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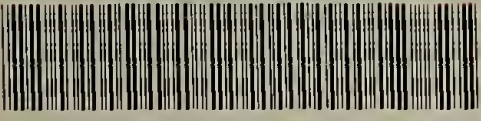
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"VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:"
WOMEN'S COLLEGES AND WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIPS
AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

A Thesis Presented

by

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"VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:"
WOMEN'S COLLEGES AND WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIPS
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FOR MY PARENTS

Sylvia and George Cuomo
for all their help and love

AND FOR DONA

Without whom this never would have been finished
With many thanks and much love

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Many women's colleges and seminaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were almost all-female environments. They owed their existence to the nineteenth century tradition of separate women's spheres. But within that tradition, some of the colleges began to erode the boundaries of gender separation. Mount Holyoke Seminary, established in 1837, becoming a college in 1888, was based solidly on a women's culture, and kept its commitment to the ideals of that culture even into the twentieth century. In contrast, Smith College, established in 1875, although an all-female institution set up as a separate women's world, became part of a new movement, which was in some ways in opposition to the traditional all-female world. This movement endeavored to create a system in which women could benefit from the more "progressive" aspects of a mixed-sex culture and the ideology of the "New Woman." I have chosen to examine these two contrasting institutions because they were bastions of women's culture, and remained so even as the walls of separate spheres began to crack. In my study I explore what these two differing approaches to gender relations reveal about the changing nature of women's spheres and female friendship patterns with members of both sexes, and how each college dealt with both the intimacy among women inherent in the world of separate spheres and male-female relations. This study is intended to shed light on the controversies among

scholars over the nature and dynamics of late nineteenth and early twentieth century women's culture and friendships.

The women's colleges of the nineteenth century were daring new experiments. They were meant to be institutions where white middle and upper class young women were given the opportunity to study in schools which were on par academically with the best male colleges. Mount Holyoke, which began as a seminary, had an additional purpose. It was meant to educate women morally and spiritually and to prepare them to enter careers as teachers.

Although Mount Holyoke was the earliest of the Seven Sister colleges to be established, it remained a seminary until after the other colleges were in place. Mount Holyoke was the only institution among them which had been established entirely by a woman. Wellesley, Vassar, Bryn Mawr and Smith were male creations. Mount Holyoke was a female inspiration. And especially because it began much earlier in the nineteenth century than the other women's colleges, it was established very firmly on the model of a women's sphere. From its inception in 1837 as a female seminary, Mount Holyoke was a totally self-contained female environment. Over the years, it remained true to the ideals of its earliest generations by choosing its faculty from the ranks of its newly graduated students. Unlike the other women's colleges, Mount Holyoke was not originally intended for middle class women, although it increasingly drew them by around 1900. Before then, its primary student constituency was women from rural families of modest income. Nor did the need to gain approval from a male dominated society shape its founding.

Although its focus shifted away from training teachers when it became a college in 1888, it remained true to many of its original ideals.

Vassar College, which opened in 1865, and Wellesley, which opened in 1875, were modeled after the seminary style of Mount Holyoke, using one main building to house all students and female faculty members. Wellesley was much like Mount Holyoke in that it had a woman president and an all-female faculty. Both Wellesley and Mount Holyoke had a clear religious orientation, were established for young women of limited means, and were rurally situated. Although Vassar was also a rural institution, unlike Mount Holyoke and Wellesley, it had a male president and mostly male teachers. Not only was Vassar less concerned with the religious characters of its students, it aspired toward a more middle class student body as an institution geared toward young ladies of social refinement. Smith College and Bryn Mawr College (1885) also admitted students predominantly from the white middle and upper classes. Both Smith and Bryn Mawr had a mix of male and female teachers. At Smith, the faculty was evenly divided by sex as stipulated by Sophia Smith who endowed the school.

Radcliffe (1879) and Barnard (1889) had a very different character than the other women's institutions. Like Vassar, Smith and Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe catered to the elite. It attracted women from the upper class urban society of Boston from which Harvard drew its students. Barnard students were also urban and generally came from New York City in the early years. But unlike the other Seven

Sisters, the existence of these two schools depended completely on the fact that they were annexes of all-male institutions: Radcliffe of Harvard and Barnard of Columbia. Professors of the male colleges instructed women in academic subjects. Moreover, these two women's colleges remained non-residential until around the turn of the century. Radcliffe and Barnard did not have the social structure or college life that the other women's institutions had.

Although racially the Seven Sisters remained homogeneous, virtually all-white institutions, geographically some began to draw from a wide variety of regions. Smith, Vassar, and Bryn Mawr had always drawn students from relatively diverse geographic areas, while Mount Holyoke and Wellesley had initially taken local students from the surrounding rural areas. Radcliffe and Barnard, as day schools, had also taken nearby students from the cities in which they were located. After 1900, however, all the women's colleges increasingly began to attract students from diverse areas of the country, and even abroad.

In my study of Smith College and Mount Holyoke Seminary and College, I chose to focus on the years between 1870 and 1915. This period reveals a clear shift in student behavior and in the nature of student life. This shift corresponds to a transition from the older values of the "true woman," to the newer values of the "New Woman" and was reflected in, and actively shaped, the nature of college women's relationships. During the decade between 1900 and 1910, a transition is especially evident in the diminished occurrence and visibility of romantic friendships, as well as

transformations in the nature of friendships in general among women. Concurrently, there is a corresponding increase in attacks on women's intimate friendships in the broader culture.

The older values of true womanhood were premised upon the "women's sphere" of the home, family and church. This sphere, according to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, was very much a female phenomenon. It was a world of mutual love and support among women, where men rarely appeared, and only as unimportant players when they did.¹ New Womanhood emerged in the late nineteenth century, and contrasted with the female-oriented image of the true woman. The New Woman was typified by college-aged women who were independent, athletic, individualistic, and heterosocial. After the turn of the century, students at both Smith and Mount Holyoke had adopted many of the ways of the New Woman. Students' writing style, for example, began to make liberal use of slang, and they began to describe their friendships with men very casually. Sports, such as basketball, field hockey and tennis, came into vogue at the colleges and students took up an endless variety of athletics with great passion.

The precise correspondence between broad cultural changes in views on women and changes at these two colleges is not easy to determine. The schools may have adopted social trends sooner or later than society outside the institutions, or they may have set up social systems unique to themselves, with different standards of

1. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," in Disorderly Conduct (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), first published in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 1, no. 1 (1975).

tolerance for relationships. The differences between Smith and Mount Holyoke highlight the complexities in defining historical causation.

Because Mount Holyoke drew the majority of students before 1900 from rural backgrounds, in order to keep the price of attending the institution low, all students were assigned domestic chores. A religious atmosphere thoroughly pervaded Mount Holyoke seminary, and to a lesser extent, continued when it became a college. The administration encouraged religious conversions among the students. Although many did convert, or entered as Christians, there were usually at least a few who did not. Nor, the president complained in 1895, were "all who enter(ed) as Christians...as earnest and devoted" as the college wished.² Throughout the period under study, Mount Holyoke's evangelical background and missionary purposes affected student life there.

When Smith College opened to students in 1875, the majority of the students in the first decades came from business or professional classes.³ Instead of housing all its students and teachers under one roof, as Mount Holyoke did until the mid-1890s, Smith developed the "cottage system" of several smaller dwelling houses, each presided over by a female head of the house and a female teacher. These women were to provide a good influence over the students and

2. President's Report, 1894-95, p. 7, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

3. Tiziana Rota, "Between 'True Women' and 'New Women': Mount Holyoke Students, 1837-1908" (Ph.D. dissertation, Universtiy of Massachusetts/Amherst, 1983), p. 77.

4. President's Report, 1884-85, p. 6, Smith College Archives.

"check extravagance and improprieties."⁴ In addition, and perhaps more importantly, Smith College's President Seelye wrote that "(t)his plan of smaller families has at least proved a great gain to their social life. Personal peculiarities have been thus more readily studied, and the influence of their teachers more strongly felt."⁵ Clearly, one of the benefits to the administration of the family-like housing arrangement was to be able to monitor and control student behavior and social life. In some respects, the living arrangements for students at Smith may have been more restrictive than those at Mount Holyoke.

Although Smith College was set up to provide rigorous academic training for its students, it also endeavored to be a place where its students would "receive a social refinement and culture, which shall enable them to feel at home in the best society, and to conduct themselves with grace and propriety in any sphere of life."⁶ Maintaining feminine characteristics among the students was important to the president; he often noted in his annual report that the women were full of womanly graces and that academic education in no way altered that. Although womanliness was also an important attribute of Mount Holyoke women, its administration did not advertise the feminine characteristics of its students as deliberately as did Smith College's president.

5. President's Report, 1876-77, p. 4, Smith College Archives.

6. Official Curricular of Smith College, no. 1, p. 6, Smith College Archives.

Smith College's obvious attempts to appear publically acceptable were probably in response to the a growing public debate over whether women should receive higher learning and how it affected them. Although higher education for women had always been criticized, the last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the rise of a new attack by scientists. In 1874, for example, Edward H. Clarke published Sex in Education or a Fair Chance for the Girls, detailing the horrors of too much education for women. He wrote of young women who, when they studied as hard as men, suffered in body and especially harmed their reproductive organs. He argued that a woman's body could not do two things well at the same time; overworking the brain caused a physical breakdown, resulting in such problems as neuralgia, uterine disease, hysteria, "and other derangements of the nervous system."⁷ Clarke cautioned women to "remain women, not strive to be men, or they will ingnomiously fail."⁸ Obviously, Clarke's fear was that educated women would become too independent, "masculine," and a threat to men.

Twenty years later, the debate over women's education had not ceased. Charles F. Thwing, less extreme in his position than Clarke, was one of a number of critics who addressed the issue. With some reluctance, Thwing conceded that college women were no less physically healthy than their non-college counterparts. He was more definite in his opinion that a college education did not cause

7. Edward H. Clarke, Sex in Education or a Fair Chance for the Girls (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1874), pp. 17-18.

8. Clarke, p. 19.

masculine traits in women: "College education has not made women either a bluestocking, a stick or a brute!"⁹ Thwing cautioned, however, that the college woman must remain womanly, and that mannishness in women was "deplorable." The community outside the college, he said, also demanded that she be a lady.¹⁰ Thwing's perspective was typical of the kinds of concerns college administrators were facing: while college education for women had gained some acceptance by the turn of the century, experts and social critics continued to link education with loss of proper gender behavior.

In addition to the fear that college women might behave like men, Thwing further warned about the dangers of close friendships that developed among students at female colleges. Although he did not object to these intimate friendships on moral grounds, he argued that such relationships damaged students' health: "...many college friendships are exceedingly exhausting. Women give themselves up more readily than men to intimate relations. College officers are wise in cautioning students against too warm friendships, especially against forming them in the first year of college life."¹¹ By the end of the century, intimate relationships between women were becoming the object of worried scrutiny, increasingly linked with dangerously inappropriate behavior.

9. Charles F. Thwing, The College Woman (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1894), p. 14.

10. Thwing, pp. 132-33.

11. Thwing, p. 74.

Until the late nineteenth century, women's close friendships were viewed as harmless, and were esteemed as noble by women and men alike. It is possible, however, that such relationships were praised and tolerated because they were useful in keeping women subordinated and content within their own female sphere. This sphere allowed women some autonomy and support in a non-public and non-threatening arena. But by the turn of the century young women began to assume roles geared toward greater self-assertion and independence, rather than merely to content themselves with the selfless social and domestic work of previous generations. Feminist gains were made in some conventionally male sectors as more women entered the wage-earning market, challenged the male monopoly of the professions, and clamored for political rights equal to men's. In order to control women now, men began to criticize those actions which led to their independence, such as a college education and close female bonds. College women seemed more autonomous than their middle class non-college peers. They often worked after college, sometimes living among communities of women, such as in settlement houses, foresaking marriage. College educated women married far less frequently than women who did not attend college, causing much concern among eugenicists. Articles such as one published in 1915 entitled "Education and Race Suicide" attest to the fears that higher education caused women to remain single and childless. The article asks,

Is it to be expected that the curriculum created by such a staff (mostly unmarried women) would idealize and prepare for the family and home life as the greatest work of the

world and the highest goal of woman, and teach race survival as a patriotic duty? Or would it be expected that these bachelor staffs would glorify the independent vocation and life for women and create employment bureaus to enable their graduates to get into the offices, schools and other lucrative jobs? The latter seems to be what occurs.¹²

The growing concern of social authorities over women's bonds with one another influenced some college administrators to encourage the heterosocial aspects of the ideology of the New Woman. As a result, although many women saw the New Woman ideology as liberating, its assault on women's culture threatened female power. To be sure, women were being allowed more freedom to pursue "equal" relationships with men, and to be more independent and athletic, but, in fact, the New Woman ideology also had reactionary implications. In its effort to make heterosexuality and heterosocial relations mandatory it condemned supportive and close female friendships as perverse. Although a women's sphere may have been restrictive and imposed on women to keep them subordinated, it did allow for emotional support and intimacy between women which was often used as a basis for social activism. The New Woman viewed such relationships as old fashioned and even morally depraved. As a result, women began working under more isolated and difficult circumstances, diminishing the potential power they held as a group to bring about social change.

12. Robert J. Sprague, "Education and Race Suicide," Journal of Heredity 6 (May 1915):158-62, p. 162.

In addition to fears of race suicide, women's institutions in the early twentieth century came under attack as women's intimate relationships became seen as sexually problematic.¹³ Nineteenth century romantic relationships among women had been tolerated because the prevailing ideology did not view women as sexual. Therefore, women's intimate friendships were not thought to have any sexual element, and because most women married eventually, were no threat to the male hegemonic structure. New late nineteenth and early twentieth century theories of sexuality, however, suggested women in fact had active sexual natures, and this cast suspicion on the assumed platonic nature of intimacy between women. The medical profession that in the nineteenth century believed female homosexuality to be rare, now began to study the issue in a new light. They recognized, too, that institutions such as girls' schools and women's colleges had many instances of female romantic relationships.

Women's colleges had to defend themselves within this emerging ideological construct of the New Woman. By virtue of their very origins as strictly female institutions, women's colleges were rooted in the older tradition of women's spheres. Depending on their history and leadership, women's colleges

13. See George Chauncy, Jr., "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance," Salmagundi 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983):114-146; Lillian Faderman, "Lesbian Magazine Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century," Journal of Popular Culture 11 (1978):800-817; Christina Simmons, "Companionate Marriage and the Lesbian Threat," Frontiers 4 (1979):54-59.

responded differently to rising criticism of their schools for producing women who were too autonomous, and for creating intimate relationships among students which were increasingly deemed unnatural and unhealthy.

The issues of the proper role of women's colleges and of women's intimacy were heavily contested during this period. This controversy, in part, creates its own obstacles in interpreting sources and makes it difficult to draw conclusions as completely as is desirable. The majority of my evidence is taken from letters and diaries written by the college students themselves. Problems inhere in these sources as there was considerable self-censorship in writing about passion, and even more so about sexuality. This was true of students of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leaving virtually no explicit evidence on the substance of intimate relationships. For instance, I found no evidence in my sources of any sexual relationships between women, or between women and men. Yet I am not convinced that there were no such relationships among the students I studied. It is likely that many of the romantic relationships between women remained non-sexual, but it is also quite likely that some had a sexual component.

In addition to the scarcity of materials on the intimate nature of relationships, the sources can be difficult to interpret because the writing styles of the earlier eras often obscure meaning. The flowery, emotional prose of the nineteenth century may cause us to interpret relationships as more intimate

and romantic than they actually were. And when students in the twentieth century began using language that was racier and full of slang, it may have made relationships seem more distant, in comparison to the nineteenth century, than they were.

The following chapter will explore some of the secondary literature that has been done on friendship, both general aspects of intimacy and specific works on nineteenth and early twentieth century friendship. It will also look at works on male-female relationships and female sexuality. The scholarship on the subject of women's friendships and intimacy and separate spheres remains controversial, and the literature to date leaves many questions unanswered. I hope my thesis will begin to address some of those gaps by further developing the issues regarding the nature and variation of women's relationships, the options available to women for relationships with both men and women, and the factors that influenced women to chose men or women for intimate relationships.

In the second chapter I will describe the change in the nature of women's relationships at the colleges between 1870 and 1915. My research suggests that it was during these years that college women and college administrators transformed the acceptable limits of female intimacy from the primarily homosocial world of "separate spheres" to the heterosocial world of the "New Woman." This transformation took place differently at the two colleges, but at both it involved an interaction

between the needs of the colleges and the interests of their students.

The third chapter explores male-female relationships at Smith and Mount Holyoke as a context for understanding the relationship choices made by the students. The two institutions treated the question of male presence on campus very differently. This chapter describes these differences, and addresses the extent to which the colleges actually created separate women's spheres. The chapter also discusses the preferences of the students, points of contention with the administrations of the colleges, and the extent to which their relative choices were limited by the presence or absence of men on campus. By 1915, the kinds of intimate women's relationships which had once been universally accepted, now became the object of controversy. Researching the access to men on the campuses provides a context in which to interpret students' relationship choices, and to determine the extent to which women's colleges were all-female worlds. By the end of the period I have studied, it is clear that the nature of intimacy among women had changed. Women's colleges offer a unique opportunity to study that change, and to assess the conditions out of which those changes grew.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Only in the last decade or so have historians begun to explore the meaning and historical importance of women's friendships and intimate relationships. The reason for such long omission may lie not only in the neglect of women's history itself, but in the view that private affairs do not constitute true history. History has traditionally involved the public arena--important public events, rather than private matters and everyday life. Historians' acceptance of social history as a viable field of study, made popular by the Annales school and by liberal and radical social movements of the 1960s, did not encourage the exploration of women's past until the revival of feminism. Until recently, scholarship scarcely treated female sexuality, friendship, and especially lesbianism. Since the late 1960s, however, a number of works have appeared affirming the importance of studying women's relations in love and friendship, decrying that lesbian history has been "hidden," and calling for historians to end the denial of lesbian experiences.¹

1. Lilian Faderman, "Who Hid Lesbian History?," Frontiers 4 (Fall 1979):74-76; Blanche Wiesen Cook, "'Women Alone Stir My Imagination:' Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition," Signs 4 (1979):718-39; Leila Rupp, "Imagine My Surprise: Women's Relationships in Historical Perspective," Frontiers 5 (1981):61-70.

