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The Emotional Toil of Paying for College: Lower Socioeconomic Status White Women's College Experiences, 1880-1920

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The Emotional Toil of Paying for College:
Lower Socioeconomic Status White Women's College Experiences, 1880-1920

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Higher Education

by

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ABSTRACT

Typically historical inquiries in higher education have been centered on privileged individuals from wealthier backgrounds who had the opportunity of attending primarily prestigious institutions. The experiences of college women from lower to middle class socioeconomic backgrounds have been for the most part ignored. This dissertation explores how socioeconomic backgrounds shaped the experiences of college women from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, focusing on lower class students. With no universal financial aid program, the majority of these women were from families who could afford to pay tuition. Women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds did attend college, but their individual experiences are often missing in the literature. The historiography chapter explores how previous historians have considered the impact of socioeconomic status on the experiences of White women in higher education concerning the purpose of higher education for women, demographics, curriculum, the extracurriculum, and careers after college. Generally, the purpose of women's higher education depended on the type of socioeconomic student that the institution attracted; wealthier college women had more options in college and were training to be wealthy wives and less wealthy women had fewer options and were training for paid employment.

While little is known about these women from less advantaged backgrounds, partly because they were in the minority and partly because they are not well represented in the primary sources that exist, there are two women included in this study who give insight into the experience of being a lower to middle socioeconomic status student in college from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. M. Madeline Southard struggled with financial insecurity during college, which led to food insecurity and caused anxiety that manifested in

decreased mental health. She relied on her Christian faith as the main coping mechanism to alleviate the struggles of being a low socioeconomic student. The chapter on K. Gretta Ordway, describes how a middle-class student managed to attend a prestigious and expensive institution in an era before government-funded financial aid. Attending college created a financial hard in her family, and Ordway had to navigate the often-unclear institutional practices related to financial aid. Being excluded in campus life due to being a less wealthy student at a primarily wealthy college also contributed to mental health issues. These college women went to college a decade apart and in different institutions, but they are connected because of their struggle to pay for their college educations. Their experiences in higher education have the ability to shed light on the current situation students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face today.

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Moving in the middle of the program was challenging, yet my dissertation committee was incredibly supportive and kind throughout the process. I would not have been able to complete the program and dissertation without their help. They set high standards and believed that I could meet them, which gave me the confidence to do just that. Thank you to Dr. John Murry, Jr. for your support and gentle guidance. Thank you to Dr. Kate Mameishvili for your support and expectations for excellence. Thank you to Dr. L. J. Shelton for being authentic, asking insightful questions, and introducing me to the work of Brené Brown.

Thank you to Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, for permission to publish excerpts from M. Madeline Southard's journal. Thank you to Dean Rogers, Special Collections Assistant of Vassar College, for your help finding materials on K. Gretta Ordway and Vassar College for permission to publish excerpts from her journal. Also, thank you to Marjorie Snyder, Archivist of the Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas for your time and assistance in research on Madeline Southard.

My parents, family, and friends who don't know exactly what I do or study, but are proud and support me regardless. I am eternally grateful for my husband, Paul and son, Riley.

As a first-generation low-socioeconomic student, attending college was a nearly impossible dream, and I am extremely grateful to have been given all of the opportunities and

support that I have had along my academic career. As an undergraduate student, I worked two jobs, received scholarships, and student loans in order to finance my education. It has not been an easy journey and I often identified with the stories of Southard and Ordway. More than a hundred years have past since these women attended college, but their stories are still relevant today. Even during my doctoral education I felt many times as though I didn't belong and worried that there had been some administrative mistake that admitted me into the program. It has not been without struggle, but I am thankful for the journey and everything that I have learned along the way.

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the students, past, current, and future that are struggling to pay for their educations and wondering if they belong. All it takes is one supportive, encouraging person to make a difference in a student's life.

EPIGRAPH

“Oh you girls of the future, who will be able to fulfill your personal life and life’s sweet relationships too, will you think sometimes I wonder of what it cost other women to bring this to you, or will you wonder uncomprehendingly what kind of being these ‘old maids’ were.”

Madeline Southard, Journal, 1919

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The history of higher education often brings up thoughts and images of wealth and privilege; however, recent scholarship has been more inclusive and broadened our collective knowledge of students' experiences in higher education. This dissertation explores the influence of socioeconomic status on White women's experiences in higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, focusing on lower-income students. Most historical scholarship on higher education has focused mainly on specific colleges or types of institutions of higher education. While many historians have made mention of women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in their work; there is a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of specific women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds attending private colleges and coeducational institutions. As a first-generation low-socioeconomic status student, this topic is personally relevant and meaningful for me. While my early interest on student debt and the impact on mental health of contemporary students began in my higher education coursework, it quickly combined with my historical research work as a graduate assistant. This contemporary focus led me to wonder about the historical aspect of this topic.

Historians strive to use materials that were created in the time under examination, also known as primary sources, to recreate the past.¹ Secondary sources, or the existing historical scholarship on an era or subject, provide context to primary sources and reveal opportunities for

¹ See for example, Robert Jones Shafer, *A Guide to Historical Method*, 3rd. ed. (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1980); John L. Rury, "Historical Research in Education," in *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research*, ed. Judith Green (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, 2006), 323-32; Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, "Does History Matter in Education Research? A Brief for the Humanities in an Age of Science," *Harvard Educational Review* 75, no. 1 (2005): 9-24.

future research. This dissertation provides a historiography based on 20 secondary sources and uses a variety of rich, descriptive primary sources for two case studies to offer a more complete history of the effect of socioeconomic background on White college women's college experiences. The secondary sources were selected based on women's college experiences during the time period in question. The primary sources included were based on women's college experiences, the time period of 1880 to 1920, and had to include financial insecurity.

I begin my study in 1880 and end it in 1920, roughly around the same time as what is commonly referred to as the Progressive Era. In Chapter 2, I review the existing historical scholarship that historians of higher education have written about White college women during this era. The secondary sources included in this historiographical essay were published between 1984 until 2018. After reading and analyzing the historical scholarship, I separated them into three different waves of historical research. In this chapter, I explore how previous historians have considered the impact of socioeconomic status on the experiences of White women in higher education concerning the purpose of higher education for women, demographics, curriculum, the extracurriculum, and careers after college.

Several themes stand out in Chapter 2 from analyzing the existing scholarship. One of the underlying themes in the scholarship was the use of higher education to preserve students' middle and upper-class status or move toward middle-class values if they were from lower classes. Generally, the purpose of women's higher education depended on the type of socioeconomic student that the institution attracted; wealthier college women were training to be wealthy wives and less wealthy women were training for paid employment. By and large the wealthiest women students at private women's colleges and poorest at normal schools faced the least gender segregation and middle-class women students faced the most. Wealthier women

attending women's colleges and coeducational universities had more extracurricular opportunities than women from less wealthy backgrounds. After college, career options for women were based on the socioeconomic distinctions in women's backgrounds; higher socioeconomic status women largely chose to marry men from affluent backgrounds and not seek paid employment, while lower socioeconomic women did not have the luxury and pursued careers.

Chapters 3 and 4 offer case studies of individual White college women who struggled to afford higher education in the Progressive Era. In Chapter 3, I explore the college experiences of Mabel Madeline Southard, who attended Southwestern College in Kansas from 1895 until 1899. Southard would go on to lead a remarkable career as an evangelist in which she became renowned for her advocacy for women's equal rights within Christianity. While Southard has been the subject of scholarly study, these studies largely overlook her formative college years. Uncovering her college experiences not only locates the foundation of her formidable career, but it also illustrates how a White woman who suffered from extreme financial insecurity managed to access and afford higher education in the late nineteenth century. While very self-sufficient in her thoughts and behaviors, Southard was constantly financially dependent on her family, church leaders, and professors to afford her education, in addition to working and borrowing money. The struggle for financial security led to food insecurity and caused anxiety that manifested in decreased mental health. Southard relied on her Christian faith as the main coping mechanism to alleviate the struggles of being a low socioeconomic student. Her long history of choosing career success over personal relationships began in college and continued throughout her life. An interesting paradox exists for Southard in that she fought for gender equality and advocated for

women's rights her entire life; yet she was unable to achieve both career and the family success she desired.

In Chapter 4, I look into the college experience of Katherine Gretta Ordway at Vassar College from 1909 until 1913. Ordway obtained a degree from Vassar, became a teacher, and completed her graduate work at New York University. Unlike Southard, Ordway did not become a prominent figure; however, her college years document the college experience of a middle-class socioeconomic student at a primarily wealthy, private women's college during the early twentieth century. The daughter of a preacher, understanding how Ordway managed to attend a prestigious and expensive institution in an era before a government-funded financial aid system reveals the precarious position of some students to remain enrolled. Unlike Southard, Ordway received parental support and scholarships from Vassar that helped her obtain a college degree. At the same time, attending college did create a financial hardship in her family, and Ordway had to navigate the often-unclear institutional practices related to financial aid. The aspects of college that she enjoyed and participated in most aside from academics were those that did not create added expense. Being excluded in campus life due to being a less wealthy student at a primarily wealthy college also caused emotional suffering, isolation, and loneliness. Ordway struggled with mental health due to the pressure to perform well in her coursework, a perfectionist temperament, and low self-esteem. While Ordway enjoyed a long career as a teacher and seemed to stay active as a Vassar alumnus, she never wrote about personal relationships. She lived with her younger sister until the day she died. As an interesting side note, Ordway's younger sister graduated with a bachelor's, master's, and doctorate. It is a fair assumption to conclude that Ordway contributed to her sister's achievements.

Methodology

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore how socioeconomic status shaped White women's experiences in higher education in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Given that the majority of women who went to college were from upper-middle to upper socioeconomic backgrounds, I was especially interested in understanding the experiences of women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The following questions guide this dissertation.

1. What have previous historians said about how socioeconomic status affected the experiences of White women in higher education in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century?
2. How did specific or individual White women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds access and experience higher education in the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century?
3. How did specific or individual White women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds pay for college in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century?
4. How did specific or individual White women's lower socioeconomic background affect their college experiences, mental health, and life after college in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century?

Research Design and Data Collection

The research design of this study was historical research. The purpose of this design is to collect, verify, and synthesize evidence from the past in order to gain a clearer understanding of the past and its impact on present and future events. It is dependent on data that is observed and

recorded during the time period under investigation by others rather than the investigator of the study. I began my research as a graduate assistant reading student diaries from both men and women at various different institutions. In total over the last almost five years I have read and coded over 67 student diaries. The majority of these diaries were shared from my advisor, Dr. Michael Stephen Hevel. In addition, I completed Internet searches for digitized college student collections and took research trips to the Bentley Historical Library (University of Michigan) and Schlesinger Library (Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University). I reviewed and analyzed original primary sources from the Bentley Historical Library and the Schlesinger Library.

The two case studies selected for inclusion in this dissertation were chosen based on the student's struggle with financial security. The two women in the case studies wrote rich, thick descriptions of their finances and how this affected them personally. Other diaries may have made mention of finances or perhaps financial struggle, but not in a way that allowed me to draw any sort of logical conclusions or interpretation without many more primary sources. I determined the socioeconomic status of Southard and Ordway based on the facts written about in their diaries and compared this information with information that I had found in secondary sources. Southard was from a small farming family in Kansas. Based on this information, I deduced that she fit in the low socioeconomic status category. Ordway's father wrote in a letter exactly how much his salary was. Using this information, I compared it to average salaries for certain professions during that time period. Her father made approximately one-third less than bankers and lawyers of that time. While this does not put her into the category of low socioeconomic class, it does seem to indicate that her family was in the lower portion of middle-

class. The sources from the Bentley Historical Library did not meet the parameters of my dissertation thus were not included in this dissertation.

Working with primary sources requires significant preparation in locating, pulling, and handling primary sources. Finding aids were used in determining and identifying these sources for the archivists. In addition, I worked with the archivists at Southwestern College and Vassar College in collecting, verifying, and finding additional primary sources. The data that I relied on in my dissertation include student diaries, letters, college catalogues, and student newspapers. In addition to analyzing rich, descriptive primary sources, I included 20 secondary sources to compile the historiography chapter.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process for my historical research study was cyclical and involved multiple rounds of reading diaries, coding them in word documents, looking at the coding for themes, searching for additional materials, and repeating the process. Overall, the process of historical research is data collection of historical data, criticism of the data, and then synthesis of the evidence based on the themes found in the data. The data collection was a comprehensive gathering and organizing of the data, which included primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of artifacts found in the time of interest such as diaries, official records, newspapers, and magazines.² Secondary sources consisted of articles and history books written by historians on the topics of interest. The second step was a comprehensive review of the materials and data. The analytic process of document review and criticism is a two-step endeavor. The first step involves external criticism. External criticism is the establishment of

² Bill McDowell, *Historical Research: A Guide for Writers of Dissertations, Theses, Articles and Books*. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002); Anthony Brundage, *Going to the Sources: A Guide to Historical Research and Writing*, 6th ed. (John Wiley & Sons, 2017).

validity by determining the authenticity of the source. It deals with the form and appearance of the data rather than the meaning of the contents. The second step involves internal criticism. Internal criticism is the determination of reliability by attempting to correctly interpret the contents of the documents. I used original and authentic sources. I was aware of my own personal biases. In addition to being a first-generation low-income student, I completed my master's degree in mental health counseling. This background created the lens through which I read and interpreted my sources. I substantiated the documents by searching for a collaborating source to ensure that my interpretations were correct.

I began my project with an overarching question about the college experiences of students during the time period in question. I narrowed down my interests to include women students with special interest in socioeconomic status, mental health, health, and overall student life. I chose to focus on the experiences of White college women because those were the primary sources available. When reading the diaries, I transcribed and coded each theme into a Word document. I reread the diaries with the intention of understanding the context of each theme. After coding and transcribing each diary, I analyzed the word document to understand any change over time for the student.

With any research, there are limitations that should be considered when interpreting and applying the results. Historical research involves logical processes instead of statistical ones, which can lead to the possibility of subjectivity. Due to the nature of historical research, there is a lack of control over external variables; therefore, one limitation is that internal validity is weak.

Significance of Study

This dissertation adds to our historical understanding of the impact socioeconomic status had on White women's college experience during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

One significant finding and contribution from the case studies, but not the historiography chapter, is the impact of socioeconomic status on mental health. While to some extent socioeconomic status has been included in the historical scholarship, it has not been a central focus and mental health has largely been ignored in this population during this time period. In addition to the historiography, the case studies included in this dissertation provide us insight into what it meant to be a lower to middle-class socioeconomic student during this time at two different colleges and the impact that this had on their mental health. The aspiration of higher education is touted as the great equalizer in our country, a difficult and complicated reality exists that socioeconomic status and gender affect students' experiences and outcomes in higher education. The future is ripe for historical as well as contemporary scholarly exploration of these topics. One area of historical research is to expand the number of primary sources providing a more comprehensive description and comparison of how socioeconomic status affected women at different institutions of higher education focusing on mental health.

Understanding the past in terms of the intersections of gender and socioeconomic status in higher education can provide a useful perspective to contemporary challenges. Today, the wealthiest and most advantaged Americans are more likely to attend the nation's most prestigious and well-resourced institutions. In 2017, Daryl Smith argued that there had been insufficient attention paid to the intersection of salient identities such as gender and socioeconomic status to name a few.³

There are many challenges facing today's students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in higher education. According to Sara Goldrick-Rab, college students from low socioeconomic

³ Daryl G. Smith, "Progress and Paradox for Women in US Higher Education," *Studies in Higher Education* 42, no. 4 (2017): 812–22.

backgrounds struggle with inadequate food and housing, excessive working, taking time off from school to save money, and more than half left not receiving a degree.⁴ Not only do these students leave college without a degree, they tend to choose less prestigious institutions and are less represented in graduate school.⁵ Other challenges that can hinder student success are increased family obligations, lack of knowledge regarding involvement in campus activities, and less engagement with the university community. All of these can contribute to estrangement and disconnection from the college environment.⁶ Lower socioeconomic backgrounds can affect academic performance and choice of major. Some research has been conducted on the connection between socioeconomic status and choice of major; however these studies were inconclusive and more research needs to be conducted on the impact of socioeconomic status on choice of major.⁷ Students who saw themselves to be relatively lower in socioeconomic status than their peers reported more impostor feelings, which has been associated with “workaholism” and negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression.⁸ The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully in her or his community.”⁹

⁴ Sara Goldrick-Rab, *Paying the Price*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016) 120-140.

⁵ MaryBeth Walpole, “Socioeconomic Status and College: How SES Affects College Experiences and Outcomes,” *The Review of Higher Education* 27, no. 1 (2003): 46.

⁶ Cara C. MacInnis et al., “Cross-Socioeconomic Class Friendships Can Exacerbate Imposturous Feelings Among Lower-SES Students,” *Journal of College Student Development* 60, no. 5 (2019): 595–611.

⁷ Iryna Y. Johnson and William B. Muse, “Choice of Academic Major at a Public Research University: The Role of Gender and Self-Efficacy,” *Research in Higher Education* 58 (2017): 366.

⁸ MacInnis et al., “Cross-Socioeconomic Class Friendships Can Exacerbate Imposturous Feelings Among Lower-SES Students,” 595.

Similarly, while women, unlike in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, make up a majority of students in higher education today, the existence of sexism on campus and in society still influences their experiences. Despite this overall growth, there has been little change in the number of women who major in some fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.¹⁰ This underrepresentation of women in lucrative fields translates into women having less promising careers and lower earnings.¹¹ Why has there been little change in the number of women majoring and working in these more lucrative fields when the majority of students in higher education are women? Blanca Rincón and Casey George-Jackson have suggested that negative environments and sexism has contributed to women's participation in these fields, persistence, and degree attainment.¹² Having gender diversity in the workplace contributes to innovation and improves business performance, but men college students are 2.5 times more likely to chose a finance major than women students even though women often score higher in their first college math courses.¹³

The main contribution of this dissertation is original historical scholarship on the impact of socioeconomic status on White women college students' experiences during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The case studies demonstrate how two lower socioeconomic students successfully paid for their educations and the emotional toll this cost.