The first historical essays describing female friendships opened inquiry not only into female ties as such but into the gender conventions and female culture which shaped them. Focusing the attention of historians on the friendship among middle class white women in the nineteenth century, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's "The Female World of Love and Ritual," analyzed the importance of female friendship and intimacy in women's lives. At the same time, she suggested a new approach to the topic of women's sexuality and lesbianism.² Smith-Rosenberg found that through the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, there existed among white middle class women a world of their own, within which women formed long-lasting, intimate relationships. She claimed this world was a product of "separate spheres", where men and women lived very separate lives, the men rarely intruding into the arena women inhabited. Men worked in the public sector, while women's sphere encompassed the home and family. Smith-Rosenberg contended that in this framework friendships among women differed from the friendships women formed with men, including their husbands. She suggested that although men played a loving role in women's lives, both in courtship and marriage, male-female bonds during this period of the nineteenth century tended to be formal and distant compared to the emotional intensity of women's

2. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," in Disorderly Conduct (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), first published in Signs 1 no. 1 (1975). See also William R. Taylor and Christopher Lasch, "Two Kindred Spirits," New England Quarterly 36 (March-December 1963):23-41 who suggested in 1963 that very intimate relationships among women were considered normal in nineteenth century society.

relationships. Both single and married women had close female friendships and often spoke of their friends in terms many twentieth century women would reserve for lovers. Smith-Rosenberg claimed that these relationships, many of which in the twentieth century social authorities would label "lesbian" and deviant, were well within the normal and acceptable range of behavior for nineteenth century women. She argued, in addition, that the very categories of "normal" and "deviant" relationships were not rigidly defined. The earlier period allowed for a more flexible intimacy where boundaries between affection, love, and sensuality were not as distinct as in the twentieth century.

Smith-Rosenberg's essay not only opened a new area for historians of women to explore, but brought up a number of questions worth close scrutiny. Several of these issues are relevant to my work. How, for example, are we to interpret these relationships among women? Were they in fact "lesbian" relationships, and is this even an important question? The answer may lie partially in how the term lesbian is defined. It is important for historians studying friendship to be aware of how definitions of friend, lover, kin, and other related terms, have changed over time. Although it is difficult to decipher what people in other eras meant by the terms they used, it is crucial that we not assume they convey the same

meaning as today.³ As the meaning of "friend" proves problematic, so does the definition of the word "lesbian." Studying the question of lesbianism in history can help us unravel the complex links between friendship and sexuality.⁴

Many late twentieth century feminist writers have attempted to define the category of lesbianism in a way which both differentiates and respects women's historical and current experiences. Blanche Weisen Cook suggests that "women who love women, who choose women to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently are lesbians."⁵ Cook intended by this definition to encompass many nineteenth and early twentieth century women, especially college-educated women who chose work and female networks over marriage, many of whom entered the newly-formed profession of social work.

3. Kathleen Kelley, in an unpublished thesis, has found that, even today, all people do not use the term "friendship" in the same way. She believes language is problematic when attempting to define differences between friends, acquaintances, intimate friends and kin. Kathleen M. Kelly, "Women's Friendship Networks: Their Nature and Significance," (Social Work Thesis, Smith College School of Social Work, 1981). See also George Levinger and Harold L. Rausch, eds., Close Relationships: Perspectives on the Meaning of Intimacy, (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977); and Lillian Rubin, Just Friends, (New York: Harper and Row, 1985.)

4. Although I use the term "lesbian" in this paper, nowhere did I find the use of the word among my primary sources, nor did the students in their diaries and letters ever indicate they were familiar with the word.

5. Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman," in A Heritage of Her Own, Nancy Cott and Elizabeth Pleck, eds. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

Adrienne Rich agrees with Cook, and has urged us to use a broad definition of the word lesbian in order that we not take part in the denial of lesbian existence. Rich believes all women can be placed on what she calls a "lesbian continuum." All women have women-centered or related experiences, obtaining emotional, physical and spiritual sustenance from other women throughout their lives. Rich does not define this lesbian experience as necessarily sexual, but as at least emotionally linking women together in some way.⁶ Some writers, however, including Sharon O'Brien, argue that Cook and Rich are too broad in their definition of lesbian, and urge a more specific usage. Although O'Brien recognizes that lesbianism must be construed as encompassing more than sexual expression, she relies on a definition rooted in self-identity as more tenable.⁷

Leila Rupp suggests that Smith-Rosenberg's work has been used both to deny the sexual component of women's relationships in the past, and to label women as lesbian who would not have so labeled themselves.⁸ She believes women's relationships were highly complex, and that we cannot deny the sexual aspect of some of them; yet at the same time we should not insist that such relationships be classified in the twentieth century category "lesbian." Rupp warns

6. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in Women: Sex and Sexuality, Catherine R. Stimpson and Ethel Spector Person, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

7. Sharon O'Brien, "'The Thing Not Named:' Willa Cather as Lesbian Writer," Signs 9 (Summer 1984):576-99. See also Ann Ferguson "Patriarchy, Sexual Identity and the Sexual Revolution," Signs 7 (Autumn 1981):159-72 and Janice Raymond, "A Passion for Friends," (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

8. See her article, "Imagine My Surprise."

investigators to proceed cautiously when discussing women's relationships, and suggests that a woman's self-identity, rather than her sexual behavior, should influence how scholars define her experience.

It does seem prudent not to be too inclusive in the definition of lesbianism. Although all women do, of course, receive emotional support and intimacy from other women, and this should be acknowledged and not trivialized, there seems an inherent danger in suggesting that all women belong on a lesbian continuum. It may not be appropriate to give them a name which today is used by women to identify themselves often specifically in relation to their sexuality and their political and social ideology. Not only would many women reject this definition of their experiences, but it would diminish the meaning and identity of those who choose and have chosen to call themselves lesbians, while making it easy to ignore them and their history by not differentiating them from heterosexual women.

It is inadequate to explain women's experiences historically by calling them all lesbians because there is too much variety in their relationships with both men and women. My research indicates that there were some late nineteenth and early twentieth century women whose primary romantic interests were other women and who had seemingly little interest in men, and these women I label lesbians. On the other extreme were those women whose interest in men was consuming and who showed no apparent indication of intimate romantic bonds with other women. Some of the women in my study, however,

seemed to be reacting to the opportunity of the women's college and professed romantic interest in both women and men. This of course varied depending on the time and institution, and was probably also a condition of the period of the students' lives. As relatively young women, many probably not yet thinking of marriage, they may have viewed college as a time where they could be flexible in their relationships. Yet this last group I would not unconditionally label as lesbian or heterosexual, as I am not convinced either label is satisfactory. Nor do I think it necessarily serves any purpose to classify them.

Smith-Rosenberg's important article also raised a second question central to my work--the degree to which the worlds of nineteenth century men and women really were separate.⁹ Was there as little contact and friendship between the sexes as Smith-

9. For a discussion on the emergence of separate spheres see Nancy Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England 1780-1835, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) and Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1980). See Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York, (Philadelphia Temple University Press, 1986) for a discussion on working class heterosexual relations at the turn of the century.

Rosenberg contended?¹⁰ Carl Degler in his book, At Odds, claims that the notion of separate spheres was more an ideological construct than a description of reality. Degler pointed out that the nineteenth century allowed ample freedom for the sexes to socialize and that courtship was not particularly restrictive. Only among the urban upper classes did he find evidence of chaperoning, and even there the custom did not emerge until the late nineteenth century. Degler argues, too, that many marriages were not only supportive and companionate, but also emotionally open. Although he does recognize that intimate friendships between women were a part of the culture, he believes men and women could be intimate and open with each other, and social custom provided them with the opportunity to do so.¹¹

Although not arguing against the reality of separate spheres, Ellen Rothman in her book, Hearts and Hands, corroborates Degler's view that nineteenth century middle class society allowed young

10. As many social scientists have shown, women's friendships among themselves seem to have been quite different from those between women and men and those among men. They have found that today, as has been suggested for friendships in the past, women's relationships with each other have tended to be more emotionally open and supportive. They are often committed, caring and of long duration. Women's friendships with members of their own sex are of great importance to women, and can provide intimacy not found with a husband or boyfriend. Lillian Rubin has argued that women's relationships, in contrast to those between men, are based on shared intimacies rather than shared activities, and on emotional closeness rather than competitiveness. See Rubin, Just Friends; also Kelley, "Women's Friendship Networks;" and Robert C. Townsend, "Male Friendships," unpublished paper delivered at Mount Holyoke College, March 1977.

11. Carl Degler, At Odds, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

unmarried men and women the chance to socialize alone together. During the period between 1870 and 1920, however, Rothman finds that friendship between the sexes became somewhat strained. But she argues there was still plenty of opportunity for young men and women to socialize and court alone.¹² My research indicates in fact that the women's colleges provided a relatively porous environment--even in separate female institutions men and women interacted regularly.

Smith-Rosenberg's portrait of female love relies on her interpretation of the nature of separate spheres. She conjures up images of an autonomous, almost idyllic, life within a women's separate world--a utopian world where women possessed crucial forms of power.¹³ Nancy Cott in The Bonds of Womanhood, offers us a more complex interpretation of women's spheres. Although women may have gained strength from their network of friends, and their relationships may have been in some ways empowering, such bonds must be seen in the light of the pervasive male political and social power. The ideology of separate spheres which developed in the early nineteenth century, and which allowed for these friendships, also encouraged a new kind of subordination for women and placed them in a situation with little access to public power, even while it created strong bonds among them.¹⁴

12. Ellen K. Rothman, Hands and Hearts, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984).

13. Smith-Rosenberg, "Female World of Love and Ritual."

14. Cott, Bonds of Womanhood.

Whether it was men who constrained women in the private world of the home, or women who helped to build this world for their own benefit, women's role in the middle and late nineteenth century led some women to feminist demands for greater autonomy and equality, demands which were unsettling to at least some men of the Victorian era. Strong friendships not only provided women with emotional strength, but they may also have been a catalyst to enable them to move into the public arena as activists for public morality. Women's networks inspired and supported this work, and the work in turn caused women to draw closer together.¹⁵ Women's colleges are a good example of the way in which private bonding allowed some women to move into non-traditional spheres. Yet this movement out of women's prescribed social roles into professional arenas directly challenged male prerogatives.

This threat to men's control, many historians argue, caused a new attack on women's sexuality and close friendships in the late nineteenth century, an attack led by doctors and psychiatrists who re-defined women's sexuality and branded close friendships as deviant. This attack on women's intimacy often went hand in hand with a new emphasis on "companionate" egalitarian marriage and the fulfillment of women's sexual needs in marriage. Some scholars suggest that by around 1875 women's intimate relationships with each

15. See Cook, "Female Support Networks"; Mary P. Ryan, "The Power of Women's Networks: A Case Study of Female Moral Reform in Antebellum America," Feminist Studies 5 (Spring 1979):66-85; Taylor and Lasch, "Two Kindred Spirits"; Ellen Dubois, et al., "Politics and Culture in Women's History: A Symposium," Feminist Studies 6 (Spring 1980):26-64.

other had begun to decline due to accusations that they were abnormal.¹⁶ Other scholars argue, however, that an increase in such friendships began at this time and lasted through the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁷

Many feminist scholars agree that the attack launched on sexual deviance and lesbianism in the early twentieth century was motivated primarily by hostility toward women's new demands for social autonomy rather than by sexual behavior per se. Smith-Rosenberg suggests sexologists who attempted to dictate sexual mores were not interested in regulating sexual behavior so much as in securing patriarchal order. They wished to control social disorder by defining and classifying what was sexually normal and abnormal. This new attack, while it granted women some legitimacy in their sexual experiences within marriage, also caused women's relationships with other women to be scrutinized more closely, and monitored their sexual expression more vigorously.¹⁸ There is

16. Smith-Rosenberg, "Female World of Love and Ritual"; Nancy Sahli, "Smashing: Women's Relationships Before the Fall," Chrysalis 8 (1979):18-27.

17. Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present, (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1981); Blanche Wiesen Cook, "The Historical Denial of Lesbianism," Radical History Review 5, no. 20 (Spring/Summer 1979):55-60; Nancy Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

18. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman as Androgyne: Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936," in Disorderly Conduct, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Sheila Jeffreys, "Sex Reform and Anti-Feminism in the 1920s," in The Sexual Dynamics of History, (London: Pluto Press, 1983); Christina Simmons, "Companionate Marriage and the Lesbian Threat," Frontiers 4 (1979):54-59; George Chauncey Jr., "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conception of Female Deviance," Salmagundi 58-59 (Fall 1982-Winter 1983):114-46; Sahli, "Smashing."

evidence of this controversy at the women's colleges as administrators as well as students began to object to very intimate and exclusive relationships among women after the turn of the twentieth century.

Sheila Jeffreys argues that sex reformers contributed to the erosion of feminism. She states that even those theoreticians who were perceived as liberating female sexuality, such as Havelock Ellis (who promoted women's right to pleasure in sexual intercourse), were in fact ultimately contributing to the sexual oppression of women. While heterosexual pleasure for women was validated, and even encouraged, by the late nineteenth century sex reformers dubbed single women unnatural because they rejected men and male dominance. The prevailing ideology construed resistance to male power in sexual terms. They viewed women who were unsatisfied with sexual intercourse, as well as those who did not wish to marry, as "frigid;" these women were described as dangerous to other women and to society as a whole. By espousing the "progressive" view that women should take an active role in heterosexual intercourse, these sex reformers were categorizing feminists and unmarried women as deviant, repressed and dangerous.¹⁹

Clearly, cultural responses to female sexuality are linked to men's political and economic control of society. By insinuating that female independence implied lesbianism, men had a weapon with

19. Jeffreys, "Sex Reform and Anti-Feminism"; Smith-Rosenberg, "New Woman as Androgyne"; Barker-Benfield, "Spermatoc Economy"; Simmons, "Companionate Marriage and the Lesbian Threat."

which to control women's behavior. Although a discussion of the politics of sexuality inevitably leads us to look at men's domination over women, and rightly so, we should not neglect women's attempts at asserting their own sexual autonomy. One way many women may have chosen to do this was by electing to remain single, and perhaps living with other women.

One arena where late nineteenth and early twentieth century ideas about women, sex and friendship can be seen most clearly is the women's colleges. An important reason to research these institutions is that they were focal points for the discussion of major concerns of their day. Women's colleges were the center of controversy over the limits of acceptable female intimacy, over fears that college educated women were not marrying, and the degree of acceptable heterosocial interaction. These colleges constituted artificially created women's worlds, and offer us a unique setting for the study of female love and relationships. Women's colleges had to deal with allegations from outsiders that their institutions fostered too-intimate female friendships, making them the center of a fair amount of controversy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. "Smashing," or falling in love with another student or teacher, was quite common in women's institutions. Although scholars agree that there was a point at which women's relationships with other women began to be suppressed in women's colleges, they disagree on the timing. Studies report the turning

point as far apart as 1875 to World War I.²⁰ Smith-Rosenberg accuses such sex reformers as Havelock Ellis of putting forth the idea that school-girl intimacies were sexual rather than platonic. Ellis also defined lesbians as "masculine," a characteristic often attributed to the "New College Woman," and, thus, people used his ideas to attack women's colleges. Smith-Rosenberg contends that such accusations had an effect on female institutions, and in the 1910s and 1920s more college educated women were marrying.

Conflicting ideas about women's intimacy influenced even the physical structures of women's colleges. In Alma Mater, Helen Horowitz argues that the various women's colleges were set up with different ideas about female intimacy in mind. When Mount Holyoke was established as a seminary in 1837 it housed all its students, faculty, and administration, as well as dining and classroom facilities, in one building, thereby promoting a close community of women. By the time Smith College opened in 1871, it had had a chance to observe the perceived effects of a one-building institution, not only at Mount Holyoke, but at Vassar and Wellesley as well. College administrators had begun to worry, Horowitz claims, that crowding so many young women together inevitably led to "smashing." But, she points out, although administrators were distressed by their students' romances, neither the students themselves nor their

20. Sahli found a decline around 1875, Smith-Rosenberg, in "New Woman as Androgyne," around World War I.

parents had any problem tolerating them.²¹

Horowitz suggests that smashing was really a conflict over student autonomy versus administrative control, rather than a question of whether society or the school authorities accepted them as a legitimate form of emotional expression or sexuality. She states that Smith College was set up on the cottage system, providing smaller, home-like residences, in order to protect the students' femininity, and as a means of watching over student behavior more easily.²²

Even among contemporary historians, women's relationships in college raise questions about what constituted "normal" sexuality. Barbara Solomon, for example, believes that restricted association with men at women's institutions caused erotic friendships among students. In a similar vein, William Shade writes that colleges presented "very special social and psychological circumstances" which fostered female intimacy. In general, Shade believes separate colleges for men and women created an environment which encouraged female intimacy. (Solomon, Shade)²³ Neither Shade nor Solomon,

21. Helen Horowitz, Alma Mater (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

22. Tiziana Rota, in her unpublished dissertation ("Between 'True Women' and 'New Women,': Mount Holyoke Students, 1837-1908," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1983), recognizes the presence of "mashes" at Mount Holyoke Seminary, but declares they were not a problem there as they were at some of the other women's colleges where authorities were concerned over their effects on emotional and academic well-being. She states, also, that life in the Seminary was so regimented and full, that students lamented there was no time to form friendships.

23. Barbara Miller Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Shade, "'A Mental Passion'";

however, allow for the possibility that any of the students in women's colleges chose for themselves the single-sex schools in order to be with other women. Solomon offers only that although some did prefer an all-female college, they did so, "gladly deferr(ing) or limit(ing) dating with boys," implying that men would naturally be important once they left the institution. Although options for women were limited, one alternative was the mid-Western co-educational universities. If a woman wished to attend college, however, and desired a serious academic education, the only real choice for an intellectual of the middle and upper classes was an Eastern women's college.

While college authorities were wringing their hands over friendships among the students, parents may have been more concerned that there were so few marriagable men close by. Elaine Kendall writes that some parents were worried about Mount Holyoke's monastic qualities, fearing that it "might be a convent in disguise." She claims parents were wary of sending their daughters there, because it was oriented toward turning out teachers and missionaries, rather than young women ready for marriage.²⁴

The attack on intimacy among women included the charge that female college graduates were not marrying, and they did indeed marry less often than other women during that period. College women, who at that time were white and middle or upper class, epitomized those whom the authorities viewed as too autonomous. Not

24. Elaine Kendall, "Peculiar Institutions:" An Informal History of the Seven Sister Colleges, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975).

only were they attempting to enter the world of higher education, a preserve of men, but by doing so they were assuming an independence which alarmed society.²⁵

Despite the fact that parents, administrators, and society in general were upset that many women were not marrying and having children, not all college women were so independently inclined. Although many college educated women did not marry, the majority did. Female graduates from the mid-Western co-educational institutions, for example, had a higher rate of marriage than students from the all-women Eastern schools. Roberta Wein argues that after about 1908, more graduates from women's colleges began to marry and work less outside the home. She believes that although women's institutions may have initially challenged women's restricted role in society, especially the "cult of domesticity," by World War I this was no longer the case.²⁶ Tiziana Rota and Horowitz concur that women came to college, even by the last few decades of the nineteenth century, for a variety of reasons. Although some had a genuine desire to study, others came to prepare themselves for marriage and motherhood, or to find a mate.²⁷

Parents and administrators may have wanted to promote marriage for college women, but they also felt the need to protect their female students from the perceived dangers of intimacy with men. In

25. Smith-Rosenberg, "New Woman as Androgyne."

26. Roberta Wein, "Women's Colleges and Domesticity, 1875-1918," History of Education Quarterly 14 (Spring 1974):31-47.

27. Helen Horowitz, Campus Life, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987); Rota, "Between 'True Women' and New Women.'" See also Shade, "'A Mental Passion,'" Kendall, "Peculiar Institutions."

nineteenth century co-educational institutions, women's and men's lives on campus were kept quite separate.²⁸ Barbara Solomon suggests it was not until around 1900 that co-educational institutions began to provide freedom for more socializing among the sexes.²⁹

The nature of women's friendships and sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is clearly a complex issue that scholars have only begun to explore. I will focus on the transformation of college women's worlds from the "female world" Carroll Smith-Rosenberg described to the more heterosocial world of the early twentieth century. This shift took place at different times and rates and in different ways at Smith and Mount Holyoke. It involved a profound change in understanding of friendship, women's sexuality, heterosexual norms, women's colleges, and women's role in society.

28. Smith-Rosenberg, "New Woman as Androgyne"; Joan G. Zimmerman, "Daughters of Main Street: Culture and the Female Community at Grinnell, 1884-1917," in Women's Being, Women's Place, Mary Kelley, ed. (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1979); Lynn D. Gordon, "Co-Education on Two Campuses: Berkeley and Chicago, 1890-1912," in Women's Being, Women's Place, Mary Kelley, ed. (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1979).

29. Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women. See also Rothman, Hands and Hearts.

CHAPTER THREE

"VERY DEAR FRIENDS:" WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIPS AT THE COLLEGES

Women's colleges grew out of a late nineteenth century understanding of society as primarily sex-segregated. Both Smith and Mount Holyoke provided the traditional female world of the nineteenth century middle class, and so offered a supportive environment for the intimate relationships among women considered normal at the time. But toward the end of the nineteenth century these norms began to come under attack, and throughout the period between 1870-1915 Smith and Mount Holyoke increasingly differed in their attitudes toward female intimacy. Although before 1900 Smith College did not openly attack female friendship, within a decade or so after the turn of the century the college began a concerted effort to curb intimate female relationships. Mount Holyoke, on the other hand, was more supportive of female intimacy and there is little evidence that close female relationships were unusual there, even as late as 1915. Smith College fostered a mixed-sex atmosphere, while Mount Holyoke continued to retain its structure of a more single-sex world. Smith's insistence on male presence, and later its active discouragement of female intimacy, caused the nature of intimacy among its students to differ markedly from that at Mount Holyoke. At Smith, women's friendships did not display the same openness as those found at Mount Holyoke, and students never talked about "crushes" in their personal writings. Mount Holyoke

allowed its students to express a wider range of intimate behavior with their friends than Smith College. At Smith College, women's intimate relationships ultimately disappeared from view, while this kind of behavior continued more openly at Mount Holyoke, although it had abated somewhat by around 1915. And even though close female intimacy was forced out of sight at Smith, there were women who continued to choose intimate female relationships despite discouragement and the strong sentiment against them.

A chief concern of Smith College, from its inception through the period under study, was that its students be refined and lady-like. In his annual reports, President Seelye often referred to the womanly character of the students, and reassured potential critics of female higher education that intellectual work in no way encouraged coarsening of manners or unwomanly character. Femininity, he suggested, was important if the school were to gain acceptance by the public. Although Seelye constantly maintained that the students were naturally respectable and well behaved, he also made it clear that they were being supervised. Not only did the heads of houses watch over their students, but the president himself was in charge of "an extensive social system which need(ed) incessant supervision."¹ Both his assurances of students' control of themselves and the college's control of students, were intended to confirm that Smith attracted and maintained women fit for respectable middle and upper classes of society.

1. President's Report 1890-91, p. 4, Smith College Archives.

In the first years of Smith College, students were kept busy with a daily academic schedule which allotted only two diverse hours for recreation. But so demanding was the academic program that there was not enough time, an early student wrote, to keep more than one recreational hour.² This one hour was the only time available for walking, sewing, letter writing or other non-academic activities. It is no wonder that in the early years the students rarely spent much time socializing among themselves. By the end of the first decade, however, the workload apparently lightened somewhat, and the students began to spend more time in social activities. While the college was still young, perhaps because there were relatively few students, the women generally socialized in small groups--rowing on the lake or playing cards, for example.

As the college grew in numbers and years, the social pace became hectic. By the 1880s, the school's second decade, students began to socialize in larger groups, and many were constantly involved in non-academic activities. Endless rounds of receptions, recitals, concerts, plays and dancing took up much of their time and energy. There was also a variety of clubs, as well as the student government, which involved many students, and numerous informal gatherings for feasting, singing or talking in students' own rooms. Although men were included in some Smith College events and visited the campus, by far the majority of the organized and informal activities on campus in this period were all-female occasions.

2. Alice Miller, letter to her mother, October 7, 1877, Smith College Archives.

Despite the fact that even in the private gatherings in their rooms there were not uncommonly at least ten or twelve students present, the women built a family-like community and delighted in each other's company: "We danced, played games and enjoyed ourselves as only girls can who have lived together for three years," wrote one student.³

By 1895 President Seelye was expressing concern that too much time was being spent on social activities,⁴ but students did little to reduce their activities voluntarily. While socializing informally in groups of friends remained a feature of Smith College life through 1915 and beyond, students also spent time in activities--usually a walk or rowing on the lake--with only one other person. Although during this period it was unusual for students to mention one best friend, they seemed to enjoy pairing off with a variety of different people. Activities in pairs may have given students a chance to become intimately acquainted with a particular person, but it did not seem to foster the making of a best friend. Rather, students cultivated many different acquaintances, and sometimes had several good friends.

Much of Smith College's social customs were highly formalized. Throughout this period at Smith College, students "dated" one another. The usual date was to ask another student to morning chapel--to be asked by a senior to be her chapel date was a coveted

3. Margarett Osgood, letter to her family, April 27, 1883, Smith College Archives.

4. President's Report, 1895-96, p. 12, Smith College Archives.

privilege. Students also asked each other to receptions, movies, or plays, and it was the custom to return one invitation with another.⁵ This tradition could have encouraged exclusivity among the students, but apparently did not. It was not the custom to "date" the same person steadily, but to pair off with a variety of different people. Instead of building exclusive relationships, the custom was used to get to know a great many different students. In part, especially for upperclass members, it seemed to function as a big-sisterly gesture intended to insure that the younger students were not left socially alone or unknown.

At a sophomore reception in 1898, Fanny Garrison asked a freshman to attend the event with her. Wrote Fanny: "I called for Elizabeth Levitt at seven and I think gave her a good time. Here are the girls she dance with-" She listed by name for her parents the fourteen students with whom her charge had danced.⁶ Although in some respects the role Fanny played was that of a romantic suitor--she picked up her freshman and escorted her to the reception--she was also being motherly. Fanny's duty was to see that her younger college-mate was taken care of in this situation, and she was proud that her freshman had a good time under her guidance. These situations could arouse jealousies as sometimes rivalry erupted over who was to ask whom to an event. Referring to another dance, Fanny

5. Dorothy Atwill, letter to her parents, February 9, 1914, Smith College Archives.

6. Fanny Garrison, letter to her family, October 14, 1898, Smith College Archives.

wrote that "five or six of the girls had had quite a scrap over who should take us."⁷

Although the previous situation can be interpreted as involving sisterly or maternal care, there were other ways in which students behaved toward each other in a manner befitting a romantic suitor. At the numerous dances and receptions at Smith College, many of the women dressed as males--sometimes as a particular historical or literary character, and at other times apparently as generic men. So attired, the students danced with each other at these events. At a Smith College party in 1897, Fanny Garrison wrote to her family that one student was dressed as a "stunning man & (was) the cause of much flirtation."⁸ Through at least 1914, students regularly dressed as men for their many frolics and entertainments, and danced with other students. They also donned male attire to portray male roles in college plays. Dorothy Atwill commented in 1913 of a student dressed as a prince that "she made an ever so much better looking man than girl," and of another student dressed for a play, she wrote that she "looked perfectly darling and so did Lil in men's clothing."⁹

It is unclear whether the students themselves initiated the custom of asking others for dates, including those for the rather formal dances and receptions, or whether the college authorities

7. Fanny Garrison, letter to her family, October 7, 1898, Smith College Archives.

8. Fanny Garrison, letter to her family, November 11, 1897, Smith College Archives.

9. Dorothy Atwill, letters to her parents, February 20, 1913 and February 3, 1913, Smith College Archives.

encouraged this ritualized form of socializing. The dates would have allowed for some intimacy between students, while at the same time the tradition of rotating partners would have ensured that no two students became overly close.

The emphasis upon non-exclusivity is evident, too, in dancing customs. The students danced often--almost any formal or informal social situation was considered an appropriate time to dance. At least through 1920 or so, college women danced with each other, and this activity was apparently never under attack by either the administration or outsiders, and the students continued to enjoy it. Dancing necessarily meant close physical contact with a partner, as students usually did such dances as the waltz or two-step, as well as an opportunity for intimate talk and getting to know another person.

Dancing, too, although providing for brief intimacy, in fact may have precluded any real exclusivity because students continuously changed partners. At least at more formal receptions, students had dance cards which they filled out upon arrival, ensuring that they would mix with many different women. Dancing became a means of having a small amount of intimacy with a variety of other students. Impromptu dancing by the students doubtless had less monitoring, and students may have taken the opportunity to stay with one partner.

Before the turn of the century, although it was unusual for students to speak of one particular friend, it was not unheard of or disparaged. Some students were particularly close with another, and

constantly together, but this apparently happened more in the first few decades of the college. Exclusive friendships apparently were not the norm, but students by no means considered them inappropriate. And some students' letters showed very emotionally intimate and close loving relationships with their friends-- sometimes with one or two friends in particular.¹⁰ Faculty often served as models. One student spoke casually of a faculty member's close association with another woman. The "very dear friends" came to Northampton together, one resigning her position at Wellesley College in order to be with her companion.¹¹ In 1877, President Seelye himself believed close friendships between women were not only acceptable but admirable. In the annual report to the Trustees he praised a college employee for her "strong personal friendship between herself" and another woman.¹² Because the president found such attachments laudable, and spoke of them publically, it is likely that students were encouraged to view intimate female friendships in the same light.

And indeed students spoke of their friends in glowing terms. They took pleasure in others whose dispositions were sweet and who were aesthetically pleasing. Those spoken of most highly were described as charming or lovely. Womanliness, wholesomeness and kindness were characteristics most valued. Intelligence was

10. Eleanor Rose Larrison, letters to her friend Cora, Smith College Archives.

11. Alice Miller, letter to her mother, November 25, 1877, Smith College Archives.

12. President's Report, 1876-77, p. 12, Smith College Archives.

apparently not as prized as a friend who was sweet, or "earnest and thoughtful," although perhaps students took for granted that their fellow college mates were bright.¹³ A friend was also one whose interests lay close to one's own heart. Alice Miller wrote to her sister in 1882 of another student who embodied the significant qualities of a friend:

I am just cultivating the acquaintance of a freshman who would be just after your own heart. She is excessively pretty, very charming and simple in her manner, artistic enough to dress very tastefully, passionately fond of riding, walking, boating, swimming, etc., being especially devoted to horses, and she has a pretty little ¹⁴air of independence that is particularly captivating...

Alice's emphasis upon the physical appearance of another student was a theme in the letters of many of the students before the turn of the century. It was common for students to describe the dresses which others wore, and to discuss whose was the prettiest.¹⁵ Pleasing physical attributes themselves were enough to capture Alice's attention when she went to a church in town to hear Mrs. Livermore of the WCTU speak. "Her fine physique, and deep, clear voice were enough to make one listen..." (emphasis hers).¹⁶ Some years earlier, Alice attended a reception where, although there were three times as many men as women, her attentions were caught by Miss

13. Eleanor Rose Larrison, letters to her friend Cora, Smith College Archives.

14. Alice Miller, letter to her sister, November 19, 1882, Smith College Archives.

15. Fanny Garrison, letter to her family, February 12, 1899, Smith College Archives.

16. Alice Miller, letter to her mother, April 29, 1883, Smith College Archives.

Elizabeth Burnham. "I suppose you remember how pretty she is, but that evening she looked lovelier than I ever saw her before. She wore a black silk dress that was very becoming and everyone there 'fell in love' with her."¹⁷ Fanny Garrison, too, often described other students as pretty or lovely, clearly revealing that their appearance was something she found noteworthy.¹⁸

Along with the sensual appreciation of other women's physical appearance, physical intimacy among women at the college abounded before the turn of the century. At gatherings in their rooms, students sat on each other's laps or slept in the same bed together overnight.¹⁹ At a tea in another student's room, Fanny Garrison wrote to her family that it was so crowded she had to sit the whole time on the lap of a friend. "I enjoyed myself--I hope she did." At a Thanksgiving get-together, Fanny wrote that "I cuddled up with Mrs. Campbell (the housekeeper). It seemed something like being near grandma."²⁰ The students enjoyed the physical intimacy they shared with other women, and showed no doubts as to its social acceptability.

17. Alice Miller, letter to her mother, June 9, 1878, Smith College Archives.

18. Fanny Garrison, letters to her family, Smith College Archives.

19. Elizabeth Lawrence, journal entry, November 7, 1880, Smith College Archives; Fanny Garrison, letter to her family, November 25, 1898, Smith College Archives.

20. Fanny Garrison, letters to her family, October 14, 1898 and November 25, 1898, Smith College Archives.

Although physical and emotional intimacy were the norm in friendships at Smith College before 1900, "crushes" among students were distinct from other kinds of friendships. Crushes were neither included in comments about casual female physical intimacy in the earlier years at the college, nor connected with physical contact. A crush seemed to involve a passionate and spontaneous desire for another student. Throughout the period under study, Smith students themselves left little record in their personal writings of romantic feelings or crushes. Yet their existence is evident in published materials. Crushes themselves were not necessarily good friends. It is clear from what a student wrote in a piece entitled "My Freshman Crush" in the Smith College Monthly in 1895, that at this date crushes were acceptable to the college community. The sketch takes a humorous tone toward crushes, and recounts the story of a student who does not want to attend a college ball, but is persuaded to by a friend who suggests she might find a crush there. The student assents, thinking that "a Freshman crush would be a novel and possibly an interesting experience." Her friend disapproves of crushes herself, but sees nothing wrong with someone else embroiling herself in one. Some students had crushes, while some believed them to be wrong, but both attitudes were tolerated. Those who were against them saw them not as immoral or abnormal, but merely as childish.²¹

21. Smith College Monthly November 1895, III, 2, pp. 27-30, Smith College Archives.

Crushes were still in evidence in 1908. That year a sketch appeared in the Smith College Monthly, again on crushes. Although the vignette did not condemn crushes outright, the tone was somewhat more disapproving than in the earlier story. In this piece, an underclass student asks a senior to chapel. As she waits for her date, she talks with a friend, and at one point declares

there's a girl over there who has a violent case on the senior that's coming with me this morning. Won't she be wild when she sees! Don't you think cases are fool things? I don't see how a girl...can act so foolish over another girl....Oh, I forgot-- your wild crush--²² (but) yours isn't really one--you just like her dreadfully..."²²

In the end, however, the student made to appear foolish was the woman who condemned crushes, as her senior date snubbed her by failing to show up. Although by 1908 the ridicule of crushes seemed more pointed, it was no harsher than deeming them "foolish." According to these students, a crush was different from likeing someone "dreadfully," yet in reality there appears to have been little distinction. In sum, at least until 1908, crushes were discussed and tolerated among the students and were considered innocuous.

Falling somewhere between close friendship and open crushes were varying degrees of romantic attachment. In addition to writing about crushes, students showed passion for other women in the poems that were published in the Smith College Monthly, and The Alpha, two student publications. Before the turn of the century, there were

22. Smith College Monthly December 1908, XVI, 3, pp. 193-94.

many love poems written by students to other women. In the early period of the college they were passionate and romantic, praising the glories of "my lady," or lamenting the heartache of unrequited love. One poem read in part:

I need no bell nor chanted hymn;
 Her silk-soft hand, so white so slim
 Shall bless for me my way
 Her kiss upon my lips shall be
 An absolution full and free
 That hell cannot dismay.²³

These poems are full of sensual references to other women. Around 1900, the number of poems to other women decreased significantly but did not disappear.