The historiography chapter provides context, synthesis of scholarship, as well as analysis of

⁹ World Health Organization, "Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative" (Geneva, Switzerland), 1.

¹⁰ Smith, "Progress and Paradox for Women in US Higher Education.", 812.

¹¹ Johnson and Muse, "Choice of Academic Major at a Public Research University.", 366.

¹² Blanca E. Rincón and Casey E. George-Jackson, "Examining Department Climate for Women in Engineering: The Role of STEM Interventions," *Journal of College Student Development* 57, no. 6 (2016): 742–47.

¹³ Ronia Hawash and Sheryl-Ann K. Stephen, "Where Are All the Female Finance Majors? An Examination of Gender and Performance in Undergraduate Corporate Finance," *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice* 19, no. 8 (2019): 86–95.

change over time for White women at various institutions of higher education during this time period. The Southard chapter explores the college years of M. Madeline Southard, a renowned Methodist preacher, women's rights advocate, and evangelist. Southard was a low socioeconomic student at Southwestern College in Kansas, who struggled to pay for her education. The Ordway chapter explores the Vassar college years of K. Gretta Ordway, a middle-class student, lifelong teacher, and dedicated diarist. All of these chapters attempt to portray the experiences of White women college students during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with a special focus on socioeconomic status. The brief connection to contemporary research on these topics provides evidence that these financial issues facing students in higher education are not merely a thing of the past, but are still relevant and very much in existence in higher education today.

CHAPTER TWO
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND WHITE WOMEN'S HIGHER EDUCATION:
A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Introduction

The increase of White women in higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century marks an important transition in the history of higher education. The period from 1890 to 1920 is often considered as an optimistic time when people in the United States were hopeful about their futures.¹ For many women this optimism was based in part on greater access to higher education and improved class mobility. While women had been attending institutions of higher education before the Civil War, most often these institutions were called seminaries or academies.² In the late nineteenth century, White women's higher education largely transitioned from academy to college. Understanding the first generations of college women and how their socioeconomic status shaped their experiences and opportunities provides insights into the current situation women in higher education face today.

Historians of higher education have paid a great deal of attention to the first generations of White college women since the 1980s. Most historians have acknowledged to a certain extent the socioeconomic status of the women in their studies, but that has not always been a central focus of their work. This chapter connects the findings from individual studies to create a bigger picture of the impact that socioeconomic status had on White women's experiences in higher education during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In this chapter, I have considered three broad socioeconomic categories: upper class, middle class, and lower class.

¹ Lynn Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 9.

² Margaret Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 6.

The upper class consists of the small percentage of very wealthy and powerful, middle class consists of the majority of the population in between upper and lower class. The lower classes are those people with very little economic security.

This chapter explores how socioeconomic status affected the experiences of White women in higher education from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century regarding the purpose of higher education for women, curriculum, the extracurriculum, and their lives after college. The most important lessons that we can learn are the location, type of institution, and socioeconomic status of the women influenced the intended purpose of higher education for women, their college experiences, and life after college. An overarching theme running through the scholarship of women's higher education was the use of education to maintain their middle to upper class position or move toward middle class values if they were from lower classes. Whether you were a first-generation or second-generation student had a large impact on the college experience and expectations for life after college for women. Earlier historians of higher education have focused on the differences between the two generations more so than more recent historians of higher education. For the purpose of this essay, the terms first-generation (those who attended higher education from 1880 to 1899) and second-generation (those who attended higher education from 1900 to 1920) students are viewed from a historical perspective, not a contemporary perspective.

This chapter primarily relies on books of historical scholarship; however some articles and chapters were included. The books included in this historiographical essay span between 1984 and 2018 and can be separated into three different waves of historical research. [See Table 1] The first wave of scholarship was published between 1984 and 1990. These historians focused on prestigious institutions of higher education for women, especially the "Seven Sisters" private

women colleges in the Northeast (Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Wellesley, Smith, Radcliffe, Bryn Mawr, and Barnard). The second wave of scholarship, published between 1999 and 2010, expanded diversity by including normal schools, land-grant institutions, and regional areas outside the Northeast. The third was published between 2011 and 2018, focusing on larger cultural themes that have changed over time. In addition, I rely on several articles and chapters that were published during these waves of scholarship.

Table 1 – Waves of Scholarship

1 st Wave: 1984 - 1990	2 nd Wave: 1999 - 2010	3 rd Wave: 2011 - 2018
Horowitz 1984	McCandless 1999	Wheeler 2011
Miller Solomon 1985	Nash 2005	Theelin 2011
Horowitz 1987	Ogren 2005	Hevel 2014
Gordon 1990	Johnson 2008	Turpin 2016
	Radke-Moss 2008	Carter 2016
	Gold 2010	Dorn 2017
	Manekin 2010	Hevel 2017
		Freeman 2018
		Hevel & Jaeckle 2018

The first wave of scholarship focused on more prestigious institutions. In 1984, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz wrote *Alma Mater*, a book about the Seven Sisters colleges in the Northeast. In a creative analysis, Horowitz focused on how the architecture of the schools reflected the cultural implications of women's spaces and attitudes about women. Drawing on the founders' intentions for their students, Horowitz briefly touched on socioeconomic class when describing the types of students recruited and residential facilities. In 1985, Barbara Miller Solomon wrote

In the Company of Educated Women, a thematic history of women's higher education, describing how women from middle class families were the majority of early women college graduates. In 1990, Lynn Gordon wrote *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, examining second-generation women's college experiences at five institutions, a mix of single-sex and coeducational: the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Chicago, Vassar, Sophie Newcomb, and Agnes Scott College. Gordon briefly touches on socioeconomic class when describing campus life.

Initiating the second wave of scholarship, historians expanded their research to include different regions and types of higher education institutions, which resulted in greater consideration of socioeconomic classes. In 1999, Amy Thompson McCandless wrote *The Past in the Present*, arguing that higher education in the South offered women students a unique education. In 2005, Christine Ogren wrote a comprehensive history of public normal schools, *The American State Normal School*, focusing on these revolutionary institutions of higher education that served those students in under-served groups (women, rural residents, lower and middle classes, African Americans, and Native Americans) and trained them to become teachers. In 2008, Andrea Radke-Moss wrote about land-grant institutions in the West and women's experiences under coeducation in her book, *Bright Epoch*. She argued that women students faced a class-based gender identity; domestic science courses were more appropriate for lower classes and the general literary courses were more appropriate for middle to upper-class women. In the same year, Joan Marie Johnson wrote about one thousand upper-class Southern women who attended prestigious Northern women's colleges in *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*.

In the most recent wave of historical scholarship on women's higher education, researchers have focused on connecting higher education to larger cultural purposes. In 2011, Kenneth Wheeler wrote, *Cultivating Regionalism*, describing and identifying the attitudes and practices that emanated from the many small liberal arts colleges in the Midwest.³ In 2016, Andrea Turpin wrote *A New Moral Vision*, examining the larger histories of higher education and late nineteenth-century Protestantism with gender norms based on five pairs of institutions. In 2017, Charles Dorn wrote *For the Common Good*, a book based on eleven diverse institutions that attempts to understand the changing priorities and purposes within American higher education.

Location, type of institution, and socioeconomic status of college women influenced the intended purpose of higher education for women, their college experiences, and life after college. Each wave of historical scholarship has contributed to greater understanding and inclusiveness for college women; however, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of lower to middle-class socioeconomic students and how they successfully completed college.

Purpose

The various factors that influenced the intended purpose of higher education for women can be seen in the different waves of scholarship. Institutions seemed to be designed to attract women students from specific socioeconomic backgrounds. The first wave of scholarship uncovered the changing purpose of single-sex higher education institutions in the late nineteenth century, which transformed from educating the majority of less affluent White women students for paid careers into focusing on training wealthier women to be wealthy wives. The second wave of scholarship contributed to our understanding of coeducational institutions,

³ Kenneth Wheeler, *Cultivating Regionalism: Higher Education and the Making of the American Midwest* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 45.

simultaneously adding to our knowledge of women students from middle to lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The third wave of scholarship expanded knowledge about the effects of societal, institutional, and regional influences on the purpose of education for women. The majority of women students attending women's colleges were from wealthier families, the majority attending coeducational institutions from the middle class, and the majority of students attending normal schools were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Overall, the purpose of women's higher education depended on the type of socioeconomic student that the institution attracted; the purpose of educating wealthier college women was to train them to be wealthy wives and less wealthy women was to train for paid employment.

Each wave of scholarship has uncovered changing purposes over time and in the same era based on institutional type and women's socioeconomic status. To understand the changes, it is useful to look at a very brief history of the types of institutions that offered higher education for women. By the mid-nineteenth century more than 45 single-sex institutions offered college education to women. The institution names varied from seminary to academy to college.⁴ The Northeast men's colleges were considered to offer the most prestigious education. Only a few institutions experimented with coeducation during this time; coeducational institutions educated both men and women together. Women's coordinate colleges would be added to the list by the end of the late nineteenth century. Attached to an existing men's college, these new women's coordinate colleges used professors from the men's colleges to teach classes for women (e.g., Radcliffe and Harvard, Barnard and Columbia). Generally at this time, the West and Midwest had more coeducational colleges and universities than the East and the South, which had more single-sex institutions. Coeducational normal schools, where students trained to become teachers

⁴ John Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 2nd. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 83.

and at which women almost always comprised a majority of students, were spread throughout the U.S.⁵

An overarching purpose of women's higher education was to prepare women college students for life after college, but the trajectory of their lives depended on many factors, one of which was their socioeconomic status. By the 1890s, Vassar, Wellesley, Smith, and Bryn Mawr moved away from educating farm girls who would become evangelical women who often worked outside the home and moved toward attracting wealthier young women, who usually were focused on marrying wealthy men and were not preparing for paid employment. For them, higher education was to help prepare them to be moral guides for society from a top-down approach.⁶ According to Barbara Miller Solomon, Vassar's founder wanted to create a college for White women that paralleled the best men's colleges of the time to expand their knowledge, but not necessarily for paid employment.⁷ As an extension of the most prestigious men's colleges, the majority of women at coordinate colleges were from wealthier backgrounds. A common objective of coordinate institutions was teaching women to morally uplift society by being a society wife, while preserving their middle to upper class status. According to Horowitz, the prerequisites for Barnard kept out women whose families could not afford the preparation necessary to succeed in college.⁸ According to Solomon, coordinate colleges originated as a method for men's colleges to avoid coeducation and appease wealthy women by offering them

⁵ Andrea G Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West* (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 4-7.

⁶ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 147.

⁷ Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 47-48.

⁸ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 256.

the highest education without granting a degree.⁹ This changed and coordinate colleges eventually granted degrees to women. More recently, Turpin noted the target audience for Evelyn and Radcliffe, the coordinate colleges of Princeton and Harvard, was always wealthy women. Evelyn, (1887–1897) the coordinate college of Princeton, emphasized the training of society wives.¹⁰ For Radcliffe, the college hoped for tuition from the students, but also hoped that the presence of wealthy students would bring “a broader, more cultured viewpoint” similar to that of Harvard.¹¹

Southern White women in higher education were preparing to be wives, secure their class position, or preparing for a vocation depending on which institution that they attended, which was often shaped by their socioeconomic status. According to Gordon, students at Sophie Newcomb, a coordinate college to Tulane in New Orleans, were training for a vocation with an interest in advancing Southern women’s educational opportunities and a quarter of these students received financial aid despite their middle-class background of the parents.¹² Unlike Sophie Newcomb, students at all-women’s Agnes Scott in Georgia were training to become future Christian wives and mothers. In 1999, Historian Amy McCandless added that Southern White women educated in the north, who were planters’ daughters, a classical education solidified their class identity rather than promoting career preparation.¹³ In 2008, Joan Johnson added to the existing literature about women’s higher education by writing about one thousand wealthy Southern women who traveled north to attend prestigious women’s colleges in the early twentieth century. While the goal of this rigorous classical education was sometimes a

⁹ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 55.

¹⁰ Turpin, *Turpin, A New Moral Vision*, 124.

¹¹ Turpin, *A New Moral Vision*, 147.

¹² Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 165-181.

¹³ Amy McCandless, *The Past in the Present: Women’s Higher Education in the Twentieth Century American South* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 6.

professional career, the absence of a practical purpose of this education suggested that these wealthy women were looking to better themselves by enhancing their minds, strengthening character, and realizing their fullest potential while maintaining their class position in society and preparing for marriage.¹⁴ In the most recent wave of scholarship, David Gold added to our understanding of Southern public women's colleges from 1884 to 1945. Southern public women's colleges had a shared mission of educating socially and economically diverse White women, who would be expected to work, for new public and professional roles in a modernizing south.¹⁵

Women's higher education for middle to lower-class students shifted significantly after 1862 with the passage of the Morrill Act, which gave federal land to each state that established a university dedicated to agricultural and mechanical training. These institutions are referred to as land-grant institutions and most were coeducational; although, the Morrill Act did not specifically state the inclusion of women. The decision to become coeducational was left to the individual states to implement. Most Western states chose coeducation because many families wanted educational opportunities for their daughters and they could not afford to operate two separate institutions. Specifically, for Midwestern and Western states this applied to their mission of providing practical and scientific agricultural education to the children of farmers.¹⁶ Radke-Moss added that land-grant institutions prepared women for domesticity and a practical education toward paying careers in domestic-type fields such as teachers, seamstresses, and dressmakers. In addition, women were expected to positively affect the morality of the institution

¹⁴ Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges: Feminist Values and Social Activism, 1875-1915* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2008), Chapter 1.

¹⁵ David Gold, "Students Writing Race at Southern Public Women's Colleges, 1884-1945.," *History of Education Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (2010): 182-203.

¹⁶ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 4.

and aspire toward middle class sophistication.¹⁷ There was an anticipation that women would serve as potential wives for both male students and single male professors.¹⁸ The most important factors that contributed to the expansion in educating women at land-grant institutions were economic necessity, post-war demand for female teachers, and moral influence on unruly male college life.

The first and second wave of historical scholarship demonstrated that coeducational institutions largely attracted women from middle to lower-socioeconomic backgrounds, many of whom would seek paid employment after college. Efficiency and practicality were the purposes of early coeducation, whether it was producing as many Christians as possible, insufficient funding for single-sex institutions, producing as many educated workers as possible, or better enabling women to morally influence and uplift the male student population and society as a whole. The first of the state universities to accept women were Iowa (1855), Wisconsin (1867), Kansas, Indiana, Minnesota (1869), Missouri, Michigan, and California (1870).¹⁹ According to Radke-Moss, there was a deep association between land-grant institutions of higher education and the lower-middle class especially because their students came from primarily agricultural families.²⁰

Long overlooked by historians of higher education for not offering as rigorous curriculum as single-sex and coeducational colleges and universities, state normal schools played an important role in increasing access to higher education for women from middle to lower socioeconomic classes. Writing in the second wave of scholarship, Ogren demonstrated that normal schools increased educational access and offered students social mobility regardless of

¹⁷ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 42, 69-73, 146-152.

¹⁸ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 64.

¹⁹ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 53.

²⁰ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 152-53.

race, gender, or socioeconomic class.²¹ According to Ogren, between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, state normal schools gained in number and size, offering a unique educational opportunity for lower socioeconomic students from rural, simple educational backgrounds.²² Often because of their financial situation of having to work full-time before attending higher education, normal students were older in age than typical college students and arrived on campus with significant work experience. Farming families were strongly affected by economic declines from the 1870s to the 1900s, leaving many struggling with debt and poverty. For the sons and especially the daughters of these families, normal school was often a major opportunity for economic improvement and social mobility for the family.

The purpose of educating students at normal schools was to prepare them to become wage-earning teachers and an underlying purpose was to instill middle-class values into the student population. At normal schools, women and men students interacted equitably and freely, which seemed to instill in the women students a fundamental belief in independence for women. Women students learned how to think and act like middle-class citizens through their coursework, activities, social connections, and professional outlook.²³ In the most recent wave of scholarship, Dorn added that practicality was the catalyst for normal school creation. Women students who attended normal schools to become teachers wanted the salary, independence, and opportunity to better society.²⁴

In the third wave of scholarship, historians have explained coeducation in terms of institutional purposes. Sarah Manekin describes coeducation in her article about the University

²¹ Christine Ogren, *The American State Normal School: An Instrument of Great Good* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 68.

²² Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 68.

²³ Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 185–200.

²⁴ Charles Dorn, *For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America*. (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2017), 8.

of Pennsylvania. In 1876, the University of Pennsylvania granted access to two women to take courses. Educational opportunities for women at the University of Pennsylvania beginning in 1913 grew from the University's attempt to align itself with elite institutions, maintain fiscal stability, and resolve internal tensions, not necessarily the result of self-conscious activism of women pushing for more educational access.²⁵ The university decided to expand opportunities for women by opening the School of Education in 1914. The state of Pennsylvania was in need of teachers to fill the classrooms being built across Pennsylvania. Higher professional standards for teachers and stricter child labor laws led to an increased need for more highly educated teachers. For coeducation at the University of Pennsylvania, the purpose of educating women was to generate revenue and produce more women working in paid careers. Manekin does not explicitly state the socioeconomic status of the women; however, she alludes to the fact that lower-middle class students were increasingly applying for admission.²⁶ According to Wheeler, rural Midwest and Western higher education institutions in the nineteenth century emphasized practical and productive labor as one of their main concerns for their students who were from poorer backgrounds than those students from the South and East.²⁷

Based on the waves of scholarship, the purposes of higher education for women changed over time and the purpose of many single-sex higher education institutions transformed from educating less wealthy women for evangelical purposes and careers to educating wealthier women for intellectual purposes and marriage. The women attending these prestigious colleges had the most opportunities available to women during this time. Women students at

²⁵ Sarah Manekin, "Gender, Markets, and the Expansion of Women's Education at the University of Pennsylvania, 1913-1940," *History of Education Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2010): 298–323.

²⁶ Manekin, "Gender, Markets, and the Expansion of Women's Education at the University of Pennsylvania, 1913-1940," 308.

²⁷ Wheeler, *Cultivating Regionalism*, 45.

coeducational institutions came from less advantaged economic backgrounds and were more likely to be preparing for careers after graduation. Depending on the type of institution, location, and socioeconomic background women in higher education were preparing to be wives, secure their class position, or preparing for a vocation. Generally, women from wealthier backgrounds attending private single-sex colleges were securing their class position. Less wealthy women attending coeducational institutions were preparing for companionate marriages and for paid employment.

Curriculum

Many educators would argue that the most important component of higher education is the curriculum. Not only were more women attending higher education in the late nineteenth century, but they also had more types of institutions to choose from, and the curriculum varied at the different institutions. There was no consensus of what should be the eventual goals of an educated college woman.²⁸ The types of curriculum included classical, vocational, ornamental, and professional.²⁹ Typically a classical curriculum was made up of courses in Greek, Latin, modern languages (e.g., French, German), science, mathematics, political economy, and literature.³⁰ The most rigorous of men's colleges offered the classical curriculum, and it was considered to be the highest standard of education that a college student could participate in at this time. The private women's college offered a classical course of study to its students, setting them up to continue their middle to upper level socioeconomic upbringing as adults. Coordinate colleges offered an assortment of courses for women college students ranging from ornamental to classical. While women students at land grant coeducation institutions shared scientific course

²⁸ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 78.

²⁹ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 83-84.

³⁰ Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 25; Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, Chapter 6.

work with men; however, women were increasingly steered toward domestic science, which applied the natural sciences to domestic settings (e.g., home economics).³¹ Normal school students studied a wide mixture of standard academic subjects, fitting somewhere between high school and college coursework. By and large, the wealthy White students at private women's colleges and poor women students at normal schools faced the least amount of gender segregation and middle-class women students who were often in the minority at coeducational universities faced the most in terms of curriculum.

The classical curriculum was considered the most prestigious form of higher education and most available to women who could afford to attend the Seven Sisters. According to Horowitz, by the 1890s the student population of Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Wellesley, and Smith were from wealthier families.³² According to Miller Solomon, early Northern women's colleges such as Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Wellesley, and Smith were more focused on using the classical curriculum as the ultimate method to develop women's minds.³³ The curriculum at Bryn Mawr combined the best principles of Smith, Wellesley, and Vassar with the standards, curriculum, and scholarship found at Johns Hopkins, where a traditional classical curriculum was combined with modern free-elective college curricula.³⁴ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the thousand Southern, White women who traveled north to attend the best women's colleges learned new possibilities for independence and leadership with the main goal of satisfying their intellectual curiosity.³⁵ These ideas helped Southern women challenge traditional Southern gender roles, which focused on dependence and charm for women. The private women's colleges came to

³¹ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 143.

³² Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 226.

³³ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, Chapter 6.

³⁴ Turpin, *A New Moral Vision*; Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 138-140.

³⁵ Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 35-39.

represent the highest standard of a liberal arts education, yet these wealthy students were not being educated for a career.

The coordinate colleges offered a variety of courses for women college students from ornamental to classical, and some also incorporated domestic science. Often coordinate colleges offered the same classes as the men's colleges with which they were affiliated, but did not grant degrees. According to Horowitz, during those same years Harvard's coordinate women's college, later named Radcliffe College, could not give women students degrees but offered degree equivalencies or a certificate of study. In 1894, Harvard's coordinate college officially became Radcliffe College with the ability to grant degrees.³⁶ Gordon added that the curriculum of Barnard College, coordinate college of Columbia, in New York City, was designed to be a liberal arts college for women that only included students who met Columbia's entrance standards, one of which was proficiency in Greek. Sophie Newcomb students in New Orleans, coordinate college to Tulane, studied the traditional bachelor's course, as well as art, music, education, and domestic science.³⁷ Turpin contributed that short-lived Evelyn College from 1887 to 1897 offered a curriculum based in the "ornamental" style of education, which focused on preparing society women.³⁸ Courses offered as part of the ornamental style were voice, piano, drawing, painting, French, and sometimes German. The coordinate colleges that have had staying power turned into some of the most respected institutions of higher education.

Although there was little gender segregation in the classroom initially at most coeducational institutions, a feminine course of study quickly materialized for women. According to Horowitz, at coeducational colleges and state universities during 1875, women

³⁶ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 95-104.

³⁷ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 173.

³⁸ Turpin, *A New Moral Vision*, 45.

were not allowed to take the liberal arts course and were often discouraged from certain fields of study.³⁹ Radke-Moss added, in the late 1860s and early 1870s the curriculum for coeducation at land grant colleges consisted of the same courses for both men and women students. They took classics, literature, political philosophy, abstract science, and mathematics.⁴⁰ Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, women and men still shared scientific course work; however, the inclusion of domestic science as a program of study reinforced separate spheres for men and women, with these new courses reserved for women.⁴¹ By the 1890s women began studying how to make the home beautiful because it was an important responsibility for cultured women and land-grant colleges offered women courses in “Belles-Lettres.”⁴² The foreign language requirement was different for women and men, French for women and German for men. Men were expected to take German because of the scientific information coming from Germany. Women were expected to take French because it was used in the domestic arts and because it was the diplomatic language of Europe, which suggests certain middle-class expectations.⁴³ Popular for both men and women students, by 1900 some land-grant institutions offered a literary commerce course, which was the precursor to the modern-day business degree. These courses included typing, stenography, bookkeeping, accounting, and banktelling. After the literary commerce course became more associated with bookkeeping and stenography, women were the majority in this major.⁴⁴ Some land-grant college women moved into fields such as botany, biology, and chemistry, but they were encouraged to approach these subjects because they related to understanding food chemistry, nutrition, and horticulture.

³⁹ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 56-57.

⁴⁰ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 153.

⁴¹ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 143.

⁴² Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 159.

⁴³ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 160.

⁴⁴ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 183.

Most women college students excelled academically at both single sex and coeducational campuses from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. During the Progressive Era, adopting a domestic science curriculum became a significant issue. Sanitary science, also known as home economics or domestic science, involved the scientific study and professionalization of housework and childcare. Aspects of chemistry, biology, and sociology to name a few were incorporated into this professionalization of home economics. There has been some historical conflict regarding the contribution of the domestic science education for women. According to Radke-Moss, some feminist scholars and historians of education believed that the domestic science program funneled more women into domesticity, reinforced separate gendered expectations, and subordinated women through “institutionalized sexism.”⁴⁵ In her book, Radke-Moss argued that this one-dimensional side did not recognize the active role that college women played in their education and accomplishments and downplayed the variety of women’s education. Also, the fact that men and women students took the same basic foundation of coursework has been overlooked. Eastern women’s colleges rejected the home economics curriculum because they argued that incorporating it into their curriculum would weaken their liberal arts curriculum. In addition, the culture of upper-class society viewed housework as the responsibility of domestic servants, not socially acceptable for women of their status.⁴⁶ Coeducational institutions were more likely to adopt the home economics curriculum because it fit more easily with their vocational mission and structure of socially segregated campuses. Women students who took the home economics curriculum were able to teach or be self-supporting in professional domestic trades such as dressmaking and hostelry management.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 172.

⁴⁶ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 155-157.

⁴⁷ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 150.

The curriculum of normal schools allowed students to expand their knowledge by learning a variety of subjects in a somewhat gender-neutral environment because often women comprised not only a majority of the students but also the faculty. The curriculum fit somewhere between high school and college.⁴⁸ Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, normal school students were enthusiastic about their learning opportunities and serious about their higher education. They studied a wide variety of standard academic subjects in addition to classical and modern languages. Students took required classes in mathematics, sciences, history, and English language arts. Ogren argued that normal schools shifted from a more general course of study to practical, specialized courses. Participation in advanced studies allowed students the opportunity to gain cultural knowledge. Normal schools typically had normal and academic departments. The main difference was that the normal department usually required teacher education classes and the academic department did not. Regardless of what track normal school students took, they all participated in the same core academic subjects and were even in the same classrooms with each other.⁴⁹

During this time the opportunities for curriculum varied for college women based on where they attended college. Private women's colleges offered the most prestigious academic curriculum for the wealthiest of students. Coordinate colleges offered a variety of courses, both classical and ornamental, for wealthy students. Coeducational institutions offered mainly middle-class students the most restrictive course of study for women, but historians have often downplayed the multidimensional aspects of the domestic economy course of study. Normal schools offered the least prestigious curriculum, but normal students faced the least segregation of students at coeducational institutions. The proportion of women students as well as the

⁴⁸ Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 91.

⁴⁹ Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 90.

socioeconomic status of the students seems to have contributed largely to the opportunities that students had and the gender segregation faced. In general the wealthiest women students at private women's colleges and poorest at normal schools faced the least gender segregation and middle class women students faced the most.

Extracurriculum

The extracurriculum changed dramatically for women college students between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, and women students' participation depended largely on their socioeconomic background. The extracurriculum began as a strictly religious endeavor that transformed into a thriving campus culture that included student organizations, student publications, literary societies, athletics, and dramatics. While the opportunities expanded beyond what the earliest students had known, not all students were able to participate fully. This section traces the development of the extracurriculum at the different types of institutions beginning with the earliest students at women's colleges. The extracurriculum was a reflection of what the students most wanted to learn, which was often lacking in the formal curriculum. According to Gordon, by 1900, women's campus organizations seemed to emulate the character of many of the second-generation of college women by focusing more on the playful side of campus life opposed to the first-generation and their seriousness. These women students sometimes were more involved with socials, heterosexual relationships, and pep rallies than debating political issues or literary pursuits.⁵⁰ With the later contributions from Ogren and Radke-Moss's work on normal schools and land-grant institutions, this overarching argument does not hold for all second-generation women. College women's campus experiences depended on the proportion of women on campus and the women's socioeconomic status.

⁵⁰ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 137-152.

The early extracurriculum was limited and centered on religious activities for the first women college students based on the institutional founding purposes. According to Horowitz, the early institutions sought to create a structured college environment where young women were protected and intellectually guided by professors.⁵¹ According to Horowitz, Miller Solomon, and Gordon, early women college students participated in domestic chores and strict religious exercises such as chapel, prayer meetings, and benevolent societies, whereas the students of Vassar, Smith, and Bryn Mawr participated in similar religious activities but did not participate in domestic work because of their wealthier backgrounds. In 1875, Wellesley students had two periods of silent meditation per day in addition to two daily chapel meetings, and Bible study throughout their four years.

The first-generation of students at the Northeastern private women's colleges fought against stern rules and created opportunities for power and influence much like the opportunities that men had at their colleges. According to Horowitz, women students were developing their own cultures and creating meaning for their college experience that differed from the original plans of the institutions.⁵² They participated in politics, drama, literary and debating societies, Christian organizations, athletic associations, and handled budgets.⁵³ The first women students enrolled in coordinate colleges had little opportunities for extracurricular involvement. Both Radcliffe and Barnard students had access to courses, but not the extracurricular activities offered to the male students of the institutions to which they were connected.⁵⁴ According to Turpin, Evelyn College (1887–1897) had more opportunities for extracurricular activities than

⁵¹ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 145.

⁵² Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 145.

⁵³ Helen L. Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. Alfred a Knopf Incorporated, 1987), 197.

⁵⁴ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, Ch7 Radcliffe and Ch10 Barnard.

the other coordinate colleges early on, but focused students' activities toward improving social graces because this would help society women with moral influence. "Evelyn's gender ideal was decidedly class based; the college served rich girls," Turpin wrote.⁵⁵ On Friday evenings, Evelyn students, under the supervision of their principals, acted as hostesses and formally entertained guests in their home.

The second-generation of wealthy women students made college their own by developing their own culture of parties, class rivalries, games, pageants, costume balls, and athletic events, which often led to segregation by socioeconomic class.⁵⁶ According to Horowitz, wealthier students at the women's only colleges had dress-up parties, wrote and produced plays, and sang to each other.⁵⁷ What followed was an environment focused on the physical culture with more sexual awareness and freedom in the culture of heterosexuality. According to Gordon, women students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were a minority in prestigious women's colleges and coeducational universities and were often excluded from campus life: "These women had to work their way through school or live at home while attending college. They had neither the time nor the right clothes to participate in campus activities and were rarely elected to sororities or special honor societies."⁵⁸ The middle-upper class students controlled the campus organizations. According to Gordon, an alumni survey at the University of Chicago reported that 41 percent of students did not participate in campus life because those students who were poorer, older, and rural were more likely to be working and had less time for campus activities.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁵ Turpin, *A New Moral Vision*, 124.

⁵⁶ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, Chapter 1; Horowitz, *Campus Life*, Chapter 9.

⁵⁷ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 145–78.

⁵⁸ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 42.

⁵⁹ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 106.

experiences of women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in campus life are scarce in the history of higher education literature.

In contrast to the Northeastern students, the extracurriculum developed slower and was somewhat complicated for Southern students. Sophie Newcomb and Agnes Scott students initially did not establish a strong campus life, but by 1920 students at both campuses created a campus culture similar to that of the Northeastern colleges. The students at both colleges initially struggled with separating from their families, which contributed to the lack of campus life.⁶⁰ Eventually the women students founded sorority chapters, student government associations, dramatics club, a debating society, and participated in athletics similar to Eastern colleges. According to Gordon, the extracurricular life at Agnes Scott in the South developed quicker mainly because it started as a residential college, unlike Sophie Newcomb students who lived at home.⁶¹ According to McCandless, Southern women created a college culture that “reflected the ‘twoness’ of Southern society. Social regulations, physical education programs, extracurricular activities, student government, and even college architecture created a campus climate that both reinforced and challenged regional gender, class, and racial stereotypes.”⁶² The conservatism of Southern institutions contributed to the restriction those Southern college women felt when participating in the extracurriculum and asserting their independence in a way similar to Eastern college women.

Participating in oratorical and debating contests allowed lower socioeconomic status normal school students to gain social and cultural capital in an attempt to move toward middle class life. According to Ogren, by the late 1870s normal school students created and participated

⁶⁰ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 183.

⁶¹ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 177-183.

⁶² McCandless, *The Past in the Present*, 121.

in lecture series, clubs, performing arts groups, and publications.⁶³ They also participated in private instrument lessons, as well as vocal and instrumental groups. Women and men were free to interact at literary society parties, class receptions, excursions, and meals. Academic clubs at normal schools created a rich learning atmosphere for students who were intellectually curious and wanted to focus on particular subjects that were not found in the curriculum.

Literary societies existed at nearly every institution as extracurricular opportunities for women students during the late nineteenth century. Literary societies contributed to intellectual and social stimulation for students.⁶⁴ The students learned about history, arts, music, literature, poetry, domestic policy, and world diplomacy. According to Michael Hevel, literary societies provided an opportunity for middle-class college women to prepare for the politics of adult life.⁶⁵ Literary societies provided opportunities that were lacking in the formal curriculum. Literary societies generally were open to women from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

While literary societies were the first important extracurricular activity, sororities eventually superseded literary societies in importance in campus life for college women. According to Margaret Freeman, sororities created a social education for college women. Formed in the 1870s through the 1910s, sororities offered women students a place of support and social connection.⁶⁶ The purpose of sororities was often to help women students become

⁶³ Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 151.

⁶⁴ Michael S. Hevel and Heidi A. Jaeckle, "Trends in the Historiography of American College Student Life: Populations, Organizations, and Behaviors," in *Rethinking Campus Life*, ed. Christine A. Ogren and Marc A. VanOverbeke (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 11–36; Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 79–82.

⁶⁵ Michael S Hevel, "Preparing for the Politics of Life: An Expansion of the Political Dimensions of College Women's Literary Societies," *History of Education Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2014): 486–515.

⁶⁶ Margaret Freeman, "Instruction in Living Beautifully: Social Education and Heterosocializing in White College Sororities," in *Rethinking Campus Life. Historical Studies in Education*, ed.

acculturated into a White, middle-class womanhood, emphasizing feminine appearance with the end goal of becoming a nurturing mother. From the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, sororities' ability to create a space on campus that resembled home helped them gain acceptance from deans of women, university administrators, and parents of college women. The family ideal was not only conveyed through living space but also through the organizations reinforcing the idea that a woman's duty is always to be dedicated to her home. The results of sororities' growth on campus were mixed. On the one hand they encouraged camaraderie, nurtured individual talents and offered leadership opportunities, but on the other hand they often promoted discrimination against students from particular religions, ethnic or racial identities, not to mention socioeconomic status.⁶⁷ According to Freeman, sororities (no particular institution types were given) prioritized the physical appearance of sorority members and encouraged "heterosocializing," the socialization and interaction between fraternity men and sorority women.⁶⁸ The result of this led sorority members to associate their identity, value, and self-concept with their physical attractiveness. Compared to the more egalitarian literary societies, the emergence of sororities represented a less inclusive campus life, with inclusion largely based on the women's socioeconomic backgrounds.

Initially women students at coeducational institutions experienced equality in the extracurricular life; however, this balanced environment shifted in the 1890s. According to Horowitz, in the late 1880s and early 1890s, fraternities gained significant power compared to sororities. Fraternities controlled most of the extracurricular activities and kept women out of

Christine A. Ogren and Marc A. VanOverbeke (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 115.

⁶⁷ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 107.

⁶⁸ Freeman, "Instruction in Living Beautifully", 116.

leadership positions.⁶⁹ Women college students created equivalents, but they lacked the status associated with dominant college men. In addition, intercollegiate athletics became increasingly popular and excluded women. According to Gordon, coeducational universities lacked social and leadership options for women.⁷⁰ The first generation of women at the University of California lived apart from each other and was isolated from campus life. According to Thelin, with support from faculty, administrators, and the community, women students eventually formed a separate and distinct community for themselves. Similar to other coeducational institutions, the balance of power with the male students was unequal.⁷¹ For example, at some of the most prestigious coeducational institutions, where the population of women students was smallest, women were required to pay campus fees but were excluded from campus activities, men ridiculed them in the newspapers, and sororities were not supported like fraternities. The first wave of scholarship emphasized separation and restrictions for women at coeducation institutions; however Radke-Moss, writing in 2008 in the second wave of scholarship, suggested that the relationship was more complicated and reciprocal at land-grant colleges. The achievements and successful fight for inclusion by women students at land-grant institutions led to a reimagining of what it meant to be a woman in America.⁷²

In general from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, the socioeconomic background of women students shaped their experience with the extracurriculum. Women from wealthier backgrounds at women's colleges and coeducational universities had more extracurricular options and opportunities than women from less wealthy backgrounds. It encouraged individual talents, skills, and leadership for wealthy students. When it turned into

⁶⁹ Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 201.