An incident occurred regarding a poem, however, which suggests that even before the turn of the century, it was inappropriate to publicize off campus one's love for another woman. In 1881 Margarett Osgood wrote to her family that a female member of the faculty, Miss S., had written a love poem to her and her friend, Salome. Margarett and Salome were "much amused by it, both at the silliness of the rhyme itself and at the fact that it was about (them)." Far from seeing anything wrong in having a love poem written to her by another woman, Margarett was flattered, and wrote the poem out for her parents. Some of it read:

I love two maidens, each so rare
 I know not which to woo;

23. Smith College Monthly October 1901 IX, 1 p. 33; May 1896, III, 9 p. 27; December 1895, III, 3, p. 14.

And one is dark, the other fair--
 What would you have me do?
 ...Which? there's no doubt. I want them both
 (Both I could easily win)
 To give up either I am loth;
 To wed both were a sin

What! both engaged?
 Dont't tell me that
 How cruel! And such men!!
 Compared with me!!! inferior! flat!
 I'll ne'er trust woman again.

A problem arose with the poem only when the teacher who wrote it published it in the Springfield Union newspaper. Margarete told her parents, "I am more than disgusted by it and think it was exceedingly rude and horrid of Miss S. to have it published with our names still on it. Of course everybody in College recognizes it at once and it is not over agreeable." A series of letters between Margarete and her parents, as well as between Margarete's father and President Seelye ensued. Margarete was mortified by the publicity, which became worse when the poem was reprinted in the Amherst College newspaper. She was glad that "very few boys at Amherst know us by name--Last year...it would have been far worse. Still it is uncomfortable to the last degree and I wish Miss S. was in Guinea!" Yet she was comforted that the other Smith students spoke of it little, which she hoped meant they were unaware of it. Margarete said that everyone felt for her and Salome, and even the other faculty members were angry with Miss S. "Everyone knows we had not the slightest thing to do with it and consequently it has

not hurt us in the least."²⁴

It is interesting that an "amusing" poem had the ability to cause so much disturbance. The poem itself was not out of place, even if written to a student by her teacher--in fact, Margarett was pleased at first. Moreover, Margarett willingly disclosed the content of the love poem to her parents. What caused the furor was not that the teacher had written a love poem for two other women, but that it was made public outside of Smith.

Clearly, even in the nineteenth century at Smith College there were ways in which women's intimacy was acceptable and ways in which it was not. Love between women stated publically was cause for concern. That women's relationships were becoming more visible through such public institutions as women's colleges was part of what made them troublesome. They were no longer confined to the private, non-threatening "female world," but had entered the public domain. In these earlier years, love, physical closeness, and crushes were easily and safely expressed within the college. It was not until after the turn of the century that signs of open and physical closeness between students began to disappear.

Although in the early years of the college close and exclusive relationships with one other friend were not considered inappropriate, by the second decade of the twentieth century the administration had begun to show concern. In 1913 the college's Student Handbook for the first time included a list of "don'ts" in

24. Margarett Osgood, letters to her family, October 5, 1881; October 9, 1881; October 21, 1881, Smith College Archives.

its pages. Among more mundane suggestions, such as wearing your raincoat, was the warning, "Don't play with one girl exclusively. There are 1600 in college." Another admonition against too-close friendships was "Don't get a 'crush.' It's the surest way to lose a friend." Crushes and exclusive friendships had become problematic. Yet the "don'ts" were somewhat contradictory. Another prohibition read, "Don't ask upper classmen for dates until they've asked you: but return their invitations when you get them: All things come to her who waits/ Even senior chapel dates."²⁵ Social rituals such as dating and dancing were not considered inappropriate; yet the administration, or the students themselves who put out the handbook, now saw crushes and exclusivity as unacceptable behavior. Instead, they encouraged friendships that were not passionate or exclusive. One of the "don'ts" encouraged students to "Sign up for all forms of athletics and then stick to the one you do best. Firm friendships grow on Allen Field." By 1917, the Handbook left out any warning against getting a crush, perhaps because crushes were no longer happening, at least openly, or because of the fear of even suggesting crushes might be occurring by including the caveat.

During the early twentieth century, close friendships and rituals of friendship continued to be important. The tradition of giving senior pins to other students illustrates a certain ideal of friendship among the women. It was a great honor to be asked to wear another student's senior pin. In 1913 Sara Comins named three

25. Student Handbook 1913-14, pp. 17-18, Smith College Archives.

students as the only ones whose pins she would "care to wear." "It means a good deal in the way of friendship to wear a girl's pin, and I'd rather wear none at all than wear one just because I was asked and didn't really care for the girl."²⁶

To Smith students, true friendship was almost a sacred honor, at least when it came to the important custom of senior pins. Yet it was not an exclusive honor, for Sara named three other students with whom she felt sufficiently close to wear their pin. She seemed to have a sense of what that honor entailed, although she did not spell it out. It is curious, however, that Sara implied her friendships, even with the three she named, may not have been particularly close. Had they been close friends, the student who wanted to give Sara her pin would not have worried whether or not Sara would have accepted, for presumably she would have known how well Sara liked her.

It is difficult to ascertain what friendship meant to Smith students of the early twentieth century, for they rarely made it explicit--perhaps partly due to their lack of intimate friends--and they ceased to describe traits which they found appealing in friends. The theme that permeates their accounts is that of reckless group fun. Friends were now those with whom a student could have a lively and somewhat wild time, rather than share quieter pursuits. As in the earlier years, intelligence or the appreciation of a like-educated mind played no overt part in

26. Sara Comins, letter to her family, November 4, 1913, Smith College Archives.

friendship bonds. But in contrast to former years, students no longer seemed to care so much for friends principally because they were charming or nice. More important was the desire to take part in "the life" of endless activities.

The casual and ubiquitous physical intimacy of the earlier years had disappeared, at least in letters home. Students no longer wrote of physical intimacy, either because it had disappeared or because the students now believed it was not acceptable to write about. Apparently, Smith students no longer slept with each other. If they stayed in someone else's room, it was because that person was away: "I stayed in Pris's room. She was in Lora's room as Lora went to Sunnyside."²⁷ This elaborate and seemingly senseless swapping of beds indicates how physical intimacy among the students was not as casual as it had been, or else that the students sensed the danger in reporting it to their parents.

Gone, too, was the focus on the physical attraction of other students. Although some students remarked that their friends were "very pretty and sweet,"²⁸ this kind of description became rarer, and students were far less concerned with the aesthetic qualities of others as an attribute in a friend.

Although friendships became more shallow, at least as they were treated in student writings, female friends remained important to students' emotional happiness. No one friend may have stood out,

27. Dorothy Atwill, letter to her parents, January 20, 1916, Smith College Archives.

28. Dorothy Atwill, letter to her parents, September 19, 1912, Smith College Archives.

but the camaraderie of group activities was central to their lives. Although Dorothy Atwill was very interested in young men, she realized the important place her female friends held in her life at college. She wrote of a sleigh ride she took with a group of students: "It's loads of fun just a bunch of girls going off together. More fun than a bunch of fellows and girls who don't know each other well."²⁹

By this time, even the sparse evidence of crushes found earlier had disappeared. After the 1908 story about crushes, there was apparently no further public mention of them and there continued to be no evidence of them in students' personal writings. Only the warnings against them, and a few love poems, attest to their continued occurrence.

At the same time, by 1915 the number of love poems to women had fallen drastically. There were a small number of these poems, but in general these lacked the emotional intensity of the earlier ones. Yet one poem published in 1915 suggests it was still acceptable to write love poems to a woman. In one verse, for example, the author spoke of another woman as "blithe and fair," but she "ha(d) no heart" for the author.³⁰ Sensual and intimate feelings for other women, then, were still evident, although not as commonly expressed as earlier.

29. Dorothy Atwill, letter to her parents, February 6, 1913, Smith College Archives.

30. Smith College Monthly February 1916, XXIII, 5 p. 236, Smith College Archives.

An explanation for changes in Smith College policies and attitudes is not easy to provide since records are scanty on motivation. The disappearance of earlier forms of intimacy may have occurred by the students' own initiative in their eagerness to be "modern," or the students or the administration, may have made a conscious endeavor to curtail female intimacy because of its increasing association with deviant and unnatural behavior.

Some social critics had begun to attack female intimacy by suggesting that sexuality might play a role in these relationships. Close female friendships were suspected of involving lesbianism. Physical intimacy with, and passion for, another woman took on new meanings. Women with these tendencies, besides being judged abnormal, were assumed by society as not likely to want to marry, confirming the fears of "race suicide" critics who claimed college educated middle class white women were not marrying and having children often enough. Critics used these accusations to attack college women's friendships.

The fact that closeness between women was under attack, however, did not mean that such feelings disappeared, and we have seen that they did not completely vanish at Smith College. Pressures from peers or from the outside world seemed to curb the outward display of physical affection and love which had occurred more freely earlier. But intimacy and friendship continued to be important to the students. Not all remained quiet about their feelings, as a few still wrote and published poems about female love, and crushes still occurred. Although students were

discouraged from having intimate feelings for and relationships with each other, such behavior still persisted.

At Mount Holyoke, the opportunities and patterns for socializing differed from those at Smith college. Mount Holyoke was a more fully female world than Smith College, and its faculty and administration provided a model for close female friendships. The institution allowed for a wider variety of relationship possibilities than did Smith. While crushes at Smith were very distinct from other forms of relationships, at Mount Holyoke this was not as true. Mount Holyoke students were allowed more freedom to express intimate feelings for other women, and were allowed to do so longer than at Smith. While the nature and closeness of students' friendships changed at Smith in the decade between 1900 and 1910, relationships among Mount Holyoke students remained physically and emotionally intimate, and crushes continued to occur openly beyond this period.

In the 1870s and 1880s at Mount Holyoke, the institution's rules outlined study hours during which students were not to make visits to other students' rooms. In 1884 Clara Smith complained she had no time to make calls, because she spent so much time studying

or lighting lamps for her domestic chore.³¹ Permission was needed to invite a female friend for an overnight visit,³² and even by 1906, students still required permission to spend the night in another student's room. The administration suspended one woman for the infraction of this particular rule.³³ At least through the mid-1880s, students generally shared a room with another student, but periodically changed rooms and roommates. But by this time they were allowed some say in choosing their own roommates. The principal had the power to forbid two students from rooming together, but seemed to do so only when they violated regulations.³⁴ At least until 1913 students periodically changed seats at dinner, rotating tables and dinner companions.³⁵ As of 1918 the college still requested that students not have any outside visitors on Sundays.

In the years before 1900, Mount Holyoke students managed to spend some time with other students despite their restrictive schedules. Perhaps due to the rules Mount Holyoke women were required to follow, the social life at the school until the turn of the century was on a smaller scale than at Smith. Socializing in the earlier period took place in small groups and centered in students' rooms. But by around 1900 there were more college-wide

31. Clara Smith, letter to her parents, March 12, 1884, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

32. Annie Laurie, letter to her parents, February 9, 1875, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

33. Clara Smith, letter to her parents, February 13, 1884, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

34. Clara Smith, letter to her parents, February 13, 1884, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

35. Ruth Parker, letter to her family, January 7, 1913, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

activities and entertainments, and the social pace began to resemble that of Smith College. As the years continued, Mount Holyoke students began to lead a somewhat wilder and more hectic social life.

Friendship at Mount Holyoke, however, ran a different course than at Smith College. Close friendships among students were encouraged at least through 1920 by faculty and administration behavior, if not openly, then at least by example. One faculty member, appointed in 1919 wrote that when she came to Mount Holyoke she found many of the faculty had paired off.

...the whole place was divided up by couples... All the way through, the faculty were in twos and I never heard any criticism of that at all. And there was never any idea of the current twentieth century connotation that is unpleasant."³⁶

President Mary Woolley, whose term extended through the first several decades of this century, also lived her adult life with another woman as her companion. Surely these examples must have signaled to students that close female friendships were permissible and desirable. It suggests, too, that although the faculty and administration must have been aware of criticism of intimate female relationships, they chose to ignore it. They apparently did not link their behavior with that which by the twentieth century was being termed abnormal or deviant.

36. From a quote of Viola Barnes in Unequal Collegues: The Entrance of Women into the Professions by Penina Migdal Glazer and Miriam Slater (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 35.

Despite approval for strong female ties, at Mount Holyoke, as at Smith, there was virtually no mention in student writing of one best friend. Students often had many different friends, and may have had several close friends among them, but apparently no particular one with whom they spent a lot of time. Students shared many activities in pairs, not usually with the same student repeatedly, but with a variety of different ones--sewing, making beds, walking, making fudge, or just talking.³⁷ There is no evidence of the more formalized reciprocal socializing that took place at Smith where students asked each other out to the theater or for chapel dates. In fact, at Mount Holyoke, chapel seats were assigned, so it was not possible to choose chapel companions.³⁸ Students' letters reveal a very sisterly feeling among the women at Mount Holyoke. The women were friendly and nurturing, lending emotional support, for example, comforting those who were homesick.³⁹

Teachers were also a source of emotional comfort for the students. One student, Mary Anderson, wrote of a teacher, Miss Green, "When I want to be 'comforted' I go to her room and put my head in her lap and she talks to me and I go away feeling as if it wasn't such a dreadful world after all."⁴⁰ Clara Smith wrote that

37. From many letters of Clara Smith to her mother and father, all 1883, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

38. Jessie C. Staegeman, journal entry October 1, 1903, Mount Holyoke Archives.

39. Clara Smith, letter to her parents, September 8, 1882, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

40. Mary Anderson, letter to her friend Hattie, December 30, 1884?, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

as she and a friend stood in the hall watching a sunset one evening, a teacher came and put an arm around each of them, and stood there awhile, talking and watching the sunset. She then asked them both to visit her. "I think she's just as nice as she can be," Clara wrote. When Clara met another teacher in the hall after a long absence by the teacher, she wrote that "our hands were so full we couldn't hug a great deal, but then we could kiss."⁴¹

Affectionate physical intimacy between Mount Holyoke women was the norm, and served to express mutual closeness. Friends and teachers functioned as a surrogate family, looking out for one another, and offering comfort in times of stress, misery or sickness. Friends also shared many good times, socializing, eating, dancing, and singing, often in each other's rooms.

In addition to the sisterly qualities students found in friends, as at Smith, physical attractiveness was much admired among the Mount Holyoke women before the turn of the century. Students took open pleasure in their friends' appearance, even writing home about how attractive they found other students. A tradition among the students continued at least through the turn of the century of collecting photographs of other students who were especially admired. Students took great delight in acquiring these photos, and hoped to obtain those of students they found particularly appealing. By October of Annie Laurie's first year at Mount Holyoke, she was already collecting pictures. She "applied for" the pictures of two

41. Clara Smith, letters to her parents, March 12, 1884 and October 6, 1883, Mount Holyoke Archives.

or three other students. She wanted one of Fanny Hazen's: "she is so pretty. There are a number of real pretty girls here. Fannie Rice is lovely!"⁴² Almost twenty years later, in 1893, the tradition continued. Matilda Calder wrote, "I have just got Lula Estabrooks picture and it is too lovely for anything. I think she is a very pretty girl."⁴³ To be the friend, or to catch the attention, of a pleasing looking student was much desired, although none ever complained that other students were plain or unattractive. Appearance was important in that it could add to the sensual attraction of a friend.

Whereas by the 1910s Smith College was combatting intimate friendship among its students with warnings against exclusivity and crushes and evidence of physical intimacy had disappeared from student writing, there was no such transition at Mount Holyoke at this time. At Mount Holyoke, some forms of intimacy remained strong and openly displayed even during the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1917, a student editorial appeared on the worthiness of friendship. The author argued that friendships were good, and encouraged students to form them. Although it was not wrong to belong to a "set," the student wrote that it was perfectly acceptable to have other friends. Presumably she meant a few close friends.⁴⁴ The editorial was no doubt in response to a perceived

42. Anne Laurie, letter to her parents, October 13, 1874, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

43. Matilda Calder, letter to her sister Helen, February 1, 1893, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

44. The Mount Holyoke March 1917, vol. 26, no. 7, p. 375, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

attack on female friendships. Yet instead of attempting to push evidence of such relationships out of sight, Mount Holyoke students continued to encourage the formation of these bonds.

After the turn of the century, Mount Holyoke students continued to write about the emotional and physical closeness they experienced with their friends. Students still filled the role of a motherly nurturer. In 1913, when Ruth Parker felt homesick, she received concerned attention from other students. "The girls were awfully nice to me. They cuddled and petted me and the more they cuddled, the more I cried." One of the students, she related, put her to bed, then "kissed me and went away."⁴⁵ Even at this date, physical intimacy went hand in hand with the emotional support friends provided, and, perhaps more significantly, students were not afraid to write about it to their parents. Physical closeness remained an important aspect of friendship, adding to love and intimacy between friends. In 1915 Helen Mitchell wrote to her mother on several occasions that she slept with various friends. "Did I tell you that a week ago Monday night I slept with Emily Dean? I had just a lovely time."⁴⁶ The event was important enough to report a week later and to remember the exact day clearly. Spending the night with a friend seemed to cement a bond. Jessie Staegeman, for instance, wrote in her diary that she and her roommate spent the

45. Ruth Parker, letter to her family, November 5, 1913, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

46. Helen Mitchell, letter to her mother, February 5, 1915, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

night in the same bed.⁴⁷ At Smith, this kind of intimacy was not in evidence after 1900.

After the turn of the century, students at Mount Holyoke ceased to write about the physical attractiveness of others and no longer mentioned exchanging photographs. But there were indications that the effect appearance had on friends and admirers had not totally disappeared. A short story in The Mount Holyoke in 1916 bluntly stated that "Krammie is so very good looking and vivacious that she must have been mighty popular in college."⁴⁸ A sketch that appeared several years earlier in The Mount Holyoke suggests that indeed beauty was still appreciated, and illustrates as well the ideal of a truly beautiful woman. When the woman in the story was first seen, her extreme beauty was evident, but she appeared cold and unfeeling. Later, she had a softer, more emotional look about her: "Her face was the essence of life--and so I loved her."⁴⁹

In contrast to Smith College, Mount Holyoke students in the early twentieth century felt no pressure from peer or administrators to avoid physically and emotionally intimate friendships with each other. As a result, students remained freer to indulge in romantic behavior with their friends. This can be seen by Ruth Johnson's 1909 account in a letter home of her overnight stay atop a nearby

47. Jessie C. Staegeman, journal entry, November 27, 1904, Mount Holyoke Archives.

48. The Mount Holyoke October 1916, vol. 26, no. 2, p. 81, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

49. The Mount Holyoke February 1912, vol. 21, no. 6, p. 298, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

mountain for Senior Mountain Day. After the customary dancing and awards, she wrote,

I strolled the piazza with Celia by the light of the moon. Everything was conducive to romance, moon light--stars--distant lights, murmuring leaves, and the whip-or-will. We did go in though and took possession of our beds.⁵⁰

It was perhaps this freedom at Mount Holyoke to cultivate a wide variety of intimate physical and romantic relationships with other students, unhindered through the 1910s, that made the line between friendship and romance so blurred. Moreover, the line between a friend and a crush was not so marked as the one apparently in existence at Smith College. Crushes, known also as "mashes" at Mount Holyoke, flourished more freely, or at least far more openly, than at Smith College, and continued unrestricted for a longer time. Perhaps because the Mount Holyoke administration and faculty were more lenient toward intimacy and crushes, there was far less of a dichotomy between a friend and a crush. Matilda Calder often wrote that she liked other students "very much."⁵¹ In 1893 Matilda used the same words to describe her "crush," although she was reticent to admit she had a crush. Matilda wrote eagerly to her sister to inform her

I have not written you that I have caught the contagion that is: I have fallen in love. With Dr. Lowell of course....The girls tease me unmercifully about it....I am not exactly

50. Ruth Johnson, letter to her family, June 9, 1909, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

51. Matilda Calder, letters to her mother, May 31, 1893 and October 30, 1895, e.g., Mount Holyoke College Archives.

crushed only I like her very much....Half the girls are just in love with her and the other half almost hate her.⁵²

It is clear crushes were very public, widespread, and quite openly discussed among the students, and were an acceptable aspect of Mount Holyoke life, even if they were known as "the contagion." A decade earlier, when Mary Anderson wrote to her friend Hattie, she, too, claimed "I am very much in love with Miss Hooker. She is ever so kind to me." But she protested, "now please don't be mistaken and think I have a 'mash' on her for I haven't, even if the girls do insist that its the worst in the school."⁵³ Although both Matilida and Mary were reluctant to admit they had a crush, it seems to have been because they were merely embarassed to be told they had one. Although Matilda and Mary tried to pass off their infatuation as being in love, neither explained how being even "very much in love" was different from having a crush. There seemed, in fact, to be little distinction between the categories, although the students themselves implied a clear difference.

Perhaps the students endeavored to make such a distinction between being in love and having a crush because they associated crushes with infatuation, while being in love may have been seen as a nobler, more intellectually based feeling. A crush may have implied only an appreciation of superficial characteristics, whereas being in love implied a deeper appreciation of character and soul.

52. Matilda Calder, letter to her sister Helen, March 22, 1893, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

53. Mary Anderson, letter to her friend Hattie, February 5, 1884, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

Yet when Matilda wrote of a friend who had come to visit, she said her friend "quite fell in love with Lula Estabrook and I don't blame her."⁵⁴ Her friend's acquaintance with Lula must have been brief and superficial, yet she claimed to be in love. The students apparently wished to create boundaries between crushes and being in love in order to differentiate between impetuous passion and well grounded love based on deeper feeling, but, in fact, the categories seem artificial and interchangeable.

Several students give an indication as to what it was that made a friendship a crush. Emily Mellen suggested that the object of a crush was someone who provided excitement and was out of the ordinary. Emily complained about one student:

Not that I don't like M.N. I do, but she is 'most too good' & 'old maidish.' She is one of your prim little things who never whistles or uses slang. There is a Miss Mason whom I like very much, we have been to walk several times and exchanged calls, she does not use slang nor whistle & is a perfect lady, but not old-fashioned.⁵⁵

Other students indicate that a crush may have been a crush simply because others put that label to a relationship. Ten months after Mary Anderson declared she was in love with Miss Hooker, she wrote to her friend Hattie that "I like Miss Hooker, too, just as much as ever and perhaps more, but we are no longer a 'mash' at least not by reputation."⁵⁶ Crushes were a function of public definition. Being

54. Matilda Calder, letter to her sister Nellie, May 26, 1893, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

55. Emily Mellen, letter to her sister Laura, February 27, 1883, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

56. Mary Anderson, letter to her friend Hattie, December 30, 1884?, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

in love with or expressing a strong passion for another woman was acceptable, but became a crush only when others knew of and labeled a relationship as such.

Emily Mellen suggests this may have been the case. In response to the query of her sister Laura, Emily wrote "I suppose I have what the girls call "a mash." Miss Nutting a missionary's daughter & I are pretty good friends & because we go to walk pretty often together the girls say we are 'mashed.'" Emily acquiesced to the other students' definition of her as mashed, even though she did not feel particularly in love with the student with whom she was paired, and, in fact, there were other students she liked better. It was certainly permissible, however, to have more than one mash. There was another student with whom Emily went out walking frequently, and some said they were also "'quite mashed.'"⁵⁷

What did it mean to the students to be "mashed?" For some, like Matilda Calder's friend who fell in love with Lula Estabrook, a superficial acquaintance sufficed. For other students, the definition of a crush hinged on how intimate friends were. Emily Mellen, for example, believed a closer relationship was necessary. "There are other girls I like better, but am not so intimate with them because they do not come to see me so often & do not seem to care about me so much as May Nutting. So I admire at a distance."⁵⁸

57. Emily Mellen, letter to her sister Laura, February 27, 1883, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

58. Emily Mellen, letter to her sister Laura, February 27, 1883, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

Unless she knew someone fairly well, she did not consider a relationship a mash.

The extent of Emily's relationship with the two students with whom she was paired as a mash was apparently that they often took walks together. Because they regularly spent time alone, they were considered a crush. Mashers sometimes involved physical intimacy, but that did not distinguish them from other relationships: Mary Anderson's crush on Miss Hooker involved a good-night kiss, but after they were judged as no longer a mash, she wrote that "I still give her a good-night kiss whenever I happen to meet her anywhere after recess meeting, but I do not go to her room for it."⁵⁹

Crushes were tolerated at Mount Holyoke before 1900 and most students participated in them either by having crushes themselves or by talking about others who did. But not everyone applauded crushes, although criticism of them tended to be quite minor. Emily Mellen, although linked to several mashes, harbored mixed feelings about them. "I do not believe in 'mashes,'" she told her sister, "they take up too much time." She did not want to be obligated to spend every minute with one other person--she would rather see people when she felt like it. Yet this was after she lamented that "It always seems to be the way with me, If (sic) I like any one particularly well, they do not care for me & if I do not like them they are sure to like me."⁶⁰

59. Mary Anderson, letter to her friend Hattie, December 30, 1884, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

60. Emily Mellen, letter to her sister Laura, February 27, 1883, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

Having a crush on a woman did not necessarily preclude interest in men. Emily Mellen, in addition to involving herself, unwittingly or otherwise, in mashes, and showing a clear interest in female students at Mount Holyoke, was also attracted to men. She wanted to meet a man from Amherst whom she had heard was good looking and "quite a young gentleman."⁶¹ On the other hand, there were others in this period such as Matilda Calder, who rarely showed any interest in men.

In 1906 Jessie Staegeman revealed that the same sort of crush behavior continued at Mount Holyoke after the turn of the century. Jessie kept a diary of her years at the College, and through it all she evinced much interest in men, and no romantic interest in women. But at the very end of her diary she recounted that "The most exciting occurrences have been a series of various so called crushes which Juniors have had on faculty. Harriet started the excitement by looking with awe and respect on Miss Roland." Then other students began to follow Harriet's lead, and Jessie's "heart went out in a great longing" for a teacher, too.⁶²

The crushes which continued to hit Mount Holyoke students well into the twentieth century seemed like a game--one student got a crush, and the rest seized on the idea and quickly followed. The crushes may have lacked intensity and depth if some had them merely to be like other students. But Jessie, at least, did not pine at a

61. Emily Mellen, letter to her sister Laura, April 18, 1883, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

62. Jessie Staegeman, journal entry, June 8, 1906, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

safe distance. She made several engagements with her teacher, walking in the woods with her, or visiting the teacher in her room. On the whole, however, the rash of crushes seemed inspired by a whim. Nevertheless, students not only still tolerated crushes, but actively sought them out. Even those interested in men often fell in love with other women. Crushes continued to be discussed very openly among students, and it is clear that the teachers also knew and abetted what was happening. Neither students nor faculty gave any indication that such behavior was inappropriate. Instead, students entertained and enjoyed themselves by having crushes.

Although by around 1915 crushes were still in evidence at Mount Holyoke, they may have been less pervasive and less condoned than in earlier years. Ruth Parker, in a somewhat puzzled tone, wrote to her mother about a student who had a crush:

It is awfully funny. One of the freshmen girls has a crush on a senior and the way she carries on is ridiculous. She goes to see another girl who has the senior's picture and kisses it good-night. She raves about the senior and calls her 'divine' and 'heavenly.' I guess she must be a little bit off in her upper story.⁶³

At least several other students knew of this crush, and the freshman made little attempt to hide her affections, but Ruth made it clear that she thought crushes were ridiculous, and extremely unusual.

63. Ruth Parker, letter to her mother, January 25, 1914, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

Students may have been somewhat less open about crushes during this later period than in previous years, but, as another student illustrates, the same feelings that a crush inspired were still to be found and were written about openly, if not explicitly labeled a crush. Over a period of months, Helen Mitchell, in her letters home, wrote about Mary Hunter, another student, in glowing terms. She called Mary the "most beautiful and grandest girl in the whole world," and talked about Mary's "wonderful imagination and everything else" for no apparent reason, other than that she was obviously quite taken with her.⁶⁴ For Halloween, when the students at each dinner table dressed up around a theme, her table was a bridal breakfast.

The groom was that wonderful girl, Mary Hunter. Oh, she was perfectly grand! Tall, dark with wonderful brown eyes, curly, awfully curly brown hair and when she had her dress suit on, and mustache and goatee she was beyond words.⁶⁵

Although Helen never referred to her feelings for Mary as a crush, it would probably have been described as one by other students. It is not clear whether she revealed her infatuation to other students, but she wrote freely to her mother, and especially to her sister, about it.

While remarks about crushes declined, poetry remained an acceptable medium through which students could admit love for

64. Helen Mitchell, letters to her mother, October 26, 1913 and November 27, 1913, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

65. Helen Mitchell, letter to her sister, November 8, 1913, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

another woman. In 1911 The Mount Holyoke printed a poem "To 'Lis'beth," written by one of the students.

...with the dear torture of your mockery
 I'm afraid to tell you that I love you
 (I wonder--if I told her, would she smile?)
 ...How deeply I do cherish you, how true
 I cannot keep from telling you I love you...⁶⁶

Although the publication had always carried some love poems written by students to other women, such poems were not as numerous as at Smith College.

Clearly it was still acceptable to harbor deep, intense feelings of love for another student. At Mount Holyoke, even by 1915, there was no evidence of a concerted effort on the part of either the students or administration to curb intense, romantic female relationships. Exclusivity among friends was not openly addressed as it was at Smith, or at least if it was, students remained relatively unaffected by it. Toward the end of this period, relationships and feelings labeled as crushes appear less widespread, suggesting some of the ideological messages against female intimacy were encroaching, but students still had crushes, and openly acknowledged their feelings. Only just at the end of this period was there any indication that love and passionate feelings for other women were wrong, or at least very unusual, as Ruth Parker suggested in her 1914 letter home about the student who was "off in her upper story" because she had a crush. Unlike at Smith College, both students and the administration at Mount Holyoke

66. The Mount Holyoke June 1911, p. 19.

appeared not to believe, or be overly concerned about, the ideology that declared women's love for each other could be sexual, and, therefore, suspect.

Smith College and Mount Holyoke were set up on very different social foundations, and this was reflected in the two schools' attitudes toward female friendship. Mount Holyoke encouraged intimate friendships by example of its teachers and administrators, and romantic attachments among women remained acceptable and public through 1915. At Smith College, however, evidence of intimate friendships and crushes between students declined in the first decade after 1900. Both the Smith administration and students seemed to actively discourage such relationships in order to remain publically respectable in the face of growing criticism aimed at same-sex intimate friendships.

In addition to curtailing close relationships among the students, Smith also endeavored to avoid suspicion of fostering "unnatural" friendships by creating a mixed-sex atmosphere at the college. The two schools responded differently to the increasingly sex-integrated life that was becoming the norm on co-educational campuses and the larger society. On both campuses, although to different degrees, controversy over female intimacy took place within the context of acceptable socialization with men.

CHAPTER FOUR

"GONE TO THE DOGS:" STUDENTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEN

Controversies over when and how students at women's colleges should socialize with men reflected deeper conflicts over the proper sphere for women. This issue assumed the form of opposition between the old and new relational values for women. Older, nineteenth century values esteemed female friendships and operated in a more restricted "women's sphere," while the newer values encouraged more mixed-sex interaction and "equality" for women in heterosexual relationships. The founders and administrators of Mount Holyoke and Smith Colleges envisioned the role of women's institutions in this matter very differently. In fact, Smith was founded in part as a corrective to Mount Holyoke's policy. In the struggle between the old and new order, Mount Holyoke's administration chose to hold closely to the old, while Smith's administration took an aggressive departure toward the new.

Mount Holyoke discouraged heterosocial interaction, while encouraging friendships among its students. Smith's administration, on the other hand, pioneered an institution which actively incorporated heterosocial interaction--probably in reaction to what it saw as the "unhealthy" environment of all-female institutions. Smith's President Seelye wrote in 1885, for example, that "There has been a strong effort to preserve that feminine modesty and

refinement that segregation of young ladies in large numbers is apt to destroy."¹

Smith College's effort to foster a heterosocial environment may have been to prove to the doubtful and accusing public that the college did not produce "unnatural" women and that its students were "normal" and heterosexual. Further, Smith students came from wealthier families who exerted a much greater social pressure for their daughters to return to the marriage market after college. The early Smith College administration's push toward heterosociality may have been as much to appease outsiders as because its primary concern was the student's womanliness. In fact, there is evidence that the president was not overly concerned that students marry, and may have hoped that at least some would follow academic careers. In an annual President's Report, Seelye wrote that he had been thinking of several Smith College graduates for posts as teachers at the college, but they had gotten married.² It is likely, too, that Smith College, which had the most rigorous entrance requirements of all the women's colleges when it began, and which strove to emulate the best male colleges academically, would have hoped that its students would take their studies and their future seriously. It is doubtful the president would demand so much intellectually from the students, only to want them all to marry without further academic or professional pursuit. Yet even if only for the benefit of the public and the students' families, the administration's overt

1. President's Report, 1884-85, p. 6, Smith College Archives.

2. President's Report, 1885-86, p. 2, Smith College Archives.

policies were geared toward socializing the students in a heterosocial atmosphere.

In conflict with the public goals of the Smith administration, and perhaps in line with its more hidden agenda, were the single female faculty members who wanted to bring students into the professional mold. The influence of female teachers offered an alternative to what the administration advocated publically. Smith students were left to find their way through the mixed-message the college provided. For Mount Holyoke students, too, there was a degree of confusion as to whether to embrace the philosophy and community of the professional women's world or whether to return to the heterosexual values of the outside society and marry. The message at Mount Holyoke, however, was more clear--the college itself was wholly dedicated to working women and a sex-segregated society. Smith College gave its students a far more confusing set of values.

Both colleges' administrations eventually faced conflicts with their students. At Mount Holyoke some students rejected the older order and demanded a more heterosocial environment. At Smith, too, some students pressed for more freedom for heterosocial interaction. But other students struggled to retain the older values, creating conflict among themselves and between students and administration. The patterns of socializing with men underwent a transition at the colleges, and this occurred, as did the change in female relationships, in the first decade of the twentieth century.

During the early years at Smith College there were no written rules governing student behavior. Until 1910, under President Seelye at Smith, no official list of rules regulated student life, except that of "lights out" in the rooms by ten PM. But students were not free to do as they wished, as informal rules operated. The President expected much from the students in the way of decorous behavior. The absence of written regulations at Smith in the early years may seem curious, but President Seelye made the case that the home training of the students guaranteed their proper behavior. The students were given the freedom deemed reasonable for young women of their social class, and Seelye argued in his President's Reports that the students took no advantage of that.³

Although rules were not officially set down, there were definite policies which were not only fully known to the students, but mandatory. These conventions governed the behavior of students, especially when associating with men. These rules included the need to obtain permission to visit Amherst College and required students to have chaperones for certain situations. In the early 1900s new rules were made, and older ones more strictly enforced, although these too were not officially codified. Apparently the administration believed student behavior was getting out of hand. The students did not agree. They were angry at what they saw as the

3. President's Report, 1875-76, p. 2, Smith College Archives.

curtailment of their freedom, and organized to fight the new rules. The new regulations were aimed particularly at Amherst College men, who were Smith students' most frequent male companions. Amherst men were now forbidden to visit Smith College students on Sundays because they had been interfering with students' attendance at religious meetings. Other male visitors would still be permitted. Under the new rules, Smith women were not to ride alone in a carriage with a man, but were permitted to attend the theater with one--presumably they walked to the nearby theater in town. All men were to leave Smith College by 9:45 PM, and students were to accept only one invitation per year to a big college football game.⁴ This last rule, however, did not preclude students' attendance at any other athletic events.