⁷⁰ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, Chapter 9.

⁷¹ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 228-229.

⁷² Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 15-21.

selectivity based on a campus hierarchical system some students, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were left out of an important piece of campus life.⁷³ What has not been recorded is how this affected individual women excluded because of their socioeconomic status. Women attending land-grant universities and normal schools had more opportunities for inclusion and egalitarianism in the extracurriculum because the socioeconomic backgrounds were mostly similar among students on campus.

After College

Many college alumnae from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century struggled with the question of what to do after graduation. The era's college alumnae's employment and activism suggest that they fit within the types of moral activities that their leaders had expected of them.⁷⁴ While for some the transition from daughter to wife to mother was still the traditional option, others meandered through life for a while before making long-term decisions.⁷⁵ There was a transition period between the first two generations of White, college-educated, middle-class college women. The first generation from 1865 to 1890 was more likely to work and not marry because they were from less wealthy backgrounds. Those women, who married, resigned from work without much thought or other options to consider. The second generation of White, college-educated, middle class women from 1890 to 1930 was more likely to marry than the first generation.⁷⁶

According Miller Solomon, women students from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century wrote about their limited choices and concerns about combining higher education, careers, and love. Between 1865 and 1900, the proportion of college-educated women

⁷³ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 107.

⁷⁴ Turpin, *A New Moral Vision*, 265-271.

⁷⁵ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 115-140.

⁷⁶ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 189-200.

who married was low. These women often found emotional, familial, and sexual fulfillment in relationships with each other. In the 1910s and 1920s, women who wanted to combine family and career were more able to do so. Combining work with marriage and motherhood became more acceptable; however, finding a way to do both was often the predicament.⁷⁷ According to Gordon, the college experiences and lives after college of the first-generation of college women shaped public reaction to the second-generation of college women. The first-generation of college women acted as mentors to the younger generation. Some secured positions as deans of women, physicians, physical education instructors, faculty, trustees, and gave advice about future careers. The college women of the second-generation were unsure of what they were to do with their lives after college. Attaining higher education was the ultimate goal for some and those women gave little thought to what happened after college. While many other college women had clear career aspirations, they often faced discrimination in their career pursuits. According to Hevel, many college women's "post-college opportunities constricted over time as hostility to women's higher education persisted and more women who embraced traditional roles attended college."⁷⁸

The earliest generation of college women felt that they had to make a choice between paid employment and marriage and family. According to Gordon, class prophecies at Agnes Scott indicated that its Southern graduates were going to be doctors, lawyers, opera singers, newspaperwomen, teachers, professors, dentists, but rarely as housewives or mothers.⁷⁹ At Sophie Newcomb, most students went on to teaching or quit school for marriage. Mostly from

⁷⁷ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 173-185; Patricia Carter, "From Single to Married: Feminist Teachers' Response to Family/Work Conflict in Early Twentieth-Century New York City." *History of Education Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2016), 39-40.

⁷⁸ Michael S Hevel, "A Historiography of College Students 30 Years After Helen Horowitz's Campus Life," in *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (Springer, 2017), 29.

⁷⁹ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 1990, 30-33.

lower to middle classes, the college women at Agnes Scott expected to use their education in a career whereas the upper class Sophie Newcomb students did not have to use their education to support themselves financially.

College women graduating from land-grant institutions slowly gained more opportunities for careers beyond domesticity or teaching. According to Radke-Moss, for the first-generation of women college students in land-grant institutions, there was the expectation that after college men would be professionals and women would be wives and mothers.⁸⁰ Although the majority of women chose marriage and family, others chose fields such as clerical work, teaching, administration, librarians, journalism, editing, nursing, and medicine.⁸¹ By 1900 it slowly became more common for women to pursue graduate studies in biology, pharmacology, music, and domestic economy. While a college education made single adulthood possible, it was not always the easiest road to take. College education offered options, but those options remained limited and teachers were not always paid enough money to economically support themselves.

Career options for college women were based on the socioeconomic distinctions between lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds; higher socioeconomic status women were able to choose between paid employment and other options. Another question that presented obstacles was career options for those college graduates who married. According to Miller Solomon, some women were content to leave paid employment to focus on managing their home and raising children.⁸² However, this option dissatisfied some women, who often found opportunities to use their talents in volunteer capacities. However, women were discouraged from doing this if volunteer commitments took too much time away from their domestic duties. Later graduates

⁸⁰ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 64-65.

⁸¹ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 64-69.

⁸² Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 117-122.

were able to expand their career options. By 1920, college educated women were writers, editors, and sometimes they were able to make a career out of the performing arts. Even with these expanded options, very few women were able to find a place in business corporations. According to Miller Solomon, theoretically by 1920 anyone with the proper credentials could become a lawyer; however, a very small percent were women.⁸³ Women in medicine were more accepted and on the rise until the early twentieth century. This trend ended because of a variety of factors some of which were the closing of “irregular” medical schools, which contained a large number of women and the increasing prestige of the medical field for men. Through these opportunities college women students learned routes of power that were contrary to traditional gender norms. This was uncharted territory, which led to an uncertain future. Because of their college experience, many of these women became unconventional. According to Johnson, Southern students educated in Northern schools were exposed to women’s activism through activities that focused on social welfare reform.⁸⁴ Students as well as their parents were aware of how beneficial extracurricular activities were in developing responsibility and leadership. According to Turpin, large numbers of students interested in religion and service participated in the Young Women’s Christian Association.⁸⁵ The most recent wave of scholarship provides us with a better understanding of the impact that college women had in their communities and different organizations.

Southern women who attended Northern women’s colleges from 1875 to 1915 usually returned home after graduation.⁸⁶ In the second wave of scholarship, Johnson added that many Southern students after returning home did not marry nor did they work for wages. As middle-

⁸³ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 127-131.

⁸⁴ Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 144-156.

⁸⁵ Turpin, *A New Moral Vision*, 238.

⁸⁶ Johnson, *Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges*, 127.

and upper class women, these Southern students did not need to marry or enter into paid employment for economic support. Those Northern-educated Southern women who entered paid employment earned slightly lower wages than their Northern peers, but higher than their Southern peers. For those Southern students who married, they often did so at later ages than Southern women without college degrees. A good number of Southern graduates waited ten years or longer to marry after graduation. Teaching was the most common career chosen by Northern-educated Southern women who chose to work for wages. Some graduates struggled with depression until they found purpose in some type of meaningful work, whether paid or volunteer. Many of the graduates found meaningful work in the new women's associations and reform interests of the Progressive Era.

Most normal school women students had two expectations required of them after graduation. According to Ogren, they were expected to teach in their state for a number of years and they were expected to marry within a certain number of years. Many graduates of normal schools engaged in teaching and missionary work; while a few went on to have careers in law and medicine. Wherever life after college took them, it seems that many normal school students went on to live lives above their lower class backgrounds.⁸⁷ Even as most of these students did not identify as feminists, they did believe in individual autonomy and this helped women's rights by advocating for women's independence in politics, education, and the decision to marry.

The first-generation of women college students began their college careers with ambition and a seriousness of purpose with the intention of doing important work after graduation. They fought for their opportunities and often had to decide between career and family. The second-generation of students had more opportunities available to them, but, because of a variety of

⁸⁷ Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 152.

factors, they entered more feminine fields or chose marriage over a career. According to Michael Hevel, “Earning college degrees had improved women’s career prospects, though the accomplishments of the first generation of college women largely dissipated as subsequent generations married or entered more stereotypically feminine fields.”⁸⁸

Conclusion

The late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century was a time of tremendous growth for women in higher education, which led to some generational differences for first and second-generation students as well as differences in opportunities based on socioeconomic status. According to Horowitz, the first-generation of women students was studious, ambitious, and independent. The second-generation differed and began to resemble the playfulness of the college man.⁸⁹ These students lost the serious purpose of their predecessors and became increasingly focused on pleasure. Women from higher socioeconomic backgrounds had more choices for their lives after than college than women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. According to Gordon, the first-generation often agonized over the choice of career or marriage making it an either or choice; whereas, the second-generation relinquish career in favor of family life.

What we know about history is always evolving and shifting based on emerging research, challenging the accepted wisdom about who we are and how we came to be this way. This is especially true for the study of women in higher education. Perhaps the most influential factors that affected the experience of women in higher education are location, founding purpose, socioeconomic class, and type of institution a woman attended during this time. Some

⁸⁸ Hevel, “A Historiography of College Students 30 Years After Helen Horowitz’s *Campus Life*,” 433.

⁸⁹ Horowitz, *Campus Life*, Chapter 9.

generalizations can be made about who these women were, what they studied, what they did outside of class, and what they did after college based on the factors mentioned above. Wealthy women at single-sex institutions in the North had a richer, more diverse academic and campus life comparable to a man's experience in higher education at prestigious colleges than other women students in higher education. Coeducational institutions in the Midwest and the West had more academic opportunities than women in higher education had previously known, but it came with a price of extreme discrimination from the male students, faculty, and an exclusion from campus life if you were from a lower socioeconomic background. The interaction between men and women at normal schools was freer and the socioeconomic backgrounds were similarly low allowing for more equal campus experience for students. External societal and institutional factors have had a strong influence on women's student experiences, but with each successive generation students are able to negotiate within those forces to create their own experience and gain a little more power.

Historians writing in these three waves of scholarship have often acknowledged the socioeconomic backgrounds of the students in their studies. More recent scholarship, especially that of the second wave, purposely focused on institutions such as normal schools and Western land-grant colleges that enrolled women students from less affluent backgrounds. While these works have revealed a great deal of information about what institutions of higher education could offer lower income women, they do not consider the individual experiences of struggling to afford higher education. The next two chapters in this dissertation help to address this significant scholarly gap by offering case studies of two White women who were economically disadvantaged in comparison to their peers. The experiences of Madeline Southard and Gretta

Ordway provide important insights into how lower socioeconomic students accessed higher education and the effects of economic insecurity on their experiences in higher education.

CHAPTER THREE

M. MADELINE SOUTHARD:

A PRIVATE STRUGGLE FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

Introduction

Mabel Madeline Southard, who was born in Michigan in 1877 and grew up in Kansas, played a significant role in advocacy for women's equal rights. Southard, who went by Madeline, dedicated her life to ensuring that women could have the right to be ordained as local preachers in the Methodist Church. Finally on May 4, 1956, at the General Methodist Conference, the delegates approved full clergy rights for women. In addition to achieving this monumental milestone, Southard authored three books: *The White Slave Traffic Versus the American Home* (1914), *The Attitude of Jesus Toward Women* (1927), and *The Christian Message on Sex* (1931). Her second and most popular book was an extension of her master's thesis. In addition to the abovementioned accomplishments, Southard founded the American Association of Women Ministers (1919), now known as the International Association of Women Ministers, which is still active today. She preached internationally in the Philippines and India.

Although Southard's career has been the subject of some scholarly study, her college career has largely been overlooked. Yet there is a direct connection from her formative college years to her life's work. Southard's education at Southwestern College, a small, coeducational college affiliated with the Methodist Church founded in central Kansas in 1885, prepared Southard for a public career in which she vocally advocated for women preachers in the Methodist Church. A large part of her career after college was devoted to this mission. Madeline Southard was a true pioneer who used higher education toward advancing women's rights in the Methodist Church.

Understanding and appreciating the college experiences of Southard gives us a more nuanced perspective of the experiences of White women students with low socioeconomic backgrounds but also the value of higher education for them. While Southard was naturally gifted in intellect and public speaking, these talents were fine-tuned during her college years and later contributed to her career success. Living in the Midwest, being raised by widowed women, attending a coeducational college, and the lack of male ministers in the region combined to create an ideal environment for Southard to achieve her goal of becoming a minister while still in college, expanding traditional gender roles. Combining preaching with attending college, both of which fell into the traditionally male public domain, laid the foundation for Southard to tackle important social and political questions.¹ She combined her interests in the social causes of temperance and social purity with her calling as a preacher to engage with issues of suffrage, sex, and women's rights.²

Southard's success in college and during her career did not occur without struggle. Suffering from financial and food insecurity while a college student often left Southard feeling anxious and physically distressed. She coped by relying on her faith and support from her extended family, church leaders, peers, and professors. Southard prepared for her life's work by combining the Southwestern curriculum and college experiences with preaching. She moved from struggling with her coursework to integrating and applying what she learned. Southard seemed to use her college experiences with relationships, gendered interactions, and sex as a

¹ Jerry L. Wallace, *M. Madeline Southard, 1877-1967: Doing All the Good You Can. Women and Gender in North American Religions*. (Jerry L. Wallace, 2016), 8.

² Kristin Du Mez, "The Forgotten Woman's Bible: Katharine Bushnell, Lee Anna Starr, Madeline Southard, and the Construction of a Woman-Centered Protestantism in America, 1870-1930" (Dissertation, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 2005), 90.

laboratory to test theories about these topics that she would eventually write books about and speak about to an extended audience.

Background

To understand Southard's experiences and the climate in which she lived, it is worthwhile to describe influential theories about women's education and women's roles in society during that time. In 1873, Dr. Edward Clarke wrote *Sex in Education*, describing the allegedly harmful effects that higher education could have on women. The book swayed public opinion against women's higher education.³ According to Dr. Clarke, a young woman was capable of studying and learning a college-level curriculum, but the effort would damage her reproductive health, in particular by shifting blood flow from her genitals to her brain.⁴ This was particularly destructive to women's efforts to attend college because her chief social purpose in the minds of many Americans was reproducing and raising children. Not only did Dr. Clarke's ideas on women's education hold considerable influence, the Victorian idea of "separate spheres" worked against women's education. The Victorian culture of White urban middle classes assigned separate spheres based on gender, public for men and domestic (private) for women. College women of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were caught in a "transitional generation, a bridge between Victorian and modern America."⁵ They were judged based on how closely they aligned with these socially prescribed ideals.

³ Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 65; Turpin, *A New Moral Vision*, 102–3; Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 190–91; Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 18–19; Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 56–57; Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 281.

⁴ Edward Clarke, *Sex in Education; or, A Fair Chance for Girls* (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873).

⁵ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 1.

Despite efforts to forestall women's higher education, young women demonstrated remarkable resolve in their desire to attend college. College women had varying experiences depending on the type of institution and location of that institution, which were closely related to their socioeconomic status. Higher education for women during Southard's college years included private single-sex colleges, coeducational institutions, coordinate colleges (e.g., Radcliffe and Harvard), and normal schools. In Northeastern private women's colleges, women students learned the most rigorous liberal arts curriculum and created leadership opportunities in politics, drama, athletics, literary and debating societies, much like the opportunities available to college men.⁶ Through these opportunities women students at the Northeastern women's colleges learned leadership roles that were contrary to traditional gender norms. At coeducational schools mostly located in the Midwest and West, women were discouraged from certain fields of study yet copied the extracurricular activities at women's colleges; however the existence of college men on campus limited college women's power and often kept them from participating fully in college life. Normal school curriculum bridging high school with entry level college curriculum provided professional education for aspiring teachers, but, with women comprising a majority of students, they freely interacted with men in contrast to coeducational institutions, allowing gender roles at normal schools to be more flexible than in other mixed gender higher education institutions.⁷ Consequently many women students believed and acted upon a fundamental belief in autonomy for women, although they did not necessarily label themselves as feminists.⁸

Regardless of gender, the higher education options for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were limited. Financial aid, as we know it in contemporary higher

⁶ Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 197.

⁷ Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 151.

⁸ Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 151.

education, was nonexistent. Tuition varied considerably between institutions. Tuition, geography, and family income affected women's access to college.⁹ On occasion, a relative, family friend, or local community member assisted young people in their efforts to obtain their education. The majority of college women from 1870 to 1920 were White and Protestant. The private women's colleges of the Northeast attracted wealthy women college students, who were not expected to work after college.¹⁰ Those at state universities came mainly from middle-class backgrounds.¹¹ Students attending normal schools were often from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It was common for self-supporting students to work their way through; however, taking breaks to work due to financial struggle often caused delays in the education process.¹²

Southard's college years provide insight into the experiences of a student from a low socioeconomic background. Her childhood was full of difficult circumstances. Before she was even born, her father died. Shortly thereafter, her mother took young Madeline and her older sister, 6-year-old Stella, from Michigan to live in Kansas with Madeline's widowed grandmother. When Madeline was just sixteen years old, her mother died, leaving her and her sister to be raised by their grandmother. While the beginning of her life was not altogether unusual for White settlers in the Midwest, her life story proved most exceptional, especially for a woman in the late nineteenth century. Fran Grace's biography of Carry Nation described Southard as fascinating: "Orphaned by the age of sixteen, this talented and scrappy Methodist preacher was a prodigy by any definition: an active Populist at fourteen, a licensed teacher at

⁹ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 63–71.

¹⁰ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 147.

¹¹ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 5–6.

¹² Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 68–71.

sixteen, and a Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) organizer and evangelist at seventeen."¹³



Figure 1. The photograph on the left is of Southwestern College. Source: Southwestern Collegian: Souvenir Edition (Winfield, 1900). The photograph on the right is of Madeline Southard in 1898. Source: The Southwestern Collegian of 1898 (Winfield, 1898).

In 1885, ten years prior to Southard enrolling in its collegiate department, the Southwest Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church founded Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas.¹⁴ At the time of its founding, the name of the college was Southwest Kansas Conference College. The college opened its doors in 1886 with just forty-three students.¹⁵ By 1900, the college had had five presidents; nineteen students had graduated from the Normal department; and forty-seven students had graduated from the College. Southwestern College was a private

¹³ Fran Grace, *Carry A. Nation: Retelling the Life* (Indiana, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 172.

¹⁴ Jerry L. Wallace and Pamela S. Thompson, *Southwestern College: The Campus History Series* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015). "Southwestern College History," accessed May 6, 2018, <https://www.sckans.edu/connecting-to-sc/history/>.