In 1913 Ada Comstock, the first dean of the college, put out a small booklet for the students entitled "Rules and Regulations," the first official rendering of college restrictions. The pamphlet listed the circumstances under which chaperones were required. Chaperones could be heads of the dwelling houses, female faculty members above the rank of an assistant, or other specially designated persons. Chaperoned activities included any evening entertainments, (except at the nearby Academy of Music), eating with non-family men after 5:00 PM, and eating lunch with men, except on the college's list of approved places. Even under these regulations, students still had many opportunities to meet with men

4. Newspaper clipping, 1906?, found under "Men Guests," Smith College Archives.

alone: it was permissible to eat with a man alone before 5:00 PM at approved restaurants, to attend athletic events (only at Amherst College and Easthampton) without a chaperone, or to attend dances at Amherst College, provided the students left Amherst by the 9:00 PM train. It was possible, also, to ride horseback or motor with a man, but only with permission of the dean on presentation of a note from a parent or guardian.⁵

In contrast to Smith College, Mount Holyoke's standards for student interaction with men were far more restrictive. Life at Mount Holyoke in general was more regimented than at Smith College. Until the seminary became a college in 1888, the institution dictated virtually every aspect of the student's lives by a series of bells. "Perfect punctuality throughout this year, is the standard presented to every pupil on entering the seminary," read a catalogue from the early 1870s. Especially strict were the rules concerning religious observances: students as well as teachers were forbidden to make or receive calls on Sundays, or to spend any Sunday away from the Seminary during the school term.⁶ At least through the late 1910s the administration retained a prohibition against receiving callers on Sunday.⁷

5. Customs and Regulations 1915-16, pp. 7-9, Smith College Archives.

6. Catalogue, Mount Holyoke Seminary, 1872-73, p. 22, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

7. Student's Handbooks, presented by the Y.W.C.A. to incoming students, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

As at Smith College, Mount Holyoke did not codify written rules of conduct for students until around 1910, and it was not until this late date that the college was inclined to address the question of men directly. In the earlier years, unwritten rules controlled the mixing of the sexes. Socializing with males, however, had not been unknown. Toward the end of the nineteenth century students had been allowed off campus to attend dances,⁸ had been invited occasionally to off-campus parties and promenades, and in 1906 the first mixed-sex dance was held at Mount Holyoke. The new written bylaws of 1910 required a chaperone for evening events outside the college, and for any events at Amherst or other male colleges, such as ballgames or parties. Chaperones were also required for attending entertainments or meals with men outside the town of South Hadley, where the college was located, for driving with men, or for receiving men in the school's parlors. In addition, permission was required for such activities as attending matinees, evening theater or opera, canoeing, camping or going to other towns on Sundays, whether or not these excursions included men.⁹ Mount Holyoke students were not permitted the same freedom to see men unchaperoned as were students at Smith. While Smith students were allowed to visit Amherst College for athletic events and dancing, and even to attend the

8. From Clippings file, series 2, vol. 2, p. 74, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

9. Student Government Association, Constitution and Bylaws of the Students' League (Student Government Association Handbook), 1911, pp. 19-22, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

theater alone with a man, Mount Holyoke students were not generally given the same privileges.

But regulations, written or unwritten, did not necessarily reflect the experience of the students. As might be expected with the myriad of rules to follow at Mount Holyoke, students complained about their number and at the pettiness of some of them, especially during the seminary years. Many students broke the rules by retiring after the tardy bell, cooking popcorn in their rooms or playing cards. During this period, students were to report any infringement of the rules on their part, but they did not always do this. If caught, students faced a talking-to or, in at least one instance, a nightly reading of the rules by the principal.¹⁰ At Smith College, too, even though there were few rules to break before the turn of the century, many students disobeyed the 10:00 PM "lights out" rule.

At Smith College, the relatively fewer restrictions placed on heterosocial interaction represented its commitment to providing its students with a "normal and wholesome college atmosphere."¹¹ This "normal" atmosphere, according to the administration, required the presence of both men and women. "One of the distinctive features of Smith College," President Burton wrote in 1915, was that from its inception, Smith had a faculty equally divided between men and

10. Clara Smith, letters to her parents, May 9, 1885, April 12, 1884, February 13, 1884, January 24, 1885, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

11. President's Report 1914-15, pp. 21-22, Smith College Archives.

women. "Unquestionably this policy has commended itself to discriminating parents and to our constituency as a whole. It has contributed much toward the development of a normal and wholesome college atmosphere."¹² From the beginning, President Seelye had encouraged the students to associate with men. But even in 1915, or perhaps more than ever in 1915, as all-female institutions came increasingly under attack,¹³ President Burton used his yearly report to equate the college's "wholesome" environment with its access to men.¹⁴ President Burton also gave a speech in 1913 in which he expounded on the love between himself and his wife, probably as a means of consciously encouraging heterosexuality among the students.

Smith College tried to integrate its male faculty into the lives of its students. In its early years, every Sunday afternoon during the fall and winter the college held religious meetings at which "the gentlemen teachers...talked familiarly to the students on some Christian theme."¹⁵ President Seelye was careful to make a point of this male-female interaction in his annual report. Gatherings such as this, and those of the Smith College Association for Christian Work, which was open to both students and faculty, provided a somewhat informal forum for the students to fraternize

12. President's Report 1914-15, pp. 21-22, Smith College Archives.

13. See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman as Androgyne," Disorderly Conduct (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 280.

14. President's Report 1914-15, pp. 21-22, Smith College Archives.

15. President's Report 1879-80, p. 3, Smith College Archives.

with the male professors. In addition, students themselves wrote of social activities with male professors, although they remarked very little about the professors' intellectual impact on their lives. Students attended concerts and other events under the care of male teachers. In 1882, for example, several students went on a sleigh ride with one male professor who was presumably acting as a chaperone. He spoke of a summer trip to Europe with other Smith College students and men from Harvard as well as other adults.¹⁶ One student even wrote of making a visit to a male professor who was ill.¹⁷ Some students apparently had romantic feelings for their male professors. Kate Morris wrote to a friend that Professor Root, "who was the idol of our class," gave each student a peony at graduation. "Alice Osborne wore hers to a party the same evening."¹⁸ After the turn of the century, perhaps because the student-teacher ratio altered with the rising number of students, women ceased to mention the same level of closeness with male professors.

The college also made an effort to expose students to people outside of the institution itself. Students wrote of paying visits to people residing outside the college, and seemed to do so fairly frequently. The college also brought people from neighboring areas to the campus. "In addition to their ordinary society," wrote

16. Alice Miller, letter to her mother, November 19, 1882, Smith College Archives.

17. Lydia Kendall, journal entry, April 20, 1895, Smith College Archives.

18. Kate Morris, letter to her friend Nellie, July 24, 1880, Smith College Archives.

President Seelye, "there have been once or twice during each term large social receptions in the Social Hall where the young ladies have had an opportunity of meeting many of our best citizens. " Many of the "best citizens" were no doubt men.¹⁹ In addition, students attended churches in town, as the college had decided not to build one of their own. This may have been to accomodate the variety of religious beliefs, but also may have served to introduce the students into town society in an acceptable setting. Smith College wished its students to socialize with men, both inside and outside the college. The college probably used these interactions with outsiders as a means of showing off their refined students to the public, proving that theirs was an institution which did not cloister away its students, making them socially inept or uninterested in male company. Rather, Smith College took steps to ensure that its students were not isolated, while proving to the public that there was nothing "unnatural" or unwomanly about its students. Of course, most of the socializing took place in situations where the college could control it, for example, at public receptions, or under respectable auspices, such as town churches.

President Seelye regularly claimed in his yearly reports to the Smith College trustees that the students at his institution were fine examples of good behavior, and that discipline was not a

19. President's Report 1876-77, p. 4, Smith College Archives.

problem among the students.²⁰ In one comment typical of annual reports, President Burton stated that "The spirit of genuine democracy and true womanliness has pervaded the entire student life of the school."²¹ In fact, President Seelye earlier claimed, the students themselves wished to make the atmosphere "womanly and refined."²²

That student behavior was always circumspect was untrue. Students told many stories of behaving immoderately. One student wrote of an expedition some of the Smith women took to nearby Mt. Tom. Walking down Main Street they were rowdy, and in the train they talked loudly and were "generally disagreeable, and coming home they were a perfect disgrace." They "raced up and down the depot platform" and walked on the rails.²³ At the college itself, their behavior was no less improper. One time a group of students climbed up ladders in order to watch other students at a social gathering eating ice cream in an upper story of a campus building. "The King of the campus joggled the ladders and told us it wasn't 'lady-like.'" And at one basketball game in 1898, the "Indians" tied the "Puritans" to a stake and danced around them. Then each Indian took a Puritan and danced the Virginia Reel "for the edification of the audience."²⁴ Because student behavior so little corresponded to the

20. President's Report 1877-78, p. 1, Smith College Archives.

21. President's Report 1910-11, p. 20, Smith College Archives.

22. President's Report 1880-81, p. 2, Smith College Archives.

23. Alice Miller, letter to her mother, October 7, 1877, Smith College Archives.

24. Smith College Yearbook, 1897, p. 89; Fanny Garrison, letter to her family, November 25, 1898, Smith College Archives.

praise the presidents lavished on their department, it is clear the administration was trying to project an image of its students to counter, or avoid, criticism of its institution. President Seelye was clearly reacting to negative public opinion when he wrote that "There is an increasing pride in the distinctively womanly character of the college....A public sentiment has been created which is strongly opposed to anything that would lessen the dignity of womanhood."²⁵

Mount Holyoke, on the other hand, was not as concerned with hiding its flaws. The administration apparently did not care as much as Smith that the public regard them as a model institution, and documented in yearly reports when there were problems with student behavior. In several of the annual reports, they mentioned students who had to be expelled from the school--one time for "direct disobedience," and another time for stealing. Neither did the reports hesitate to show disappointment in the students, such as in the 1882 Principal's Report that claimed that in the younger classes there had been "elements of superficiality and frivolity."²⁶ Although the Mount Holyoke principals often praised their students, they were not afraid to point out where deficiencies lay. Mount Holyoke was less worried about public opinion than in labeling problems and correcting them.

25. President's Report 1883-84, p. 2, Smith College Archives.

26. Principal's Reports 1871, p. 2, and 1876, p. 2; Principal's Report 1882, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

Because of the administrators' need for the college to appear publically acceptable, students at Smith were given ample opportunity from the college's beginning to socialize with men, both on and off campus. This was especially true with Amherst College students, who were often invited as groups or as individuals to the formal receptions and events at Smith College.²⁷ These included such occasions as the Glee Club concert and Junior Promenade. In 1883, men were invited to the senior party where "there were more men present than on any similar occasion in the history of the college," according to one Smith student. She sent invitations to three different men asking them to attend.²⁸

The formal events remained standard through the early twentieth century, but informal opportunities to be with men increased, and many Smith students spent a considerable amount of time at Amherst College even before 1900. Smith women attended athletic events, drama performances, or dances, sometimes receiving invitations from young men at Amherst, and sometimes going in groups with other Smith students. Men were allowed to visit Smith College residence houses in the evenings in the early years of the college, and sometimes also came in groups.²⁹

27. Alice Miller, letter to her mother, October 7, 1877, Smith College Archives.

28. Alice Miller, letter to her mother, June 3, 1883, Smith College Archives.

29. Elizabeth Lawrence, journal entry, May 25, 1881?, Smith College Archives.

Much of the social exchange between the colleges was supervised, but not all encounters with men were conducted under the watchful eye of a chaperone. Margarett Osgood, for instance, wrote home of her adventures at Amherst College in 1881: two Amherst men invited her and two friends to Amherst College for a gymnastics exhibition. After President Seelye gave his permission, the men came to Smith College to pick up the young women, and the five of them rode off to Amherst, unchaperoned. After they had been at the exhibit for some time, Margarett explained "We started from there before the exercises were over, in time to reach home before dark and just before starting, went up to George Washburn's room where he served us in the most approved style chocolate and cake and very nice baked apples."³⁰ Clearly students spent unchaperoned time with men in very informal circumstances, and this student, at least, felt no qualms writing home about it.

Smith College students were not generally restricted in their individual relations with men, either. Under some circumstances men were allowed in the Smith students' rooms. Mary Smith's 15 year old brother spent time in various students' rooms, and even played basketball with some of the Smith women.³¹ In this same period, another student kept steady company with a young man from Amherst College. She went out with him regularly, often to the opera house, with no chaperone, although she appears always to have requested

30. Margarett Osgood, letter to her family, February 15, 1881, Smith College Archives.

31. Fanny Garrison, letter to her family, November 25, 1898, Smith College Archives.

permission. At least several times she came back close to midnight, defying the 10 o'clock rule, sometimes sneaking in. On one occasion they drove to the top of a nearby mountain, then on to dinner in the city of Holyoke, and were not back until 8:00 that evening, all apparently without a chaperone.³²

While the Smith College administration encouraged heterosocial interaction to ward off public criticism, this was not the only set of standards operating at the college. The female faculty at Smith apparently often instilled other values in students. As Slater and Glazer have shown, these teachers had chosen the life of single professional women, and provided a role model for students at odds with the message of the administration and society that they marry and not work.³³ These teachers were committed to their careers, and to the idea that other women should follow their lead into the professional life. From these women, students must have gained a sense that to marry was to betray the ideals of the women's colleges. And indeed, some of the students must have internalized the example of their female teachers, as many went on to various forms of employment--mostly teaching--directly out of college, and a fair number went on to study further.³⁴

32. Elizabeth Lawrence, journal entries, September 21, 1881, October 7, 1881, January 17, 1881, and n.d.--late September or early October, 1881, Smith College Archives.

33. See Penina Migdal Glazer and Miriam Slater, Unequal Collegues: The Entrance of Women into the Professions (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

34. President's Reports; Smith College Weekly; Smith College Monthly, Smith College Archives.

Students left little evidence that they viewed their female teachers as role models, but it is clear that they thought highly of them. Especially in the earlier years, students socialized with the women teachers, dancing with them, attending church with them, and visiting the teachers in their rooms.³⁵ Clearly female teachers must have provided a view of what life could be like after college that differed from the administration's view. Female faculty offered a model of independent women, and this must have been attractive and inspiring to students who admired and befriended their teachers. Smith students, then, operated within at least two models of appropriate behavior for women college students.

In Smith College's early years, when heterosocial interaction was more limited, some students showed a great interest in and curiosity about men. Alice Miller, for instance, wrote often of Miss McCoy, a teacher, whose sole claim to Alice's interest was her impending marriage to a Yale student. Preoccupation with this marriage was not confined to Alice alone. Alice wrote of Miss McCoy's suitor: "He came to see her last week and they walked through the grounds much to the delight of all the 'Smith Collegians,' who assembled at the windows to watch them."³⁶ In addition to the great interest shown in the boyfriend and the approaching marriage, the incident may also suggest what a rare, and

35. Margarett Osgood, letter to her family n.d.--early in the college year of 1879; Lydia Kendall, journal entry, n.d.--between April 29 and September 17, 1883, Smith College Archives.

36. Alice Miller, letter to her mother, October 7, 1877, Smith College Archives.

perhaps coveted, occurrence this marriage may have been. Some students even monitored the status of eligible men in their letters, lamenting when they married. Wrote Kate Morris to a friend, "I saw the Rev. Bob's marriage in the Republican. Also Dr. Keeps of Easthampton, Prof. Wright's friend. Two impossibilities gone!"³⁷

Students' interest in men was evident in other ways. One student, for example, began her educational career at Northwestern's University for women and then transferred to Smith, but then returned to Northwestern because she wished to be nearer to men.³⁸ Smith College students did not hide their delight at having men attend their social affairs. For some, socializing with men was far more important than socializing with women, as one student attested when she wrote "I thought I would not wear my fine dress to the first occasion, which was to be only of the girls and teachers."³⁹ Another student wrote of a Smith College social reception she attended with her sister. They "each met four gentlemen and Martha met three gentlemen and three ladies, which we decided was about equal to four gentlemen."⁴⁰ So even among themselves they discussed the comparative worth of social relations with men over women.

37. Kate Morris, letter to Nellie, December 27, 1879, Smith College Archives.

38. Alice Miller, letter from her daughter, July 26, 1949, Smith College Archives.

39. Margarette Osgood, n.d., early in the college year of 1879, Smith College Archives.

40. Alice Miller, letter to her mother, November ?, 1877, Smith College Archives.

After the turn of the century at Smith College, relations with men took on a much more casual tone, as did college life in general. For some students, judging by their letters home, men became almost the sole focus of their life at school. Men came and went at a dizzying rate, and many of the students' letters were taken up with talk of men--who they came to visit, and who had a crush on whom. Excitement over the Glee Club dances was intense. The Smith College Monthly carried many sketches about heterosexual romance and the big social affairs to which men were invited, portraying these events as extremely important in the students' lives.⁴¹ Male friends often came to Sunday afternoon vespers, for instance, and just as often distracted the Smith students from the observance. For some, vespers became a social event. "Much excitement in vespers," Dorothy Atwill wrote in 1913. "Nick was there also T.C. Pray with Dot Burton. Marc Wright with a girl also. Many men."⁴² On this Sunday, Dorothy recorded that she sat grinning at a male friend all through vespers, while he grinned back.⁴³

Many Smith College students, even those with steady boyfriends, were happy to spend time with many different men. The men likewise took a casual attitude toward Smith women. Dorothy Atwill revealed this easy-going approach when she wrote to her father of a young man who had been visiting at Amherst College. He had three hours to

41. Smith College Monthly December 1895, 1908-09, 1915-16, e.g., Smith College Archives.

42. Dorothy Atwill, postcard to her parents, February 3, 1913, Smith College Archives.

43. Dorothy Atwill, letter to her parents, February 3, 1913, Smith College Archives.

spend before his train left which he wanted to spend with Dorothy, but when he found she was unavailable, he simply spent the time with someone else. She told of another man who had visited a Smith student: "He must be looking over all the Smith girls he knows. He looked me over the last time he was down. He said he was going to write me a long, long letter. I expect it never will arrive, tho," she said, apparently unconcerned by that prospect.⁴⁴ The attitude conveyed in letters and journals regarding men was often flip and careless, although obviously many of the students cared more deeply than their writing showed.

Despite the superficial tone to much of their writing, there are indications that some students longed to find true love with a man. Dorothy Atwill was moved by a talk given by President Burton in 1913 on the love between and his wife and himself. "It was the most thrilling thing, and I would like to be loved they way he loves her. But then you couldn't find a man like him in a thousand..."⁴⁵ Dorothy was clearly interested in men and wished for a deep, fullfilling relationship with one. Her experiences with men she knew, however, must have led her to believe such relationships were not the norm.

Clearly many of the students enjoyed their experiences with men, although they may not have proved as emotionally satisfying as they wished. Not all students, however, wrote so extensively about

44. Doroty Atwill, letters to her parents, February 14, 1916 and February 4, 1914, Smith College Archives.

45. Dorothy Atwill, letter to her parents, January 6, 1913, Smith College Archives.

men. Even some of those who had boyfriends and were clearly involved in heterosexual relationships did not center their lives around men, as did many of their peers. Some students rarely mentioned men at all.⁴⁶ By 1915, it is clear that it was possible to fill one's life at Smith college with relations with men--and just as clear that this was a choice not universally taken. Some students wrote as if men were constantly overrunning the campus, while others rarely remarked on them. It is clear that by 1915 at Smith College socializing with men was a matter of personal preference, and that students found it possible to interact with men in a fairly unrestricted environment.

While men at Smith College had become a normal aspect of student life, at Mount Holyoke, by contrast, the normal experience in 1915 was still one of a more separate female environment. Mount Holyoke's more restrictive policy on contact between the sexes was not so much aimed at keeping men at bay as at keeping their own students within the bounds of propriety, as defined by the administration. Mount Holyoke authorities did not encourage their students to socialize actively with men, in part because they were less concerned with turning out students full of womanly charm and ready to marry. Before 1900, fewer of their students were of the leisured class than those at Smith College, and the college was preparing many of them to work, either as teachers or as

46. Sara Comins, letters to her family, e.g., Smith College Archives.

missionaries, rather than to become wives. The Mount Holyoke administrators were themselves single working women, and regarded their status as acceptable and even desirable. And perhaps Mount Holyoke administrators simply felt no need to push its students into heterosocial relations for their own sake. If the authorities believed the heterosocial model was not inherently better than a more female-oriented world, they would have had little interest in actively promoting male-female interaction. Too, the Mount Holyoke administration showed no signs that it believed an all-female atmosphere was unhealthy, or that it produced young women "abnormally" uninterested in men. Rather, they wished to create a female environment which encouraged independence and intellectual ability.

The seminary, and later college, afforded only limited contact with men on campus. In the few decades before the turn of the century, it was not unusual for a variety of men to come to the college to give concerts, lectures, or to preach, and the college encouraged students' attendance at such functions.⁴⁷ Aside from such events, where the men were clearly at quite a distance from the students, occasionally men, such as trustees, came to visit, or, like Dr. Hitchcock of Amherst College, to judge the gymnastic tournament. And some students had gentlemen callers whom they entertained in Williston Hall, presumably in a chaperoned setting.⁴⁸

47. Clara Smith, letter to her parents, October 14, 1883, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

48. Emma Wilson, journal entry, May 11, 1893; Clara Smith, letter to her parents, April 23, 1883, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

But because all the teachers were female, Mount Holyoke students lacked the same day to day interaction with men that Smith students had. In time, however, students began to socialize with men at occasions other than just receptions.⁴⁹ But well into the 1890s it was an unusual event that brought many men to campus, as one student attested when she wrote of a reception that "It was a very strange thing to meet so many men but they behaved so beautifully that it was very delightful."⁵⁰ In addition to showing surprise at the large number of men on campus the student confessed to being a little wary of how the men would behave. After one Glee Club Concert, Helen Calder wrote that there were more men there than she had ever seen before, indicating that so many men at once was unusual at Mount Holyoke. Another student, Helen Newton, commented on the rare pleasure of men at the school. "It seems strange, but it does ones heart good to see a man, occasionally."⁵¹

Gatherings with men during the early days included a reception for the "village people," which hardly sounds like the Smith college affair for its "best citizens."⁵² At least as early as the 1880s a certain amount of interaction took place between groups of Mount Holyoke and Amherst College students. Mount Holyoke students

49. Clara Smith, letter to her parents, April 23, 1883, e.g., Mount Holyoke College Archives.

50. Matilda Calder, letter to her family, March 8, 1894, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

51. Helen Calder, letter to her family, March 11, 1896; Helen Newton, letter to her sister, September 2, 1896, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

52. Emma Wilson, journal entry, April 15, 1891, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

attended Glee Club concerts given by Amherst, or gymnastic exhibitions at the male institution, and many of the students were eager to attend such events. It was not until the early 1890s, however, that there was any mention of a chance for the students of the two institutions to interact socially after such occasions.⁵³

Although many Mount Holyoke students participated in mixed-sex events, either at their own institution or at Amherst College, the opportunities apparently were rare. One junior, after attending a Glee Club concert at Amherst, mentioned that in all her time at Mount Holyoke, she had only been out in the evening twice before. She wrote also, that "There was a serenade last night from some of the Amherst students but of course we heard nothing of it," indicating that the administration kept students from indiscriminate contact with men.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, contact between Mount Holyoke and Amherst students did occur. In 1884, a student named Julia Robb designed a survey of Mount Holyoke students, including such questions as whether they ever had visitors from Amherst College and how many correspondents they had of the opposite sex.⁵⁵ It is not clear to what use Julia Robb intended to put the answers, or indeed what the results were, but the survey does indicate a certain amount of social contact between the two schools.

53. Emma Wilson, journal entry, March 3, 1891, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

54. Clara Smith, letters to her parents, February 11, 1884 and December 17, 1884, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

55. Clara Smith, letter to her parents, April 18, 1884, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

For some students, contact with Amherst College was almost non-existent, while for such others as Ida Hay, of the class of 1883, it was extensive--she eventually married an Amherst College man. Her years at Mount Holyoke were very Amherst College-oriented. She took a great interest in the men's college and attended many promenades, concerts, and gymnastic exhibitions.⁵⁶ How Ida managed to be so involved with Amherst affairs is not clear. She sent many invitations to Amherst men for various events, and they sent replies in turn. Means to meet the men must have existed, whether sanctioned by the seminary or otherwise. There were, however, definite restrictions placed on activities with Amherst College men. Nellie Parker, another Mount Holyoke student from the same period, sent a note to an Amherst College man informing him that Mount Holyoke students were not allowed to invite friends to either the approaching concert or reception. "I'm mad," she told him about the restriction.⁵⁷

Outside the institution itself, at least some students socialized with men in this period. When, for example, one student visited a female friend overnight in a nearby town, the friend's parents went out, leaving several young women and a young man to entertain themselves.⁵⁸ Other students wrote of seeing men at parties and homes when they were on vacation. Margaret Chadwell

56. Ida Hay, scrapbook, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

57. Nellie Parker, letter to Fred A. Bancroft, June 20, 1882, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

58. Clara Smith, letter to her parents, March 19, 1884, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

spent a weekend in Connecticut with a friend. The friend's father took them to a dance, after which "the boys came to the house, and we played, sang, etc. until about two."⁵⁹ These encounters with the opposite sex were generally less restricted by adult supervision than those at Mount Holyoke--Mount Holyoke's female world was not the norm in the larger society. The students' dissatisfaction with restrictions regarding men also suggests that, in general, men ordinarily played a larger part in women's lives at this time than the college allowed.

Mount Holyoke was indeed more restrictive than Smith, and this difference played an important role in student life. In contrast to the casual way a Smith College student's brother visited rooms there and played basketball with the students, one Mount Holyoke student's reaction to the visit of her roommate's brother in 1899 points out the difference between the two colleges. Margaret Chadwell related that "As he was a brother, he was allowed to come into the (students') room for not over ten minutes." Margaret wrote with enthusiasm, "This has been an exciting day for us for H--'s brother has been here....Today H-- had him to dinner, and that was the best of all, for when a man appears in the dining room with a hundred girls or more - - -." She noted also that "A man of any description is, of course, such a rarity that it is exciting anyway."⁶⁰ Margaret was not alone when she complained that men were scarce at

59. Margaret Chadwell, journal entry, March 1900, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

60. Margaret Chadwell, journal entry, November 6, 1899, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

Mount Holyoke, even at this relatively late date. Men must have been a rare sight on campus, for the appearance of one to elicit this sort of surprise and excitement from the students. At Smith, by contrast, men on campus were never as unusual as at Mount Holyoke-- Smith students never remarked that their appearance was an extraordinary event. Margaret's reaction to men at Mount Holyoke not only highlighted the dearth of men in the students' lives, but had a sarcastic ring to it as well, suggesting that she was taking jabs at the school's strict policies regarding male visitors.

After the turn of the century at Mount Holyoke, the administration began to loosen some of the restrictions pertaining to men, but they remained fairly stiff. By 1904, the students were allowed to invite men to the Mount Holyoke Glee Club concert and reception,⁶¹ and in 1906 there was a great amount of excitement when, for the first year, the authorities allowed men and women to dance together at the Junior Prom. Although prior to that time Mount Holyoke women had been permitted to attend informal dances at Amherst College, there had been no mixed-sex dancing at Mount Holyoke itself. In previous years, men and women were allowed only to promenade together.⁶²

The advent of "real" dancing at the college was apparently not initiated by the administration because they deemed it appropriate, but rather, according to one newspaper article, "when it was

61. Jessie Staegeman, journal entry, February 20, 1904, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

62. Emma Wilson, journal entry December 5, 1905, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

apparent that the student body was on the point of open revolt." The administration conceded to the students' demands, but still exercised strict control by requiring that the name of the man each student wished to invite be submitted for approval by the parents of the young woman.⁶³ Unlike Smith College, the authorities at Mount Holyoke were not yet willing to have their students dance with men, at least at their own institution, and this was probably due to the school's religious orientation. The administration felt no compulsion to prove to the outside world that their students took part in mixed-sex society. The students, on the other hand, believed they should be allowed this kind of association with men.

Despite the fact that the college was not interested in extending privileges for students to interact in heterosocial situations, the students themselves, as at Smith College, took no less an interest in men. In contrast to the preceding decades, after the turn of the century the students at Mount Holyoke began to write that "all the girls here have men come to see them."⁶⁴ Indeed, from the amount of attention Mount Holyoke students gave men in letters, they seem to have been on the campus all the time, especially by around 1915. After the turn of the century, although official regulations changed only slightly, Mount Holyoke students found increasing opportunities to be with male friends unchaperoned--to take unsupervised evening walks with men on the campus, and to

63. Emma Wilson, newspaper clipping from scrapbook, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

64. Ruth Parker, letter to her family, October 26, 1913, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

go off campus with men, driving, visiting or touring around. Jessie Staegeman ended up walking alone one evening with a man from Amherst college, after they had lost her roommate.⁶⁵ Ruth Parker also recounted a story in which she and a young man were able to spend time together with no adult supervision.

Sunday afternoon we went up Prospect in spite of the rain. Dwane & Elizabeth were ahead of us and we (Norman and I) walked slowly along enjoying the scenery? (sic) We had just got down when it started to pour like everything. We went on to a piazza but we had got quite soaked first. Just the same it was fun and quite romantic.⁶⁶

Although many of the students in this later period spent hours thinking and writing about men, the sources reveal students' ambivalence about men's rightful place in their lives--whether to focus socially on men, or whether the company of their female friends was sufficient. Students had to deal with a conflict of values between those of Mount Holyoke that were firmly rooted in a female world and those of a sex-integrated society. In 1913 Ruth Parker wrote to her family, "all the girls here have men to come to see them. Elizabeth and I think that we will have to write to Wesley and ask him over. But cheer up we don't need a man. We have fine times without them." Ruth's reassurance may have been designed to convince her family, or herself, that she was not overly wrapped up in men, because she went on to recount a romantic thing that happened to her--a nice man lit the gas light for her. "Oh goo!" she

65. Jessie Staegeman, journal entry, November 26, 1905, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

66. Ruth Parker, journal entry, December 30, 1913, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

exclaimed. She then announced to her family that she must stop writing them, so she could write to Norman, her boyfriend, with whom she corresponded regularly.⁶⁷ Although Ruth protested that men were not necessary for "fine times," they clearly played a significant role in her life.

Students' reports of good times with their female friends notwithstanding, men were generally portrayed with much interest. Wrote one student, "a great thing happened this morn after church--I met a man. The organist at the church."⁶⁸ Although she commented no further, this was obviously both an unusual and an important event. For some students, men clearly took precedence over their female friends, and this was accepted, if we judge from the following episode. Ruth Johnson had invited a friend to visit, who failed to show up. She later got a letter from her friend explaining that the reason she did not come was that a particular young man was in town. Ruth wrote her mother

When I saw in the Palmer journal that Mr. William (illegible) or what-ever-it-is, was spending a few days in town the past week, I thought she didn't need to explain. I understood. She might have sat down and written me how it was though--that he was there & she didn't feel like coming away. I shouldn't have been jealous at all...⁶⁹

67. Ruth Parker, letter to her family, October 26, 1913, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

68. Jessie Staegeman, journal entry, November 27, 1904, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

69. Ruth Johnson, letter to her mother, February 28, 1904, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

Ruth assumed a man came first.

Despite the importance attached to men, they were not always viewed with respect, revealing students' ambivalent feelings toward them. A woman wrote of another student who had earlier been making fun of the man she was now entertaining in Williston Hall.⁷⁰ Nor did the young women always view men with passion. Martha Alice Moderwell wrote to a friend of another friend who was to be married. "Abba wrote me last August of her intended marriage and all about her future husband. She seemed calmly happy at the prospect. You know she was fond, very fond I might say of Dr. Brown." These feelings seem lukewarm at best, while the future husband "loved (the bride-to-be) dearly."⁷¹

Many of the students' comments hint at a conflict between the values of the women's institution to which they belonged, and the values of a more sex-integrated world. To many of the students, marriage was a hoped-for goal. In 1893, Matilda Calder wrote that her roommate was to be gone for three days to attend a wedding. "Quite a long stay, but then it is a wedding and they are all important things here."⁷² Yet on Senior Mountain Day, when the senior class spent the night atop a nearby mountain, one of the customary rituals was the roll call in which those who were engaged

70. Clara Smith, letter to her parents, April 23, 1883, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

71. Martha Alice Moderwell, letter to letter to her friend Connie, April 14, 1876, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

72. Matilda Calder, letter to her family, January 27, 1893, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

to be married pleaded "guilty." Wrote one senior from the class of 1909:

The next thing was roll-call--that solemn one. Seven people responded 'guilty.' I followed the example of the great majority and regretfully said 'not guilty.' It was fun to hear the resigned tones in which some of the girls brought it out.⁷³

While many students married, or wished to marry, they used such terms as "guilty" or, wrote one student of another who had just become engaged, "Now Maude has 'gone to the dogs' to use her own phrase in describing other engaged girls."⁷⁴ The senior roll call illustrates the conflict students felt between loyalty to Mount Holyoke's strong female community and the heterosexual values of society. Many of the students wished to plead 'guilty,' but as the term implies, they felt that marrying betrayed the values of Mount Holyoke.

It is difficult to document what took place between young men and women when they were together, as any intimacy between them was not recorded in journals or letters home. It is unlikely that in these documents we would uncover evidence of emotional intimacy, as it was probably not something the students wrote home about. Most of the interactions after the turn of the century are described as casual. Underneath the nonchalant tone used to describe their relationships with men, however, a deeper concern and interest, as well as emotional feeling, comes through. Although their attitude

73. Ruth Johnson, letter to her family, June 9, 1909, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

74. Helen Mitchell, letter to her mother, April 11, 1915, Mount Holyoke College Archives.

was informal, men were clearly a serious focus in the lives of many college women. The new tone taken may reflect less a lack of intensity than a new expansion of relationships with the opposite sex to include more casual friendships. It may also have reflected other social factors, such as students' desire to adopt the conventions of the "New Woman," which encouraged companionate, or more equal, interaction, or simply the casual college styles of the period.

Students in the early twentieth century chose the degree of their involvement with men from a wide variety of possibilities. Although the Smith College administration promoted heterosocial interaction, it may have done so mostly to appease criticism aimed at women's colleges accusing them of creating "unfeminine" women and an unhealthy environment. The Smith College administration wanted to prove their students were "normal" and heterosexual. It may also have been to provide the socialization the students and their middle and upper class families had come to expect. Although the administration encouraged mixed-sex socializing, students were apparently not overtly pressured by their friends to join in the heterosocial fray--even later in the period under study, when a more carefree lifestyle was pursued by many. Peer pressure may have induced some students to participate in "the life" on campus, but there is no indication that those who avoided it were subjected to unfavorable treatment or looked down on by other students. Unmarried female teachers also exerted influence on students which counterbalanced the values the administration advocated. They

encouraged students to pursue an independent, intellectual lifestyle. Students at both Smith and Mount Holyoke received mixed messages from their institutions and had mixed goals, although this was more true at Smith College than at Mount Holyoke.

Although the two institutions provided a strong women's sphere, for many students this environment was not one they would have chosen permanently. A woman's world, although supportive and capable of providing intimacy and enjoyment, was insufficient for many of the women. This can best be seen by Mount Holyoke students' dissatisfaction with limited male presence. Many students wanted access to men despite the pleasures of a female sphere. Further, in spite of the lack of emotional closeness and satisfaction with their male companions--a closeness they had with female friends--many students clearly wanted men in their world, although there were always some who did not evince much interest in them.

From its inception, Smith College consciously worked to maintain an atmosphere infused with male presence. Men were present as teachers, presidents, and as visitors from the town and from male colleges. Smith students were given as much freedom as propriety allowed to socialize with men. And many students happily took advantage of opportunities for male company. Those who may have otherwise devoted more time to female friends put their energy into relationships with men. Smith College encouraged this mixed-sex interaction, while, especially after 1900, it discouraged exclusive

female friendships. Students understood that intimate female relationships and crushes were inappropriate, and some joined the attack on romantic same-sex friendships. But although the college succeeded in keeping unacceptable behavior out of the public eye, and may have reduced its frequency and the tolerance for it among students, they failed to prevent it from happening altogether.