¹⁵ Wallace and Thompson, *Southwestern College*, 9.

coeducational institution that had a Normal department, so it did not easily fit into one of the above-described categories of institutions available to women. It seems that men and women freely interacted with one another similarly to normal schools, but it was not classified as a normal school.

In 1893 at the age of sixteen, Southard began attending Southwestern College as a preparatory student. Southard's mother had attended a female seminary as a young woman and wanted a higher education for her eldest daughter. In 1895, Southard began her coursework in the Collegiate Department of Southwestern College.¹⁶ Southard's college experiences were somewhat different than a typical woman's would have been because she spent the majority of her free time preaching.

Being raised in a Midwest farming family, Southard's financial struggles appeared early in her life. Reflecting on her life growing up in the country, she recorded "the life here was not easy."¹⁷ For individuals in the lower socioeconomic classes, especially in Midwestern and Western regions of the United States, oftentimes men and women worked equally out of necessity. This necessity challenged the idea of Victorian separate spheres. For this population, Victorian separate spheres had more influence on specific moral responsibilities versus separate spheres of activity.¹⁸

Being Poor in College

The college years were financially lean for Southard and her time at Southwestern College highlights the experiences of a low-income college woman and how she paid for higher

¹⁶ Wallace, M. Madeline Southard, 1877-1967, 8.

¹⁷ Mabel Madeline Southard Journal, 29 July 1897, Southard Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, Massachusetts (hereafter cited as SLRI). Southard and then the date will be used as a shortened version of this citation.

¹⁸ Kendra Weddle Irons, "M. Madeline Southard (1877-1967) on 'Ecclesial Suffrage,'" *Methodist History* 45, no. 1 (2006): 16-31.

education. For early women college students, the act of wanting an education intensely was not enough.¹⁹ While quite independent in her thoughts and behaviors, Southard was consistently dependent on the generosity of her family, church leaders, and professors to support her education, in addition to working as a preacher and on campus to earn money and even borrowing money. Women college students often needed the support of their families, both emotionally and financially. After Southard's mother died in 1893, the necessary support came from her grandmother, professors, college men peers, and local church leaders. It was often desperately needed. Southard struggled with financial and food insecurity, the anxiety of which manifested itself in emotional anxiety and physical distress. Southard primarily used her Christian faith to cope with the struggles of being a low socioeconomic student. Obtaining a college education must have been imperative to Southard for her to persevere through so many financial obstacles.

In 1897 Southwestern College charged tuition of \$10.00 per 12-week term (approximately \$310 in 2019) for both the Collegiate and Normal Departments. The cost of weekly living accommodations ranged from boarding in clubs (\$1.25 to 1.50 per week), to boarding with private families (\$2.00 per week), to boarding in a furnished Dormitory (\$2.00 per week), to a furnished room in a private home (50 cents per week) and finally the least expensive option was an unfurnished room (25 cents per week) (ranging from approximately \$8 to \$60 in 2019).²⁰ While relaxed admission requirements and reasonable tuition made higher education more accessible, in general students from middle to lower socioeconomic classes struggled to pay for their education. While the expenses of a college education during this time do not appear

¹⁹ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 63; Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 20.

²⁰ "Souvenir Edition of the Southwestern Collegian," *Southwestern Collegian*, February 1897, Conference edition. *Southwestern Collegian*, February 1897.

significant to the current reader, without a national financial aid program it took considerable effort and planning to pay for college education for all except the wealthiest people.

Southard regularly worked while a student, and she applied her earnings toward her college tuition. Southard may have been one of few college women of her era who earned money for college from preaching.²¹ Southard, at the young age of 15 while a student in the preparatory department, decided that she wanted to preach and began writing sermons.²² The following year, she began preaching every other Sunday to a congregation that met in a nearby schoolhouse because there was a lack of ministers in her community. A career as a minister would have been considered under Victorian ideals to be the public sphere, which was men's domain; however, due to practical matters she was allowed the opportunity to preach in her local community.²³ It seems that practical considerations allowed Southard to stretch gender boundaries.²⁴

The amount that she received for preaching varied from four dollars to as much as seventeen dollars. In 1896 at the beginning of her college years, she wrote in her diary, "Yesterday morning I preached from the text 'Be still and know that I am God'. The collection for me was twelve dollars."²⁵ In 1896 as a college junior, she acted as a substitute preacher for a revival meeting instead of the college men also studying at Southwestern to become ministers. "It seems rather strange to me that the boys always come to me if a vacancy is to be filled," she wrote, "while there are young men studying for the ministry, who would gladly go, if they would

²¹ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 71.

²² Wallace, *M. Madeline Southard*, 7.

²³ Kendra Weddle Irons, "Preaching on the Plains: Methodist Women Preachers in Kansas, 1920-1956" (Dissertation, Baylor University, 2001). In their husband's absence, some women would assume preaching positions in order to fill the void. Irons writes about rural Kansas women who preached in Methodist churches in a difficult era.

²⁴ Wallace, 8, "The leaders of the Southwest Kansas Methodist Conference certainly were under pressure to secure intelligent, educated, and committed religious workers. That was a key reason for the establishment of Southwestern College".

²⁵ Southard, 25 July 1896, SLRI.

ask them.”²⁶ This entry appears to confirm the adeptness that she had acquired at public speaking and ministry and also indicates that she is aware of the gendered expectation that men were to be preachers. In 1898, she noted about a sermon, “Bro. Myers took a collection of about four dollars for me.”²⁷ A year later, just before she was to enter her last semester of college, she preached at a revival for several days. She recorded, “They have given me almost seventeen dollars, so I can begin school without any trouble.”²⁸ Preaching alone was not enough to cover her expenses. The money that she earned from her revival work would just barely cover the cost of tuition plus boarding for a single 12-week term.

In addition to preaching, Southard also secured employment on campus. In April 1897, she began working as an assistant librarian, which she seemed to enjoy and it didn’t take as much of her time as she expected.²⁹ Several months later, she received “five dollars for my day’s work, and it comes very acceptable.”³⁰ During her last year she also worked as what we would today call a teaching assistant, grading general history papers.³¹

Despite her efforts to earn money, she still had to borrow money to make ends meet and remained enrolled. In 1898, she borrowed 25 dollars from the bank to pay college expenses.³² In March 1899, Southard attempted to secure a loan from a local woman. It is unclear whether this is a local person or not. Desperately, Southard wrote to this woman to request a loan, but the woman declined her plea because all of the money she had to lend was already in use.³³ This

²⁶ Southard, 21 February 1896, SLRI.

²⁷ Southard, 21 August 1898, SLRI.

²⁸ Southard, 2 January 1899, SLRI.

²⁹ Southard, 2 April 1897, SLRI.

³⁰ Southard, 25 October 1897, SLRI.

³¹ Southard, 17 January 1898, SLRI.

³² Southard, 9 April 1898, SLRI.

³³ Southard, 21 March 1899, SLRI.

informal system of student loans made by personal acquaintances provided far less help for students than subsequent governmental systems that did not run out of money.

Even though both of Southard's parents were dead, her extended family helped offset the expenses of her higher education. In 1897, her grandmother sold some hogs and corn to pay half of Southard's tuition.³⁴ Two years later, her Uncle Frank provided support. "Some relief has come at last to the penniless, foodless senior," she noted. "Uncle Frank came yesterday, bringing me some provisions, for which I was duly thankful."³⁵ Her uncle also gave her three dollars, for which she expressed gratitude.³⁶

Not only did Southard receive money and support from family, professors and church members also provided financial support. One of her faculty members provided Southard funds to attend a Methodist conference in 1895. She noted, "I was almost out of money and did not see how I could go a week ago, but now I have plenty to go on. Prof. W. gave me 50 cents more than was necessary for my fare."³⁷ By the late 1880s, there was already a long history of religious leaders supporting the higher education of their youngest congregants. In the Antebellum Era, local pastors and church congregations supported poor local young men in what is considered to be the first private system of financial aid.³⁸ Although much earlier than Southard's time, this resembles the financial support that Southard received from local ministers over a half century later. In May of 1895, Southard noted that "Bro. Wilson gave me a check for \$10 when he found I wanted to attend summer school. It was so thoughtful of him."³⁹ A couple of months later in

³⁴ Southard, 18 February 1897, SLRI.

³⁵ Southard, 21 March 1899, SLRI.

³⁶ Southard, 21 March 1899, SLRI.

³⁷ Southard, 14 March 1896, SLRI.

³⁸ D.F. Allmendinger, *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (St. Martin's Press, 1975).

³⁹ Southard, 1 May 1895, SLRI.

November of that year, a local church leader “paid me a dollar besides my expenses. I rather hated to take it, but I needed it so much.”⁴⁰ A year later, another clergyman augmented Southard’s preaching earnings by adding three dollars of his personal funds to the three dollars from the offering.⁴¹ In 1898 Southard received a letter from another preacher that read “enclosing a dollar bill as a Valentine.”⁴² That same year Southard wanted to attend the Methodist conference, but did not have the funds to go. Describing the situation in her diary she states “Bro. George advised me to go [Conference] and offered me some money.”⁴³ Nearly every year, she received some financial assistance from her church members and on one instance even from a professor. After college, she would offer her widowed sister, who had children to support, financial support.⁴⁴

Rarely having enough money to pay for tuition, boarding, food, and other basic necessities of life, Southard often wrote about her financial struggle and its resulting anxiety. Early in her college career in a diary entry from 1895, Southard simultaneously described how comfortable it was to board with her friend but also her inability to afford such arrangements: “This week I am boarding at Mrs. Gray’s and sleeping with Fanny. I wish I could afford to board here all year, but I know I cannot, for I can’t see my way clear for tuition, etc.”⁴⁵ This entry reveals that at least one of her friends had more economic resources than Southard, and it highlights comfort distinctions with the different types of housing options. A couple of months later, she recorded, “I am out of fuel and anything to eat.”⁴⁶ Two years later she recorded “I’m

⁴⁰ Southard, 24 November 1895, SLRI.

⁴¹ Southard, 21 January 1896, SLRI.

⁴² Southard, 14 February 1898, SLRI.

⁴³ Southard, 27 February 1899, SLRI.

⁴⁴ Du Mez, “The Forgotten Woman’s Bible,” 92.

⁴⁵ Southard, 29 July 1895, SLRI.

⁴⁶ Southard, 24 November 1895, SLRI.

most starving this week. It is no fun to be hungry.”⁴⁷ One day later she wrote, “I did but little in school; have not money to enroll.”⁴⁸ Vulnerability and exposed desire for financial stability is woven through every year of her college diary. In January of 1899, her last year of school, Southard wrote, “How I wish I could have the money I really need.”⁴⁹ Toward the end of her last semester of college Southard reflected “I am not penniless; I have one penny; nothing to eat, & am in debt. Not an encouraging situation, but I suppose I’ll get along some way.”⁵⁰ Less than one week later, she expressed anxiety regarding financial insecurity as well as food insecurity again. “I wonder if people ever guess that I am sometimes actually hungry, and without money.”⁵¹

Southard’s anxiety over not having the necessary financial resources manifested itself physically. In 1896, a professor reminded Southard that her tuition was due. “What ever I shall do, I do not know, for I have no money, and no prospect of getting any. I’m very tired and must go to bed... Oh I am so very very tired, I ought to review more for examination, but I am too tired. I really fear I shall fail in some things if not all.”⁵² Despite mentioning three times how tired she is and that this fatigue is keeping her from reviewing for an upcoming examination, she remains hopeful. While January is often a month of renewal and resolution setting, for Southard in 1898 she found herself beyond exhausted. Southard was out of town preaching morning, afternoon, evening, and leading children’s service at a meeting. The following day she was due back in school. “I was so tired and worn out attending to so many different things that I think I was almost nervous when I took the train.”⁵³ In September of that year she recorded “I have no

⁴⁷ Southard, 19 May 1898, SLRI.

⁴⁸ Southard, 5 September 1898, SLRI.

⁴⁹ Southard, 2 January 1899, SLRI.

⁵⁰ Southard, 16 March 1899, SLRI.

⁵¹ Southard, 21 March 1899, SLRI.

⁵² Southard, 4 June 1896, SLRI.

⁵³ Southard, 2 January 1898, SLRI.

money, and no prospect of getting any...I'm very tired and must go to bed."⁵⁴ The next day she stated that she did not do very much in school. Too often statistics about students' financial situation are written about, but we never hear or fully understand the impact that financial distress has on students.⁵⁵ While a student wrote this over a hundred years ago, a student could very well have written the same sentiment yesterday.

Southard relied on her Christian faith to cope with her financial struggles. There were many instances detailed in her diary of not having enough money to pay for tuition, books, boarding, or food, yet she held on to the belief God would take care of her. In November 1895, worrying about how she would eat, she recorded "the Father always provides. There is no need to worry."⁵⁶ Two months later, she wrote that God had thus far provided the means to attend school. Although she could not see how she would be able to continue due to her finances, she finished the thought with the belief that she would be provided for "by my Father."⁵⁷ In June of that year when a professor spoke with her about her tuition, she expressed that her faith would help her pay it. Following this conversation, she reached out to one of the preachers. "It was an urgent case to make me mention the subject of money to Bro. Prosser, but I am almost desperate, yet I feel that in some way my Father will supply all my needs."⁵⁸ Even as she expressed anxiety over not having money to pay for necessities, she expressed faith that God would provide for her needs.

⁵⁴ Southard, 4 September, 1898, SLRI.

⁵⁵ Kristy L Archuleta, Anita Dale, and Scott M Spann, "College Students and Financial Distress: Exploring Debt, Financial Satisfaction, and Financial Anxiety," *Journal of Financial Counseling and Planning* 24, no. 2 (2013): 50.

⁵⁶ Southard, 24 November 1895, SLRI.

⁵⁷ Southard, 8 January 1896, SLRI.

⁵⁸ Southard, 4 June 1896, SLRI.

Affording higher education was a persistent struggle for Southard throughout her years at Southwestern College. She paid her tuition through her own efforts of preaching and working at the college in addition to receiving financial support from her family and community. The resulting lack of financial resources caused her anxiety and manifested itself physically, but she coped with these difficulties by relying on her Christian faith. She endured these sacrifices in order to use her college education to prepare for a career.

Career Preparation

Evidenced in large part by preaching to earn money for college, Southard's preparation for her career in the public sphere and advocacy for women's equal rights in the church crystallized during her college years. The Southwestern curriculum combined with preaching, literary society involvement, and debating sharpened her public speaking and critical reasoning skills. Initially she struggled with her coursework, but eventually learn to apply the material she had learned in ways that prepared her for a career. While in college she learned how to navigate the male-dominated public sphere and also learned that as a woman she would be evaluated on her personal appearance as well as her public speaking skills.

During this time period, society placed considerable value on perceived femininity and traditional gender ideals. Women were allowed small ventures into the public sphere as long as they retained their femininity. According to Christine Ogren, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries caused concern in the media, political world, and middle class society over proper sex roles. Many national developments contributed to a growing concern threatening the existence of middle-class femininity including women entering colleges and universities, the women's suffrage movement, and the increasing number of unmarried career woman.⁵⁹ This was

⁵⁹ Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 175.

a complicated time with heightened tensions between increasing autonomy for women and traditional gender norms. This tension played out in Southard's diary regarding her public speaking experiences. She did have extraordinary independence in the public realm but it was tempered with continual comments surrounding her appearance and gender ideals.

Southard expressed delight in the curriculum and being exposed to new ideas; however, she faced many challenges in her college studies. Southard received a teacher's certificate from the preparatory program at Southwestern at age sixteen, but did not enjoy teaching and thus switched to the collegiate department. Preparatory coursework could be compared to contemporary high school coursework in the sense that it was preparing students for the collegiate department. The collegiate department was the liberal arts course of study at Southwestern College. Southard spent a total of six years at Southwestern, eventually earning a degree in sociology. Southard began collegiate coursework studying Greek, botany, history, Latin, and trigonometry. She went on to take political economics, history, logic, sociology, public finance, psychology, German, astronomy, physics, algebra, and chemistry. In 1895, she described that her courses were going smoothly, but that it required tough studying. She found Greek difficult, but thought that she would come around to liking it.⁶⁰ A year later, she struggled to find the motivation to commit to her coursework and found the workload to be overwhelming. She recorded that she did not feel as prepared for her courses as she would like and felt somewhat overwhelmed by having to add botany to her course load. "I hardly know how I can do so much, but must do it, for I must take botany."⁶¹ Like many students before and after her, time management was a challenge and concern over passing her classes was often on her mind.

⁶⁰ Southard, 13 September 1895, SLRI.

⁶¹ Southard, 17 February 1896, SLRI.

At the end of the semester in 1896, she exclaimed relief that examinations were finished and that she passed trigonometry and Latin.⁶²

The more she advanced in her coursework, the more she seemed to enjoy it and want to apply it to the work she felt called to do. After reading Andrew Dickson White's *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, she recorded that the "preacher boys are unwilling to accept the new ideas, and I am convinced that soon the preachers must accept them if they would influence the educated classes."⁶³ Integrating knowledge from college with her religious beliefs, 1897 became a pivotal year for Southard's intellectual development. On February 4, Southard wrote, "I have a great desire to unite the highest intellectual development possible with the deepest, most fervent religious experience. Yet I know that this is seldom done, and it is not an easy matter to do it."⁶⁴ A few months later, she expressed that her work in history and Sociology have been interesting and helpful, so much so that when called on to make an impromptu address at church, she based the foundation of her talk on an exam that she had taken in Sociology.⁶⁵

Occasionally, Southard struggled to integrate her intellectual and spiritual life. Feeling conflicted in 1898, she wrote that there were two kinds of life that constituted her makeup, educational and evangelistic. This binary idea of education at one end and religion on the other left her feeling as though she must pick one over the other. "Sometimes it seems to me that I must study, that I would rather work out the great problem of life, get at the principles that underlie society and help to educate the masses, than do anything in the world."⁶⁶ In this same

⁶² Southard, 6 June 1896, SLRI.

⁶³ Southard, 1 February 1897, SLRI.

⁶⁴ Southard, 7 February 1897, SLRI.

⁶⁵ Southard, 15 June 1897, SLRI.

⁶⁶ Southard, 30 July 1898, SLRI.

entry, she recorded that men were able to do all successfully and that she desired to do something well. She was left with the question of whether she will lecture or preach or was there a way to do both.

Midway through her college career, Southard demonstrated discipline and critical thinking. In 1897, she noted, “This has been a very enjoyable year, quite a profitable one, I think. I have gained a number of new ideas, and I think I have disciplined my mind quite a little.”⁶⁷ Later demonstrating critical thinking skills as they applied to her courses and her professors she wrote, “The French Revolution is grand. Michelet reads like an oration. Sociology by Ward is too materialistic to suit me. Our Psychology is Physiological thus far. Dr. Place is fine.”⁶⁸ In addition to thinking critically about her courses and critiquing her professors, she seemed to apply what she was learning and analyze the information. In 1898, she wrote, “Psychology was interesting as it always is. But I think the ‘I’ of the ‘self’ is rather hard to fully understand, the ‘we’ is no trouble.”⁶⁹

Southard’s experiences in the Belles Lettres Society and debating offered opportunities for her to think critically, write, gain leadership skills, and work on public speaking in an academic setting. In 1890, the President announced that the Belles Lettres Society, a literary society, would be formed due to the “urgent need of the young women of the college.”⁷⁰ At the time of Southard’s attendance, the Belles Lettres Society was the lone women’s literary society.⁷¹ Literary societies were important features of higher education throughout the

⁶⁷ Southard, 11 June 1897, SLRI.

⁶⁸ Southard, 19 January 1898, SLRI.

⁶⁹ Southard, 10 February 1898, SLRI.

⁷⁰ Alta M. Huston et al., “Souvenir Edition of the Southwestern Collegian,” 1900, Southwestern Advocate Print, 1900 edition, <https://library.biblioboard.com.>, 37.

⁷¹ Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*; Michael S Hevel, “Public Displays of Student Learning: The Role of Literary Societies in Early Iowa Higher Education,” *The Annals of Iowa* 70, no. 1 (2011): 1–

nineteenth century. These organizations helped students critically think and express their ideas about issues that were important to them and prepare for their future lives after college. Women students wrote about and debated issues that mattered to them in addition to creating campus publications, music groups, and theatrical groups. These activities encouraged self-confidence, meticulousness, and pushed the boundaries of Victorian gender spheres regarding public speaking.⁷²

Through the society, Southard participated in Belles Lettres events, wrote articles for the student newspaper, and later held the highest honor of president. While naturally talented in public speaking, Southard refined her public speaking skills in debate. In 1896, Southard competed in a mixed gender campus oration contest using the topic Truth Triumphant.⁷³ There were seven orations in total, with a college man winning the contest.⁷⁴ “I am glad I entered because it has been a great help to me,” she wrote. “The thinking, the writing, the reviewing are, I am sure, of more value than all my school work of last term, except perhaps, Sociology.”⁷⁵ Not only did Southard participate in public oration contests, but she also practiced debating in her classes. In May of that same year, she wrote about a debate that happened as part of her European History class.⁷⁶ Southard seemed to enjoy the experience of debating. “I went to have a debate in the sociology class; it is continued tomorrow, and I think I shall go again.”⁷⁷

35. Literary societies provided an acceptable means of interaction with the opposite sex. Single-sex literary societies were without the tensions of coeducational literary societies. In Iowa there was a lack of coeducational literary societies.

⁷² Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, Ch. 3.

⁷³ *Southwestern Collegian*, 1 February 1897. Volume II No 6, 4.

⁷⁴ Huston et al, “Souvenir Edition of the *Southwestern Collegian*.”

⁷⁵ Southard, 13 January 1897, SLRI.

⁷⁶ Southard, 25 May 1897, SLRI.

⁷⁷ Southard, 11 November 1897, SLRI.

Southard's experiences in college refined her critical thinking, oratorical, and writing skills. The work on her oration and performance demonstrate the personal development that came from participating in this oratorical contest. In a later entry describing this contest she recorded that she did not feel overjoyed about her performance, instead she felt "that my oration and my delivery fell short of what it should have been."⁷⁸ While this entry highlights the continual personal refinement that literary societies promoted, it also suggests the personal drive and determination that Southard possessed. In 1898, reflecting on a prior sermon that she preached, she wrote "I changed my outline yesterday evening, and made it much more logical I think. My past year's school work has been a great help to me in reasoning, I find."⁷⁹ In this excerpt from her diary, she seems to recognize and give credit to her college work strengthening her thought process and writing skills.

Learning how to navigate the public sphere that was dominated by men, Southard would receive praise and give criticism in the process. Two years after the first oratorical contest experience, Southard participated in an intercollegiate debate and was praised for her performance by the college newspaper. In April 1898, Southard, along with two male students, Ernest Cole and George Meredith, were selected by faculty to represent the college in its first intercollegiate debate against Fairmont College (now Wichita State University). Southard's team won.⁸⁰ The topic of the debate was, "The Hawaiian islands should be speedily annexed to the United States."⁸¹ The *Southwestern Collegian* described her performance as "clear and logical." Continuing on with the praise of her performance reported, "We are, and of right ought to be,

⁷⁸ Southard, 24 December 1896, SLRI.

⁷⁹ Southard, 10 July 1898, SLRI.

⁸⁰ Wallace, *M. Madeline Southard*, 9.

⁸¹ Weeks, "The Southwestern Collegian" (Newspaper, 1898), Vol IV No 30, April 16 1898.

proud of every one of our speakers; but of Miss Southard especially.”⁸² The paper seemed to suggest that Southard was the best debater because she demonstrated thorough understanding of the subject and its deeper meaning, and perhaps a little surprised that a woman would be the most successful debater. After this debate, the president of Southwestern, Dr. Chester Place, congratulated her. “I asked him [Dr. Place] if I were really one of the three best, or if it was because they had to send one girl, for I rather thought it was the latter. All that he said it must have been because I was good-looking. So finally I told him he was horrid and left.”⁸³ After the debate and this interaction with the president, she was told by Professor Kirkpatrick that she was graded the same as the others and the president was happy with her performance. Two important things stand out in the description of this experience. The first is the fact that the president commented on her appearance, which had been brought up at the first contest. The second is that she was able to criticize the president for his words regarding her appearance instead of her performance.

Southard’s public speaking performance was not the only thing up for scrutiny, she was also judged based on her gender and appearance, which complicated those experiences. In 1896, when describing preparations for the above-mentioned mixed gender oration in her diary, she read a portion of it to her professor and a friend. “[Professor] Kirk tells me that he likes it. In his rather abrupt way he said ‘Do not dress like a pretty little girl that night; dress like a woman.’ He also told me to wear my hair on top of my head to make me look taller.”⁸⁴ This entry suggests that people close to her knew the impact of this particular contest and what it must have been like to compete with men. Not only were her words up for scrutiny, but also her appearance. In

⁸² Weeks, “The Southwestern Collegian”, April 16 1898.

⁸³ Southard, 31 January 1898, SLRI.

⁸⁴ Southard, 18 December 1896, SLRI.

addition to learning necessary public speaking skills, she was also learning how to navigate the male dominated public sphere as a woman.

As a serious and religious student, it is somewhat unexpected that Southard would be aware or interested in personal physical appearances. Staying up late to work on coursework in 1897 she wrote, “’Tis midnight. No beauty sleep tonight. No wonder scholars, true ones, are so seldom good-looking”.⁸⁵ One interpretation of this statement is that she is using humor as a coping mechanism to deal with stressful times; however, it is just as likely that she truly believed strong scholarship and personal attractiveness seldom went together. Interestingly, this idea of incompatibility of scholarship and personal attractiveness seems to have been the punch line of many jokes in yearbooks and newspapers.⁸⁶

Compared to the majority of women college students of her time, the public speaking opportunities and influence that Southard had during her collegiate career were exceptional. The collegiate curriculum combined with preaching, literary society involvement, and debating prepared her for her future career. Navigating the male-dominated public sphere, she learned that as a woman she would be judged based on personal appearance as well as performance. Yet these experiences were just some of the gendered experiences and relationships Southard had in college.

College Relationships

Throughout her diary Southard wrote about relationships, gendered interactions, and sexuality, which had a profound impact on her development and influenced her career.

Beginning in college Southard chose preparing for career success and academics over personal relationships, leaving her private life less than extraordinary. This would be a reoccurring theme

⁸⁵ Southard, 3 November 1897, SLRI.

⁸⁶ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 73.

throughout her life. Through peer and professorial relationships during college, Southard received support, honed interpersonal skills, and developed theories about these topics that she would write and talk about in her later career. Although most of her professors appeared to be encouraging and supportive of her education, some seemed to have ulterior personal motives. Demonstrating maturation, Southard moved from youthful idealization of her professors to recognizing them and accepting them as wholly imperfect people. While she began her college career treating the men students as equals, she became more aware of the different expectations for gendered interactions as well as differing sexual standards for men and women. Through her experiences in college with her men professors and men classmates, Southard developed ideas about sex and sexuality during college that would influence her later career.

While some of Southard's descriptions of relationships complement what has been written about Progressive woman students, her narrative somewhat complicates them by her intellectual curiosity in sex between Christian men and women. Southard's experiences also complement Beth Bailey's work on courtship.⁸⁷ Bailey suggests that men's money purchased not only female companionship, but also power, obligation, inequality, and control. Bailey goes on to imply that the systems of dating were based on an economic model, the idea of scarcity versus abundance and the power that came from controlling the scarce resource. With little experience of power in the dating role reversal, it is easy to see how this might place women in a position of vulnerability. It seems that the possibility of financial stability for Southard did not outweigh the loss of power that she might have had to lose in order to secure that stability.

⁸⁷ Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 95.

Southard experienced tension between excelling in the public world and forgoing the private world of relationships and family. Interestingly, this was a constant theme from her college years to her later life. She chose public work over personal relationships throughout her life. During college, some of her contemporaries recognized the unique public opportunities that Southard had and the future options that would be available to her; moreover, there was some disagreement from Professor Kirkpatrick and another man on the point of whether marriage would impede Southard from her future work. “One thing he seemed quite concerned about, that I should not let my ambition keep me from marrying. He spoke of it both days. Prof. K. did not agree with him, for, as he told me later, he thinks I can do other work that most women cannot.”⁸⁸ Professor Kirkpatrick seemed to recognize the exceptional public opportunities that Southard had and would have in her lifetime.

Similar to most progressive college women, Southard faced the choice between a career or a marriage and family. According to Helen Horowitz, pioneer college women had the expectation of doing something important, making a difference in the world, and choosing careers, which often delayed marriage and sometimes led to single lives.⁸⁹ Women who chose work over family went against traditional gender norms. According to Beth Bailey, public anxiety surrounding gender in the twentieth-century America emanated from the idea that masculinity and femininity “were changing codes of behavior produced by culturally and historically specific forces” not necessarily states declared by God or nature.⁹⁰ The protocol of masculinity and femininity was defined as an elaborate system that helped young Americans define their roles as individuals and in courtship.

⁸⁸ Southard, 20 June 1898, SLRI.

⁸⁹ Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 197-198.

⁹⁰ Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 97.

Interactions with the college men at Southwestern reveal that some of them supported, encouraged, and helped Southard break gender norms. In 1895 at a religious camp meeting, she described that the male students were conducting the day services. She then added that the men said that she must preach too, so she preached the evening service.⁹¹ In late 1896, she described not wanting to have her picture taken for the ministerial association because she was the only woman in the group. When the college men in the association found out, they insisted that she be in the photograph with them.⁹² In May 1897, Southard attended the ministerial meeting and was surprised when her name was announced among other regular members. She recorded that some of the men in the association had wanted her to join for a long time. She found out that they had submitted the admission fee on her behalf.⁹³ Three months later, two of her male classmates married women. She congratulated both by kissing them stating that she could not treat either of her brothers differently.⁹⁴ In describing the men classmates in her diary she either uses the term preacher boys or brothers. Just three days after describing the marriage of these two classmates, she wrote that she is beginning to understand that as she approaches her twentieth birthday she cannot treat all men as brothers even though she would like to do that. Witnessing her friends and classmates marry, she fears that she will be alone and seems to be increasingly aware of the expectation to marry. She acknowledged, "I don't know how to treat them any other way."⁹⁵

⁹¹ Southard, 13 July 1895, SLRI.

⁹² Southard, 18 December 1896, SLRI.

⁹³ Southard, 17 May 1897, SLRI.

⁹⁴ Southard, 29 August 1897, SLRI.

⁹⁵ Southard, 2 September 1897, SLRI.

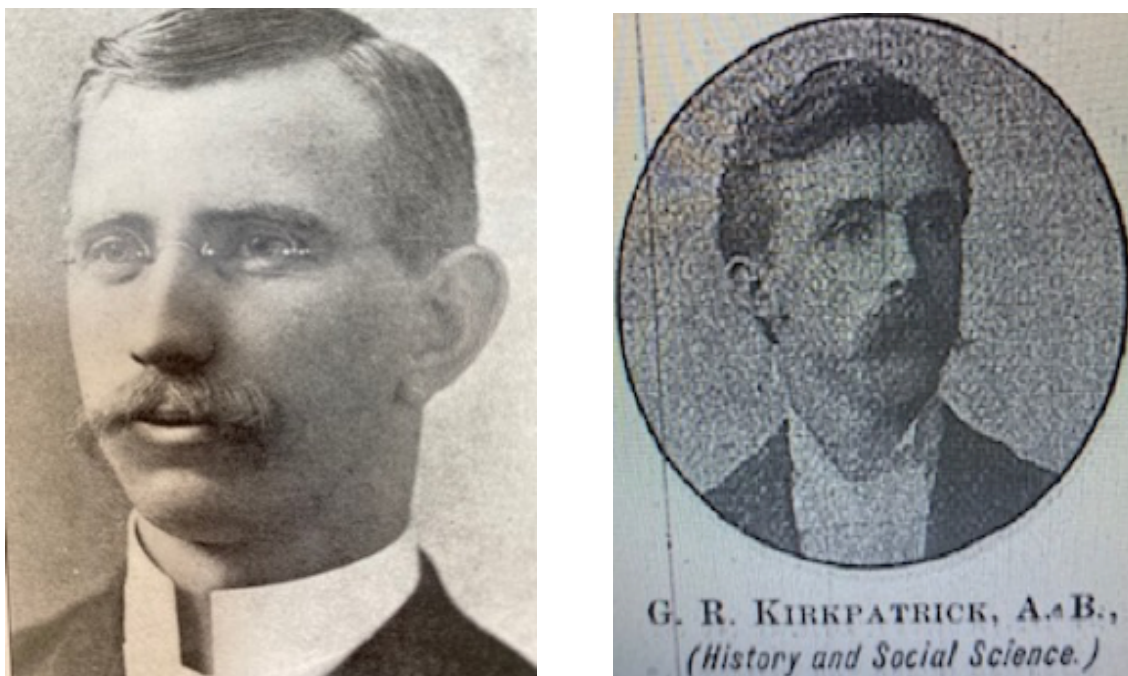


Figure 2. The photograph on the left is of Dr. Chester Place and the one on the right of Professor Kirkpatrick. Source: *The Southwestern Collegian of 1898* (Winfield, 1898).

The relationships that Southard developed with her professors, who were all men, played an invaluable part in her education. According to historian Barbara Miller Solomon, who wrote about the earliest generation of college women in the Northeast, “Instructors who recognized intellectual promise inspired more students to continue their education than we shall ever know.”⁹⁶ Conversely, other male faculty members were uncomfortable with women students perhaps because they were attracted to them and struggled to see women as students rather than objects of desire.⁹⁷ Some also did not believe that women should be allowed to pursue higher education. In Southard’s situation, her relationships with male professors were frequent items of discussion in her diary. She wrote about Dr. Place, professor and president of the college, and Professor Kirkpatrick consistently. Contrary to male faculty members being uncomfortable with female students, Southard’s professors seem to be very comfortable with her, but they sometimes

⁹⁶ Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 70.

⁹⁷ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 113.

expressed romantic interest in her as well. Southard's relationship with Dr. Place appears to have been somewhat complex. Early in her college career, she described a public address given by Dr. Place. His affection for the students brought Southard to tears. In her last year at Southwestern, she sought out Dr. Place's advice for her future educational work. She wanted to go to Chicago and study life in all of its phases and then lecture on how to help society.⁹⁸ "I talked with Dr. Place in regard to my work when I finish here," she noted. "He believes I can go to Chicago and do the work I want to do, sociological philanthropy, and so prepare for future public work. He understands and approves my plans, for future work, and that is very encouraging."⁹⁹ Although Dr. Place had been this important figure throughout her college years, he was also the one in an earlier section who suggested that she might have excelled in the debate because of her good looks. Even in relationships where there was support and respect, Southard's appearance and gender were never far from the forefront. At the same time, Dr. Place had challenged her academically, intellectually, and encouraged career development with professional interest.

In contrast, Southard's relationship with professor George Ross Kirkpatrick was underlain with romantic overtones. Professor Kirkpatrick taught history and social science.¹⁰⁰ In 1896, Southard described Kirkpatrick's lectures as interesting, and she enjoyed talking with him immensely because "he has so many ideas new to me, and he makes me think."¹⁰¹ Southard became concerned when others started telling her that maybe they were spending too much time together and that she appeared to be admiring him more than she should. She then wrote that she should probably be a little more aware of appearances and the implications even though they did not seem fair. To her, it did not seem just to "be ruled by the code laid down for those girls

⁹⁸ Southard, 15 January 1899, SLRI.

⁹⁹ Southard, 31 January 1899, SLRI.

¹⁰⁰ Weeks, "The Southwestern Collegian, 18 June 1898, Vol IV, No 39," 1.

¹⁰¹ Southard, 3 February 1896, SLRI.

whose association with gentlemen is largely with the thought of securing agreeable company, who will pass the long evenings with them, take them to entertainments and supply those delicious nothings in which girls seem to so much delight.”¹⁰² The insinuation that outsiders know her most intimate thoughts and conversations had a sharply sarcastic tone to it. Yet it was not unheard of for women students to be courted by the men professors at Southwestern. Southard noted that a woman student who was indignant with Professor Kirkpatrick because he and the student “quit keeping company” in 1897.¹⁰³ Two years later, Southard wrote about a different professor taking a woman student out on a Friday night.¹⁰⁴ She expressed relief that this professor had not asked her because she thought it would be unpleasant for her as long as she took his class.