Mount Holyoke, on the other hand, remained less concerned about public opinion throughout this period. If the administration indeed tried to quell romantic relationships between its students, the students, for the most part, ignored their attempts. It appears, however, that the college authorities believed there was no need to bow to public opinion regarding the abnormality of female friendships, and intimacy among the students flourished more freely than at Smith.

The fact that in 1915 at both Smith and Mount Holyoke romantic friendships continued to exist suggests that the presence or absence of men was not the only factor in determining the occurrence of intimate relationships between female students. Pressure from the administration at Smith seems to have curtailed intimate behavior among students there, but it remained nevertheless, although on a smaller and less open level. If the students were given the option to spend time with men, and were encouraged to interact socially and form romantic relationships with them, those women who did not may have been making a conscious identification to form intimate relationships with other women. Forcing women's exclusive relationships underground forced women to make a deliberate stand in

choosing intimate female relationships. At Mount Holyoke, too, some women made a choice to be involved intimately and romantically with other women. It is likely that some of those who chose women's colleges were also choosing a segregated lifestyle to begin with-- those who went to college may have done so purposely to be among women.

This research suggests that the choice of intimate friends was both socially constructed and individually chosen. Mount Holyoke, which was a deliberately female world, produced an atmosphere which fostered strong bonds between women, while at the same time provided little encouragement for male-female relationships. Yet this situation did not in fact prevent students from forming relationships with men. Many students commented unfavorably on the lack of men, and even fought for more opportunities for association with the opposite sex. So while the single-sex world of Mount Holyoke allowed close friendships between women to develop relatively unhampered, it failed to create in many students a desire to choose a female world over one in which men were more present. Moreover, at Smith College, although heterosocial interaction was emphasized, and exclusivity among the female students discouraged, many students continued to choose for themselves on whom to bestow their intimate affections. Personal choice prevailed in at least some cases, despite the powerful influence of their environment.

Yet, ultimately, society, or in this case the colleges, was the final arbiter. Both Smith and Mount Holyoke defined the limits of tolerable behavior, and the students found it necessary to adopt

publically the standards of the institution. At Smith, students themselves took part in pressuring their peers to conform to the administration's standards. The administration, in turn, bowed to the prevailing ideologies of the larger society. Smith's standing in society depended on the appearance of respectability and wholesomeness. The college had a large stake in conveying an image of normalcy, untinged by accusations of lesbianism.

Mount Holyoke, on the other hand, was far less susceptible to attacks on female intimacy than Smith. Perhaps the most important factor in this was the difference between the structures of the two colleges. The social structure at Smith College resembled that of society as a whole--a white, male dominated institution which demanded heterosexuality. Within that construction, little overt deviation was tolerated. Into the first several decades of the twentieth century, Mount Holyoke's structure was different because it was run by an all-female administration. The women who ran Mount Holyoke were single working women, and probably had less interest in maintaining the dominant male social structure. The administration, in fact, resisted that structure, and actively asserted itself against the ideology which condemned female love as lesbian. The structure they established at Mount Holyoke allowed for more affection and intimacy between women. There is no evidence that they made excuses for being an all-female institution, and within the college they gave freer reign to students to form strong bonds among themselves.

Mount Holyoke was a world run by women. These women lived and worked together within the confines of the college. They found support and companionship in close friendships with one another, often setting up couple relationships. They had no desire to promote the heterosexual model which condemned their own relationships as wrong. Neither did they wish or strive to make their institution a mixed-sex environment. Because the administration firmly supported close female friendships, such relationships among the students would naturally have been tolerated. Smith College's leadership, on the other hand, provided a very different kind of role model for students. At the head of the college was always a married man. He and his family, along with the college's commitment to a mixed-sex world, gave its students the message that heterosexuality was the desired norm.

Mount Holyoke remained primarily a self-contained women's institution which saw little need to draw in or cater to male society, as did the later women's colleges. When Smith opened in 1875, Mount Holyoke was already well established, and no longer had to prove itself. Its survival may have depended less on obtaining public approval than the later institutions. This left Mount Holyoke freer to ignore changing public opinions regarding female intimacy. Smith College, however, strove to make itself a reputable institution which refined middle class women would attend. It was designed and run by prominent men whose concerns included deflecting the increasing attacks on women's institutions and intimate female friendships.

Mount Holyoke also remained relatively geographically isolated, while Smith College was located in the more cosmopolitan and geographically central city of Northampton. Although certainly not as urban as Radcliffe of Barnard, Smith may have attracted a more sophisticated student body than Mount Holyoke, and they and their parents may have been more sensitive to criticisms aimed at female institutions and intimacy.

Forces outside the college itself shaped the pressures put upon students to behave in certain ways. But some students at both institutions resisted. The Smith College administration succeeded in dictating what was publically permissible, and affected the nature of intimate friendships. It created a limited and defined environment where less physical intimacy, and perhaps less emotional depth, was tolerated. But some students, by choosing intimate female friendship, offered resistance which may have been barely detectable to outsiders. By 1915 only a few women were apparently resisting the college's definition of relationship norms, and this may have been possible only because their behavior remained private.

Even given the social framework at Smith College, some students were able to assert themselves by choosing other women as their closest companions. Although the cultural ideology which Smith College perpetuated limited some students' behavior, others were able to define their experience within that restrictive structure. At Mount Holyoke, the institution itself took a stand against society's norms; this made it easier for its students to resist society's strictures upon female intimacy, and they were able to do

so longer. But by around 1915, some students apparently began to capitulate to society's attacks on female friendships, perhaps wishing to avoid accusations of abnormality. Too, the students may have wished to model themselves more actively after the "New Woman" image and forgo the old fashioned set of social relations of the school's earlier years.

Women's colleges were loci for certain kinds of female autonomy as well as for social conservatism. Students were able to choose with whom to have intimate relationships, especially in the all-female world of Mount Holyoke where students were free to pursue relationships with women. To an extent, this was also true at Smith College, especially before the turn of the century. Intimate relationships with women may have been allowed to exist in women's colleges later than in society as a whole, allowing college women more freedom in their relationship choices than non-college women. But under increasing pressure from society, and perhaps from students' own desires to appear "modern," the women's colleges--Smith much earlier than Mount Holyoke--assumed a newer, but also more repressive stance, and cracked down on female intimacy in order to conform to the new requirements of respectability and normalcy.

Smith College began as an innovative college for women by allowing a liberal interaction between the sexes. Under the guise of progressivism, it fostered the characteristics of the New Woman by allowing students fairly unhampered association with men. But in addition, this arrangement at Smith had repressive repercussions for female intimacy, and ultimately narrowed the range of acceptable

relationship choices for its students. Mount Holyoke, which retained longer the more "old-fashioned" social structure that esteemed female companionship, continued to allow women's friendships to flourish. Not until the new ideologies that labeled women's relationships as sexual and deviant had fully permeated the college, did Mount Holyoke also become restrictive of women's relationships.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In the historians' debate over the character and significance of separate spheres for men and women in the nineteenth century, the extent to which men and women lived in different worlds emerges as clearly varied according to time and place. I have found that Mount Holyoke and Smith, although they were all-female student environments, were not totally sex-segregated worlds. The issue is then one of the extent of separatism at any given time and the consequences of that separatism.

Women's colleges were artificial female worlds, probably more of a separate "women's sphere" than could be found generally in society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They provided environments populated only, or virtually only, by women, where they ate, slept, worked and socialized with each other. The colleges arose out of the social construct of separate spheres, and they continued to exist as separate women's worlds even after the social organization of the outside world changed.

Not all the Seven Sisters were equally sex-segregated. Mount Holyoke and Wellesley, with their all-female faculty and female presidents, as well as their relatively isolated locations, were the schools with least interaction with men. Smith, Bryn Mawr, Vassar, Radcliffe, and Barnard students all had more contact with men, if only by virtue of their having male faculty members and, in some

cases, male presidents. Neither were these latter colleges as culturally or geographically isolated as Mount Holyoke and Wellesley, except perhaps for Vassar.

The all-female nature of the student bodies at women's colleges influenced patterns of socializing, especially before the turn of the century. This contrasted with the very heterosocial nature of interaction at the co-educational colleges and universities, which rose rapidly in popularity after 1900. Students at these colleges became part of a separate female culture outside the mainstream, with its own rituals and social functions. Many students formed very close and often romantic relationships with other women. This social structure may have been a product of limited social options or a choice made by the students themselves to so construct their relationships.

Although these college students enjoyed many aspects of their women's culture, such as close friendships and an emotionally satisfying and supportive atmosphere, the existence of a women's "sphere"--if by that is meant simply a world inhabited mostly by women--did not preclude the desire of many of them to socialize with men, and eventually to marry. For some students, the colleges' construction of separate spheres was perhaps unwillingly imposed upon them, while for others, the gender-separate college was desired along with the anticipation of heterosociality outside of college. Perhaps the literal presence or absence of men should not determine the existence of a "separate sphere" for women. With regard to

Mount Holyoke and Smith, a separate women's culture appears to have existed along-side a considerable amount of interaction with men.

But it seems likely that not all students participated in the same "culture" within the colleges. Students apparently chose for themselves whether to participate in a mixed-sex or single-sex culture, and many students were involved in a combination of both cultures within their institutions. The female world at the schools was not all-pervasive--some students chose to operate in a sex-segregated atmosphere, while others chose a social life which included men. It is likely that if women in this relatively isolated environment were allowed to choose from a variety of such options, women in the less restricted larger society were allowed similar choices. On the other hand, while women outside the colleges may have had access to a wider range of heterosocial options, they probably had somewhat fewer choices regarding access to a female environment.

Despite the administrations' wishes or inclinations at both Smith and Mount Holyoke, students took part in defining for themselves their social world. Either overtly or subtly the administrators attempted to set up a certain structure for their institutions, and to an extent, students stepped into a ready-made culture, accepting this framework. Yet at both Mount Holyoke and Smith College, some students carved out a niche for themselves, regardless of the colleges' structures.

The sex-segregated spheres of women's schools gave women a certain amount of autonomy and strength. At Mount Holyoke, because it was very much a female world, the faculty and administration had a great deal power of within the institution. It was run in a manner beneficial to the female faculty and students, with women maintaining control. Students and teachers were able to assert their own autonomy within this setting, including having the freedom to choose female relationships. Yet this influence was only effective within the school, conveniently restricted away from the male world of the broader society.

At Smith College, because it was run by a male president and many of the faculty were men, women did not hold the same important forms of power as did women at Mount Holyoke. Female faculty at Smith felt more the control of a male created and male dominated system. Female students, however, were not as directly regulated by men, and were able to set up a student sub-culture in which they possessed a certain amount of autonomy, although this did not extend into their being as free to choose intimate female relationships as students at Mount Holyoke.

Ellen Rothman argues that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century men and women were emotionally distant, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg claims that separate spheres caused this distance between the sexes, at least through the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century. Although I had little evidence, my research does indicate that relationships between men and female students were not as emotionally close or fulfilling as those between women.

Yet I did not find the two worlds to be as separate as Smith-Rosenberg suggests, even in all-women's colleges. Students were fairly free to carry on relationships with men, even within these restricted environments, and many women clearly wanted men to be very involved in their lives, despite the lack of deep emotional intimacy. Men regularly passed in and out of the institutions, especially at Smith, and would have had an even more substantial presence on the campuses if the students had been allowed to regulate male access.

I have found that the nature of women's friendships at the colleges changed between the period of 1870-1915, and that much of this change may have been in response to the increasing accusations of abnormality levelled against close female friendships. It may have been due also to the fact that the nature of gender relationships was changing in general, but this change in itself may have been in part a result of the attack on close female friendships.

Within Smith College and Mount Holyoke, romantic relationships between women remained quite common through the nineteenth century and beyond. My research suggests that the time frame posited by Carroll Smith-Rosenburg and Nancy Sahli, according to which intimate female friendships waned by the late nineteenth century, is incorrect, at least in institutional settings. Although I agree that intimate and romantic women's friendships largely faded from public view, I suggest that they declined at a later date, although even then may not have totally disappeared. My evidence

corroborates more closely the work of Lillian Faderman, Nancy Cott, and Blanche Weisen Cook, who claim that these kinds of women's relationships remained common until around 1910. I have found that these intimate friendships lasted even longer in women's colleges. Sahli has suggested that women's colleges would probably have been among the first places to reflect changing attitudes toward sexuality and intimacy, and she documented romantic relationships in women's colleges only until 1875. My findings, however, indicate that women's colleges may have been among the last holdouts tolerating female intimacy. Smith College, despite its "progressive" ideological leanings, apparently accepted romantic friendships until nearly 1915, and at Mount Holyoke, they continued openly even longer. I also suggest that even after intimate relationships disappeared from view, some students continued to have such friendships but were not as open about them.

What was considered important in a friend changed during the years between 1875 and 1915. Before the turn of the century, physical appearance and a pleasant manner and good character were admired. Physical intimacy went along with emotional closeness. A crush may or may not have included physical intimacy, but was usually based on intense spontaneous and passionate feelings. Although some students declared themselves that they had crushes on other women, crushes often seemed more a function of public recognition as such, often despite a student's own assessment of the relationship. As Kathleen Kelley found, language is problematic when attempting to define a friend, good friend, lover, or any

gradation of close relationship. And, indeed, students, especially at Mount Holyoke, had a difficult time differentiating between the varieties of friendship. The line between a friend, being "in love," and a crush was very indistinct. At Smith College, the students seemed to have a somewhat more definite idea of friendship categories, perhaps because it was necessary to avoid what looked like crushes. Apparently, neither students nor their parents had trouble tolerating physical intimacy and crushes between women, especially at Mount Holyoke. At Smith, after about 1908, students themselves were more reticent about giving evidence to parents and seemingly even other students of physical affection and crushes.

After around 1900, students at both colleges looked less for pleasing physical and moral characteristics in friends than for those women who could share the increasingly casual and active life that had become the norm at colleges. Although students at Mount Holyoke continued to openly express and write about physical affection among themselves, students at Smith ceased to write much about, and presumably engage in, physical intimacy with other students.

I found, also, that although most of American society in the late nineteenth century did not make use of chaperones, both Smith and Mount Holyoke required them for many social activities with men. Students had, however, opportunities to see men alone, even at the more heterosocially restricted Mount Holyoke. Despite the differences between the amount of socialization that Smith and Mount Holyoke allowed its students with men, at both institutions, there

were those students who chose to spend time with men, and those who did not. Yet many Mount Holyoke students nevertheless showed ambivalence toward men and marriage, uncertain whether they viewed marriage as disloyal to their experience of a female culture.

Before 1900 it was common for many students at both Smith and Mount Holyoke to engage in romantic friendships with other students, and this was true, especially at Mount Holyoke, even after the turn of the century. It was permissible and even encouraged to form romantic attachments to women as well as to men. Patterns of female friendship in women's colleges were not based on exclusivity.

Although we tend to use a dyadic model when viewing friendship, it may not be applicable in this case. A student could be involved simultaneously in numerous friendships and numerous crushes. And college women apparently did not generally neglect their female friends for a boyfriend, even when men were very important in students' lives.

Yet the fact that women had a variety of relationship options should not obscure the existence of lesbian bonds or deny that women made conscious choices. Many college women must surely have formed romantic relationships with other women who would not have done so had it not been tolerated by the colleges and common among the students. The institutions placed many women on close terms, and at least at Mount Holyoke, encouraged close friendships. Yet, an artificially constructed environment should not be seen as the only factor in determining relationship preferences. Women's institutions did not "cause" lesbianism, or what we might describe

as lesbian behavior. At Smith College, intimate women's relationships were not always encouraged, and were in fact actively discouraged in later years, yet romantic friendships still occurred. Women's colleges may have allowed for women to experiment with various sexual or romantic possibilities; yet those students who formed intimate bonds with other women chose to do so, and chose from a variety of options, often including extensive socializing with men.

Further, even if many women involved in relationships with other women formed such friendships only in a milieu which accepted those relationships and allowed them to flourish, there were doubtless women who chose other women and would have done so even if they had been publically condemned. But were these latter women the only "true" lesbians? It is difficult to interpret romantic relationships among women by trying to define them as lesbian or non-lesbian, and perhaps that is not necessary. Although we should not necessarily label these women lesbians, it is useful to learn that when a culture accepts such relationships, love between women can and has thrived. It is important to know that there were times when romantic female relationships were neither culturally restricted nor so distinct from other relationship options. It was in fact a separately constituted women's culture which allowed these relationships to survive when the dominant culture began to re-define them. Charges of lesbianism had a detrimental effect on female friendships in society as a whole, inhibiting emotional and

physical intimacy. Women's colleges allowed for some of this intimacy to continue relatively unhindered.

Lesbians do indeed have a history, despite their only relatively recent identification as a separate group. And although it is important for them to define themselves as a group for political and emotional support and autonomy, they can take from the past the knowledge that at times society has accepted and integrated female love into the society, even if it was ultimately to suit the needs of the dominant forces of that culture. It is important to know that there were romantic relationships between women even if they were due in part to a socially favorable climate, as well as to know that some women have chosen such relationships in the face of society's objections.

There are still many questions left unanswered by historical research on female friendship and romantic relationships. We need to explore further the causes of the changing nature of female intimacy. It would be useful to know whether the attack on intimate bonds between women caused a more conscious identification as lesbians for some women, and how others may have dealt with their love for women if they did not choose to so identify themselves. There is also a need for comparative work to be done at co-educational colleges and universities to examine the effect of a larger and more permanent male presence on women's relationships with each other and with men. Additional same-sex colleges also should be researched. Studies conducted on black women's colleges, colleges that catered to less elite classes, and colleges in

different geographical areas of the country would add much to our knowledge of female intimacy. Research into relationships among women in non-academic settings would also provide insight into the nature and change of women's bonds in the years around the turn of the century.

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