The evolution of Southard’s relationship with Professor Kirkpatrick is especially fascinating because it parallels her growth and development not only as a student but also as a woman navigating a relationship with a man. In 1896, she recorded that she thought he was a fine teacher and that he made recitation interesting.¹⁰⁵ A couple months later she wrote that she admired him.¹⁰⁶ The following year, she wrote that Professor Kirkpatrick had been showering college women with attention and none of them had rejected his attention. In her diary she insisted that he could do more than this. He talked intellectually, inspired ideas in others, and encouraged people to think. She wrote, “I enjoyed this, but, it the public desire, can exist without.”¹⁰⁷ Toward the end of her college years, Professor Kirkpatrick moved away from Southwestern to work in Chicago. Southard and he corresponded through letters. In 1899, he sent

¹⁰² Southard, 28 April 1896, SLRI.

¹⁰³ Southard, 18 February 1897, SLRI.

¹⁰⁴ Southard, 21 February 1899, SLRI.

¹⁰⁵ Southard, 23 January 1896, SLRI.

¹⁰⁶ Southard, 5 March 1896, SLRI.

¹⁰⁷ Southard, 28 April 1897, SLRI.

Southard the volumes of *Les Misérables*, which she had wanted to read very much. This gift was complicated because Southard believed it implied he was more interested in her romantically than as a student. This placed Southard in a difficult situation. “What to do, I do not know,” she pondered. “I cannot easily refuse them, nor can I ‘easily’ keep them. I do not understand why he did this. It places me in a perplexing, not to say embarrassing, situation.”¹⁰⁸ After he sent the books, she wrote to Professor Kirkpatrick that they needed to stop corresponding. “This sending of books etc. is a little too much. He wants to find a place for me in Chicago. I told him he need make no such effort; I could not go to a place of his finding.”¹⁰⁹ After receiving Southard’s letter requesting that they quit their correspondence, he took offense. She felt terribly that he felt rejected because she admired him greatly. She described his teaching as being permanently “stamped upon me that I can never be free from it if I would. The memory of those class-hours, so precious, so much a part of my past, that I cannot bear to feel that he thinks angrily or bitterly of me.”¹¹⁰

Southard seemed to start developing some ideas about equalizing the double standards between men and women with regard to sex when she was still a college student. In 1895, Southard documented a conversation that she had had with a young man about sex. “In some way in the discussion of social questions, we drifted into a conversation concerning the relations between husband and wife.”¹¹¹ She acknowledged that other people might consider their conversation inappropriate, but she wrote that the conversation was equally beneficial. The assumption here is that they are discussing marital sex, which would have been a bold conversation at the time. Not only is it somewhat shocking for the time and people engaged, but

¹⁰⁸ Southard, 2 January 1899, SLRI.

¹⁰⁹ Southard, 9 April 1899, SLRI.

¹¹⁰ Southard, 7 May 1899, SLRI.

¹¹¹ Southard, 21 July 1895, SLRI.

also interesting that Southard was having this question as a freshman student. Southard was a woman minister and college student having an intellectual conversation about sex with a man in 1895. This conversation in college foregrounded one of Southard's major career contributions, publishing *The Christian Message on Sex* in 1931. Southard's last publication, the book contained views on sexuality from a biblical perspective. According to her biographer, "She stood for enlightenment and sublimation in dealing with sex as opposed to suppression and concealment, which was common in her day. A prime concern of hers was eliminating the double standard between men and women in sexual behavior."¹¹²

The experiences that Southard had in college related to sexuality prepared her for her later career. In 1896, she visited and spent the night at a home for girls and women who had unwed pregnancies. When Southard woke up, she saw the other girls with their babies. "I have not time nor power to describe my feelings at that place. I never, so far as I know, came in contact with that class of people before. But I treated them exactly as equals, was as pleasant and agreeable as I knew how to be, and I am sure I won their hearts in the little time I was there."¹¹³ This experience was not typical of the average college student and had a strong impact on Southard in her life after college. A couple of months later, with some women from the WCTU, she visited a brothel. She saw a twenty-year-old girl wearing a white nightgown. Southard recorded that this nearly devastated her knowing that this girl's life was damaged. After this visit she bought a book called "Traffic Girls". After reading it, she wrote "Oh how I long to crush the awful system from the world, yet how powerless I am! God help that now and in all the years to come. I may do all in my power to put down this fearful work of the Devil."¹¹⁴ In 1898, she and

¹¹² Wallace, *M. Madeline Southard*, 23.

¹¹³ Southard, 30 March 1896, SLRI.

¹¹⁴ Southard, 26 June 1896, SLRI.

another woman visited a different brothel. Southard prayed with the young woman who opened the door. The woman explained to Southard that she should try to save people before they came to the brothel.¹¹⁵

Southard's subsequent career regularly focused on women's sexuality. In 1904, while involved with the WCTU, she became more interested in social purity work. According to Kristin Du Mez, Southard informed a woman that the woman had contracted syphilis from her husband.¹¹⁶ "She worked with prostitutes to learn of their conditions." She also continued to work with young women in rescue homes who had given birth or contracted sexually transmitted infections. She helped them by listening to their stories and getting them proper medical treatment.¹¹⁷

During her later college years, Southard wrote about becoming more conscious of her own sexuality and the requirements that needed to be met for her in a romantic relationship. In 1898 toward the end of her undergraduate career, a young man professed his affection for Southard. This forced her to express her disinterest because she did not possess similar feelings. She struggled with the idea of causing another person pain from rejection. She felt respect and admiration for him and described him as a good person. "But I can not love; I do not think I could ever. It is not, as he seems to think, his lack of address, of society ways. I think it is a lack, I can hardly say of intensity – that is not true – but of heat. He does not attract me, and I cannot help it."¹¹⁸ Her reasoning has sexual connotations and foreshadows what would be a pattern throughout her life of forsaking personal relationships to focus on work. The most difficult thing for her was to possibly hurt another human being. Just a month later, she learned that two men,

¹¹⁵ Southard, 19 July 1898, SLRI.

¹¹⁶ Du Mez, "The Forgotten Woman's Bible," 89.

¹¹⁷ Du Mez, "The Forgotten Woman's Bible," 89.

¹¹⁸ Southard, 11 June 1898, SLRI.

whom she had tried to convert at a saloon, found her sexually attractive. She wrote, “How blind I have been to not realize that I, attractive as many girls, have excited that feeling in some men. But it is only recently that I have realize that a man could think of me in that way.”¹¹⁹ In 1899, shortly before graduation, Southard became more firmly rooted in her values as they are expressed through thoughts and subsequent actions with regard to sex and relationships: “I would rather be a man’s comrade than his play thing, that is certain.”¹²⁰

It is fascinating that in this time Southard would allude to her own sexuality. According to Du Mez, rejecting marriage and family caused Southard immense grief throughout her life.¹²¹ This manifested itself in stretches of loneliness and depression and even seemed to contribute to a nervous breakdown later in life. Kendra Irons writes about Southard’s later life and in 1923, at the age of 46, Southard lamented that even though she has done much good, the sacrifice of forgoing marriage and family weighed heavily on her. She recognized that the possibility to bear children was gone and the thought was depressing for her. She recorded, “So far as sex desire, that is stronger than twenty years ago. And most people think we spinsters do not care! Thank God for Grace to not show it.”¹²² Twenty something years had passed since her college days when she first hinted at her own sexuality and interest in relationships. In her college years as well as in her later years, it was not a lack of desire or interest in romantic relationships, but one of choice. Southard seemed to intuitively know from a young age that she could have a career or marriage, but not both.

¹¹⁹ Southard, 19 July 1898, SLRI.

¹²⁰ Southard, 15 May 1899, SLRI.

¹²¹ Du Mez, “The Forgotten Woman’s Bible,” 97–98.

¹²² Irons, “Preaching on the Plains,” 157.

Conclusion

Living in the Midwest, being raised by widowed women, and receiving an education in a coeducation environment contributed to Southard's enlightened attitude. Displaying independence in thought and action, Southard focused on her goals and faith. She used a sense of enlightenment to support her argument against predetermined gender roles and equal rights for women in the Methodist Church. The progressive nature of her thoughts and actions was woven throughout her life. A lifelong journal keeper, Southard wrote her last journal entry in 1964 just three years before she passed at the age of 90. A pioneer in the Methodist church and a progressive woman, Southard accomplished remarkable, almost unheard of things in her lifetime. She pushed the boundaries of gender, education, and career. It was not without sacrifice, struggle, determination, and external support that she was able to achieve so much. Being a low socioeconomic student contributed to this struggle and seemed to affect her mental health while she was in college. While her story is not the dominant one read about in the history of higher education, it certainly is an important one regarding how a low socioeconomic student used her college education and experience to stretch gender boundaries and fight for equal rights for women.

CHAPTER FOUR

K. GRETТА ORDWAY:

THE EXPERIENCE OF A MIDDLE-CLASS SOCIOECONOMIC STUDENT AT VASSAR

Introduction

Katherine Gretta Ordway, who went by Gretta, was raised in New York and attended Vassar College from 1909 until her graduation in 1913. She was eighteen years old when she entered Vassar as a freshman. Ordway became a teacher after graduation, eventually earning her master's degree from New York University in 1926. Her father was a minister who graduated from Princeton University and her mother never had the opportunity to attend college. Ordway's father's salary as a minister was \$1000, which posed a problem for her parents to pay all of their daughter's college expenses. In 1890, Charles Spahr reported that the national average salary for teachers was \$250 per year, ministers \$900, physicians and lawyers \$1,200.¹ This study was a little earlier than Ordway's time, but it is a good benchmark to measure how comparable salaries would be for Ordway's father. Using these numbers as a guide, Ordway's family income level was approximately 33 percent less than that of physicians and lawyers. While this does not put the family in the lower class, it does seem to indicate that the family's socioeconomic status would fit somewhere in the middle class in an era when the most Vassar students were wealthy and there was no government-sponsored financial system. A study of her college years provides an opportunity to examine the college experience of a middle-class student at a primarily wealthy, private women's college during the early twentieth century, revealing how a less advantaged student attended and managed to remain enrolled.

¹ Charles Barzillai Spahr 1860-1904, *An Essay on the Present Distribution of Wealth in the United States*, vol. no. 12, Book, Whole (New York; Boston; T.Y. Crowell & Company, 1896).

This chapter explores Ordway's purpose for attending Vassar, how she paid for college, what she did at college, and what she did after college. While Ordway did not become a popular well-known figure like Madeline Southard, she did achieve her goal of independence as a result of graduating from Vassar. Her story is not the dominant one that is told in the history of higher education for women because middle-class students at private colleges were few and far between. The lack of inclusion in campus life due to being a less wealthy student at a primarily wealthy college also caused her emotional suffering, isolation, and loneliness. While she experienced exclusion in campus life due to her socioeconomic background, her experience with different aspects of health was somewhat complicated. She participated in health-related aspects such as gym because it was included in her tuition, but the additional expenses of other aspects of health and physical culture deterred her participation. Unlike Southard, who had only distant relatives to help, Ordway had parental support and college financial support that helped her obtain a college degree. Yet she struggled with mental health issues due to the pressure to perform well in her coursework, her perfectionist nature, and low self-esteem.

Intending to provide women an equal education to that of the best men's colleges at that time, Vassar College largely attracted a wealthy population of women students. Matthew Vassar, a retired brewer, provided the money to open Vassar College in 1865. Without a domestic labor system helping students afford their education, Vassar students were required to pay for their college education with little financial assistance from the institution, which meant the majority of students were from the wealthiest families.² In 1865 the cost of tuition, room and board was \$350 (the equivalent of \$5,542 in 2020) but by 1917 it had risen to \$550 (the equivalent of \$11,090 in

² Turpin, *A New Moral Vision*, 59.

2020).³ During the 1911 to 1912 school year, Vassar had 108 faculty members, 17 of them men and the rest women.⁴ In Ordway's 1913 graduating class, 234 women received their bachelor's degree.⁵

Ordway struggled to afford the tuition all four years of college. In 1910 through 1913, the tuition for Vassar was \$150 per year and board was \$350 per year.⁶ She applied and received scholarships, she worked on campus, her parents contributed money, and she even considered taking out student loans to help her finance her education. In 1912, she received a semester invoice in addition to the tuition and board that she owed \$1.50 for laboratory, \$2.50 for guests (it is unclear what this was referring to), and \$19.75 for medical care.⁷

According to Lynn Gordon, the majority of Vassar students from the 1870s to the 1920s came from backgrounds that consisted of upper-middle or upper class; however, Ordway did not fit into this category.⁸ The majority of students' fathers were merchants, manufacturers, bankers, or lawyers. This would have put Ordway in the minority for socioeconomic status compared to her peers. In addition to tuition and board, students needed approximately \$100 to \$250 a year for clothing and transportation. Very few scholarships were given during this time. Even as late as 1925, only nine percent of Vassar students received financial aid. In addition, students were discouraged from having jobs because the administration feared they would fall behind in their

³ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 140; The amount in 2020 dollars was retrieved from the U.S. Economic Data Inflation Calculator from <https://www.officialdata.org/us-econom.com>.

⁴ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 137.

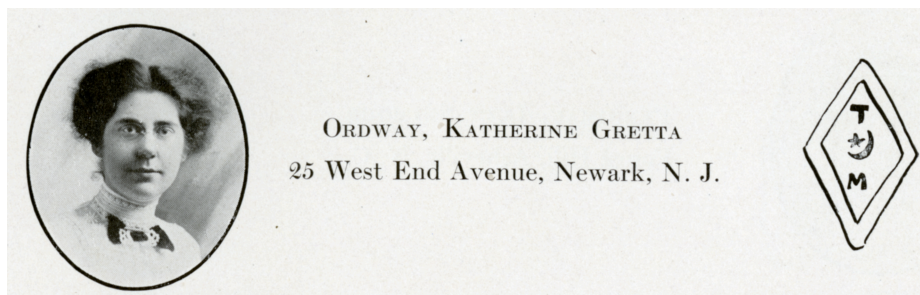
⁵ Mary Pemberton Nourse, "Vassar Miscellany News," June 11, 1913, Vol. XLII No. 10 edition.

⁶ Annual Catalogue of Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY 1909-1913, retrieved from <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015066660229&view=1up&seq=11>

⁷ Katherine Greta Ordway Journal, 3 July 1912, Box 130, Vassar College Archives and Special Collections, Poughkeepsie, New York (hereafter cited as VCASC). Ordway and then the date will be used as a shortened version of this citation.

⁸ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 140.

coursework.⁹ For students from less wealthy socioeconomic backgrounds, this restriction placed them at a disadvantage for paying for their college education and indicated the type of student that the administrators of Vassar were trying to attract. All these things point to a difficult environment for a squarely middle-class student like Ordway.



Source: Archives and Special Collections, Vassar College Library, Vassarion 1913.

Purpose

Attending a private women's college had been a life-long dream of Ordway's. The impetus for this seems to be rooted in her desire to have a career and achieve independence. Vassar's President strongly encouraged the women students to use their education for great purposes in life. The President instructed students that "Possibilities and powers of which we have not dreamed lie dormant in each of us. We are often surprised at the powers, which we see manifested in our friends, abilities of which we had never thought... Throwing our whole selves into working for our Ideal. Don't be afraid young women of the responsibilities which are put on you. You can meet them".¹⁰ It was very clear in her diary that Ordway expected to work and be self-supporting after graduating from college.

The expectations for Vassar college women were to engage in life-long learning and scholarliness. Not only did Ordway feel pressure from herself, her family, she also felt pressure from the expectations of the president of the college. In 1910, the President of Vassar described

⁹ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, 140.

¹⁰ Ordway, 20 February 1910, VCASC.

what the purpose of college ought to be for Vassar women and what it would not include: “I have no place here for domestic science, for training in motherhood. Make the best of what you have and the most of yourself.”¹¹ It is very clear in this passage that the President expected the women of Vassar to do great things with their education beyond domestic responsibilities. Later that month, Orway recorded that the President—“Prexy” as the students called him—talked more about the purpose of a Vassar education: “Prexy wants the women who go out from here to be not only efficient wherever they are placed but also to be efficient in scholarship.”¹²

Attending a woman’s college had long been on Ordway’s mind and she had strong affection for Vassar. In 1910, a letter received from a childhood friend reminisced about how the two friends had dreamed of going to college when they were young. The girls’ dreams centered on Smith and Wellesley, colleges they had read about in *Ladies Home Journal*. The friend ended up choosing Mount Holyoke and Ordway chose Vassar, both members of the elite Seven Sisters women colleges.¹³ In 1910 at the end of her freshman year, reflecting on what her college education at Vassar had meant to her thus far, Ordway described loving Vassar dearly. “The outlook on life, the social training, the contact with professors and the glorious opportunity for study and the pursuit of all that is highest and best are some of the phases of the experience of this quarter of college life. I love V.C.”¹⁴

Ordway’s chief purpose for attending Vassar was to receive an education that would allow her to be independent and pursue a career, and she seemed to understand that Vassar

¹¹ Ordway, 7 October 1910, VCASC.

¹² Ordway, 31 October 1910, VCASC.

¹³ Ordway, 21 May 1910, VCASC.

¹⁴ Ordway, 3 June 1910, VCASC.

would help her in achieving her goals.¹⁵ In early 1911, she recorded her purpose for attending college was to “get thoroughly equipped for my life work by making the most of every opportunity offered to me here.”¹⁶ After a moving sermon from the college President in 1911, Ordway reflected on the definition of intellectual life, which she described as “determination, purpose and use of our powers. . . The purpose of college is to train us for life. I believe in the men’s colleges today too great attention is paid to the ‘social, athletic & administrative’ side of college life & it is creeping into the girls’ colleges. They are all right but do not constitute the big end and aim of college.”¹⁷ Later that same year, Ordway echoed this idea about learning independence in another diary entry. She observed an interaction between child and mother when she was in town. After hearing a small child say to his mother that he could do something himself, Ordway applied that perspective to students in college: “To learn how to do and to do it is surely the purpose of our coming here.”¹⁸ Her grandest ambition was to be an instructor or professor at Vassar.

Oftentimes the purpose of higher education for women during this time period was not clear. Ordway seemed to be very clear on her purpose of gaining independence, training for life and a career with her education from Vassar. The President of Vassar was clear in his expectations that the college women of Vassar should prepare themselves for scholarliness and make great contributions to the world.

Student Life

Being a middle-class socioeconomic college student excluded Ordway from participating in many extracurricular aspects of college student life and developing close friendships. She

¹⁵ Ordway, 1 March 1910, VCASC.

¹⁶ Ordway, 12 February 1911, VCASC.

¹⁷ Ordway, 24 September 1911, VCASC.

¹⁸ Ordway 12 October, 1911, VCASC.

coped with isolation on campus by using her college room as a refuge and solace to emotionally buffer against these feelings of exclusion. Ordway did feel strong affection for Vassar and the activities that it offered. While she didn't feel as though she was a part of the campus community, she experimented with drag and attended lectures on feminism while a student, which probably encouraged and supported her desire for independence.

Coming from a middle-class background, Ordway did not have the financial resources to participate fully in the social aspect of college, which in turn contributed to her isolation. In fact, Ordway decided that the reason she was not included was because she did not have the money to host spreads. She wondered if the way to the college women's hearts was through their stomachs. Feasting in their rooms was an important aspect of campus life for college women during this time; however, only those with the financial resources were able to participate, as students who attended spreads were expected to reciprocate and purchase refreshments for all attendees. Instead of attributing her lack of financial resources to not being able to host spreads, Ordway internalized this desolation and loneliness as a personal character flaw. In her second semester, she decided that after she received some money or food, she would try to host a spread: "Being worth just \$.07 at present I don't think I'll try to give a spread, but when my ship comes in I'll try to give them something to eat and see if the bait will land any fish."¹⁹

Ordway wished that she had more positive interactions with others during college. In January 1911, a fellow student asked her to dinner. "First time I have been in Main dining room this year," she recorded. "Was delighted to go and had a good time."²⁰ A year and a half later, she experienced another positive interaction with a peer. She made hot chocolate with some of

¹⁹ Ordway, 1 February 1910, VCASC.

²⁰ Ordway, 28 January 1911, VCASC.

her fellow students. One of them told Ordway what an impression she had made on the other students. Reflecting on her friendships, she expressed positivity and optimism toward others, but negativity toward herself. Not only that, but she also seemed to be acutely aware that some of these wealthier students could teach her important social skills from which she could gain cultural capital. “Everyone has some good trait,” she wrote. “But I want to learn to know these girls who can teach me and from whom I can gain socially.”²¹

Ordway also seemed to have far fewer heterosexual interactions than wealthier Vassar students. In September 1911, she recorded a date with a man named James. She described wearing a red dress and that James brought a box of honey nougats. The date consisted of James showing Ordway his postage stamp album and picture that he had taken. To conclude the evening, she asked for a “hearty handshake.”²² This was the only date that she recorded in her diary while a Vassar student.

Never developing the close personal connections and relationships that she desired, Ordway continued to be a mere spectator in the campus life that was so absorbing for the majority of wealthy college women. According to historian Lynn Gordon, Vassar women during this time period focused most of their energy and purpose for going to college on campus life, which meant friends, games, and extracurricular activities.²³ Ordway wanted to “find out how to be socially agreeable and before it is forever too late make a firm, friendship with a girl who will give you something and who will always make you be your best and do your best and appear your best in every way.”²⁴ Yet Ordway’s low self-esteem may have contributed to her lack of

²¹ Ordway, 8 June 1912, VCASC.

²² Ordway, 13 September 1911, VCASC.

²³ Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education*, 139.

²⁴ Ordway, 8 June, 1912, VCASC.

friendships. In the same diary entry, she described herself as lazy, slow, not athletic, and not using her talents to the best of her abilities. The next month, when her mother asked her who her close college friends were, she cried. Even as she approached her final year, Ordway had yet to establish the close personal relationships that she had desperately wanted during her college years.²⁵



The image above is of students dancing around maypole in 1910 as part of an annual May Day celebration. Source: <http://www.mtholyoke.com/pcsite/photos/sisters/Vassar/Vassar14f.jpeg> on 11/22/19

While Ordway did not experience the close personal relationships with her peers that she desired, she did feel connected to the college and experienced the uniqueness of being a college woman in an era when that was still a rarity. Toward the end of her first year of college, she was at a class meeting and was voted as one of six delegates to attend various conferences. The class

²⁵ Ordway, 2 July 1912, VCASC.

would cover the expenses of the trip.²⁶ A couple days later, Ordway described watching the girls march across the lawn for the Senior May pole dance. As she watched them, she “felt a something not unlike a lump in my throat.”²⁷ This event evoked strong emotion within her, a feeling of college spirit or from a sense of feeling left out of such campus activities.

Working through the trials of living on campus, Ordway recorded an incident when several students asked her to switch rooms with another student in May 1910. For her there was tension between wanting to be liked and also wanting to keep her own room, which seemed to be in a more desirable location than the other student’s room. According to Horowitz, Vassar did not recognize student cliques in its rooming policy, students had to draw for their rooms each year. Some students worked together to have rooms next to each other. While democratic in room selection, “propinquity did not assure familiarity. Two students from different social worlds who lived next door to each other would not meet unless properly introduced.”²⁸ Ordway spoke to several of the students who lived close to her about what she should do. Her peers suggested that the students doing the requesting would be nice to her only until they get her room and then they would ignore her. Seeking additional opinions, she wrote to her mother and father about the situation, “This room question is worrying me.”²⁹ She spent hours writing the pros and cons of switching rooms and her feelings about the matter. Describing the room as an inanimate friendship with the resulting comfort and support it gave her after joyous times as well as sorrowful times.

²⁶ Ordway, 3 May 1910, VCASC.

²⁷ Ordway, 6 May 1910, VCASC.

²⁸ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 152.

²⁹ Ordway, 12 May 1910, VCASC.

For Ordway, who struggled with social interactions and loneliness, her room was a source of comfort, support, and a protective factor for the sometimes difficult experiences of college. “How often I have stood at my one West window and, gazing out over the hills, thought there is the river and West of the river and far to the north is home. 403R has witnessed the joys & sorrows and various difficulties of my Freshman year. It is to me a sacred spot.”³⁰ Worrying that the students who wanted her room and their friends would mistreat her if she did not comply with their requests consumed her thoughts. Several days later letters from both parents arrived telling her in no uncertain terms to keep her room. Her mother wrote, “Don’t you give up your room to anyone. If it is so desirable for them it is only good enough for you.”³¹ Her father told her to just explain to the students that she cannot do that and to focus on her studies. After receiving this advice and support, Ordway told the student wanting her room that she planned to stay in her room for the next year. She did not write about any recrimination from the college women who wanted her room.

At the start of the next academic year, Ordway further explored independence by dressing up as a man. It was not uncommon for women students to experiment with drag by dressing up in men’s clothing for certain campus events in the early twentieth century. In October 1910, Ordway dressed up as a man and attended an entertainment at a room close to hers. The students had refreshments in their attire. Later that day, dressed in a borrowed man’s suit, she attended the sophomore party. The theme of the program was a circus. It reflected courting for women students who had an “adoring lover at her side.”³² At the end of the production, the classes sang songs. The combination of drag with courting seems to suggest that women were experimenting

³⁰ Ordway, 13 May 1910, VCASC.

³¹ Ordway, 17 May 1910, VCASC.

³² Ordway, 22 October 1910, VCASC.

with the idea of what it would be like to try on different gender roles. According to historians Margaret Nash, Danielle Mireles, and Amanda Scott-Williams, “Drag appeared at single-sex and coeducational colleges and universities in a wide variety of settings, including mock funerals and textbook burnings at Amherst, Alumni Parades of Princeton, mock trials of the Hasty Pudding Club at Harvard, and dances at Vassar”.³³ In the early twentieth century drag was used as impersonation, and it provided college women the opportunity to, in some respects, try on the more independent roles available to men.

Ordway also explored independence during her college years by attending lectures regarding feminism and the power of women. In 1911, Ordway heard a lecture from Mrs. Florence Kelley, the secretary of National Consumers’ League, on working women and college women. Ordway described it as a splendid lecture. Kelley spoke about the impact that individual college women have had on working women’s condition. The topic continued with Kelly explaining to the students that women need to work to decrease the stigma and disrespect which domestic service holds. It is interesting to compare the message from Florence Kelly to the message from the President about domestic service. Kelly continued her lecture by telling the story of a Bryn Mawr student who made a 600-page brief that was presented to the Illinois Court proving the “the constitutionality of limiting the number of working hours of women in the factories.”³⁴ One month later Ordway attended a suffrage lecture in the Collingwood opera house. Mayor Segu and Inez Milholland presented arguments for women’s suffrage. Ordway recorded that Inez “used splendid specific illustrations.”³⁵ Ordway did not specifically state her

³³ Margaret A. Nash, Danielle C. Mireles, and Amanda Scott-Williams, *Rethinking Campus Life: New Perspectives on the History of College Students in the United States*, ed. Christine A. Ogren and Marc A. VanOverbeke (Cham: Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 82.

³⁴ Ordway, 20 October 1911, VCASC.

³⁵ Ordway, 17 November 1911, VCASC.

position with regard to women's suffrage aside from the previous passage, but she heard from older women about the importance of independence.

The socioeconomic background of Ordway limited her from many social aspects of college such as spreads, friends, and games, contributing to an exclusion from the campus life that was so important to college women of that time. Vassar's democratic rooming policy helped somewhat in equalizing the social hierarchy for Ordway; however, without friends to introduce her to others she remained isolated in the comfort of her college room. Conversely, experimenting with drag and attending lectures regarding feminism was not based on socioeconomic background allowing Ordway to freely be involved and included, helping her envision a more independent future.

Health

The physical culture and physical education movement was just gaining momentum during Ordway's college years. A new field in the late nineteenth century, physical education indicated the importance of knowledge to promote optimal health. Physical educators taught rules of hygienic living, which shaped many Americans ideas and attitudes about health. They taught that health revolved around the idea of personal control and exercise could be used to implement it. Some of the country's most influential physical educators were among the leading authorities popularizing physiology and exercise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.³⁶ Physical educators purported that health consisted of a connection between body and mind; the result was a relationship between physical and mental processes. As a social construct,

³⁶ Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 126.

ideas about health change with social conditions. The “new woman” of the early twentieth century had a strong figure, exercised outside, and radiated health.³⁷

As a relatively new field, physical education and sport were sweeping the nation, and college women like Ordway were eager to participate. Ordway first mentioned a physical sport in her diary in 1909—hockey. Ordway described it as “some very good exercise.”³⁸ Her first experience in gym began by putting on gym clothes, referred to in her diary as “togs.” Writing about women’s health and body image, historian Margaret Lowe describes the gym suit and what it represented in the United States at this time. Designed for physical activity, the gym suit was used to promote physical health not a feminist plan or a suggestion of a college woman’s place in society. Lowe writes, “And the suit was clearly designed for physical activity within the gates of the college and behind the closed doors of the gymnasium. Considered health building, the gym suit worn in the proper context expanded the students’ physical freedom without challenging notions of acceptable femininity.”³⁹

After donning the gym suit, Ordway participated in the physical exercises at gym. She was able to easily participate in physical exercise at college because it was included in her tuition and not an added expense. The exercises began with simple calisthenics, then jumping, and swinging from rings. Describing her performance in gym, Ordway admitted, “I am no expert.”⁴⁰ In gym, the students used weights, fence vaulting, and climbed a fence. In February 1910 she signed up for fancy dancing.⁴¹ There were important similarities and differences between physical training and athletics. Both involved exercising the body, improving health, and

³⁷ Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood*, 196.

³⁸ Ordway, 11 November 1909, VCASC.

³⁹ Margaret A. Lowe, *Looking Good: College Women and Body Image, 1875 - 1930* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 48.

⁴⁰ Ordway, 18 November 1909, VCASC.

⁴¹ Ordway, 18 February 1910, VCASC.

strengthening muscle. Physical educators argued that gymnastic work and callisthenic programs were more scientific; whereas, athletics and sports were more social requiring different skills and qualities. Physical culture was more prevalent at all women's colleges in the East and coeducational institutions in the West.⁴² Preventing ill health from too much studying by incorporating more physical movement into the lives of college women aided in promoting acceptance of women's physical exercise. Women's physical culture began with simple calisthenics that promoted improved health and movement while still fitting into the sphere of acceptable female conduct.⁴³ Later acceptable forms of physical education were fencing, archery, golf, bicycling, and tennis. As long as these activities promoted grace and gentle movement that aligned with femininity they were socially acceptable. Ordway seemed to relish this physical aspect of college life. In March she went to her first track practice.⁴⁴ They practiced broad jump standing still, running broad jump, hop skip and jump, and shot put. She recorded that it went very well.⁴⁵ In October 1910, she signed up for basketball and fancy dancing again.⁴⁶ The next month, she recorded that she was able to stand on her head for first time in gym.⁴⁷ She reported enjoying her first swimming lesson the following spring.⁴⁸

Physical appearance is a superficial exterior representation of a person; however, physical appearance can affect how a person is treated among their peers. In Ordway's case, her physical appearance may have contributed to her lack of confidence in social situations and her limited campus engagement. The main aspect of Ordway's physical appearance that seemed to affect her

⁴² Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 190-192.

⁴³ Ogren, *The American State Normal School*, 169.

⁴⁴ Ordway, 10 March 1910, VCASC.

⁴⁵ Ordway, 12 April 1910, VCASC.

⁴⁶ Ordway, 20 October 1910, VCASC.

⁴⁷ Ordway, 22 November 1910, VCASC.

⁴⁸ Ordway, 12 April 1911, VCASC.

throughout her college years was facial acne. Throughout her diary, Ordway described the struggle with acne and the various remedies she attempted. A family friend who saw her on a break home from college said, “What is the matter with your face?”⁴⁹ She went to the doctor to receive some sort of facial treatment, but told the doctor that she could not afford very many treatments because of a lack of money.⁵⁰ In 1912, she described having gone into almost \$30 of debt (the equivalent of \$800 in 2020) for serum injections to treat her acne.⁵¹ Facial acne plagued her throughout her entire college career. She never directly stated that this affected her social interactions with her peers, but one has to wonder if this did in fact have an impact. Moreover, spending money on acne treatments decreased the amount of money she had to participate in campus life.

Ordway seemed to enjoy and partook eagerly of this new physical culture regardless of her socioeconomic background. Based on her diary reflections, her physical appearance seemed to contribute to her lack of self-esteem. She spent precious financial resources attempting to mitigate facial acne when those resources might have been applied toward other aspects of campus life.

Support

The emotional and financial support that Ordway received from her community, family, and institution helped pave the way for her to complete college. She received advice from several people about what to do in college and how to be successful as a student, which contributed to her success. In addition, she received financial and emotional support from her parents, which

⁴⁹ Ordway, 21 December 1909, VCASC.

⁵⁰ Ordway, 5 January 1910, VCASC.

⁵¹ Ordway, 13 June 1912, VCASC; Inflation calculator retrieved from <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com>.

played a large role in her persistence. She was able to pay for college from parental financial support, college scholarships, and working while a student.

Ordway received advice and support from several different people about how to be a college student. According to more recent higher education research, what matters most for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds is intervention and mentorship from one person in the student's life.⁵² Mentors accomplish this through health information, confidence building, and expressing the importance of education to the student.⁵³ In 1909, when visiting the high school that she graduated from, one of her former teachers suggested that she should get plenty of exercise and take classes from instructors "who have an inspiring and attractive personality regardless of what they teach. It is the influence of the instructor that counts, not the subject studied."⁵⁴ He also suggested that she find out who was on the scholarship committee when applying for a scholarship. Just a month later she received advice from her father, who offered, "Drive your work, don't let your work drive you."⁵⁵ In addition, she should be nice and agreeable to the students, get plenty of exercise, and take good care of her health. In an additional letter from her father, he admitted being pleased that she has been filled with "college spirit". He described college life as a unique experience. He made sure to warn her against lack of exercise. "I want to put in an emphatic warning. Look out for exercise. You are meeting my expectations grandly and I am just proud of my girl. Be careful and go ahead."⁵⁶ Her father stated in his letter that Ordway was exceeding his expectation, yet she would express concerns in her diary that she felt she was not living up to them.

⁵² Arthur Levine and Jana Nidiffer, *Beating the Odds: How the Poor Get to College* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996), 65.

⁵³ Levine and Nidiffer, *Beating the Odds*, 144.

⁵⁴ Ordway, 22 December 1909, VCASC.

⁵⁵ Ordway, 4 January 1910, VCASC.

⁵⁶ Ordway, 18 February 1910, VCASC.

It is interesting to compare two separate letters that she received from her parents and their advice to her. One can only wonder if her father's advice was different from her mother's in part because he had a college education whereas her mother did not. Her mother sent a letter in 1911 that suggested if Ordway did well in German that she might get appointed as a tutor and if she performed really well then possibly a professorship, ending the letter with "do your level best."⁵⁷ After graduating in 1913, her mother was still offering advice, telling Ordway she was fussy and that she did a lot of things that did not amount to much. She continued to explain that Ordway could not do everything but instead she should "chose those things that will advance you in your profession."⁵⁸ Ordway agreed with her mother's approximation of the situation and determined to do better. Her father offered support and satisfaction with Ordway, but her mother offered harsher assessment and expectations.

Struggling to pay tuition, Ordway attempted to secure scholarships while in college. In November 1909, Ordway requested a scholarship but was told that she was too late for the current year. Scholarship notices would be posted early next year on the bulletin boards. She was informed that she need to be in the habit of checking the bulletin boards and to keep her work up as high as possible.⁵⁹ In February 1910, she made a formal application for a scholarship for the following year.⁶⁰ In March she received a request to come to the secretary's office. This scared Ordway because she thought she would be notified that she had failed Latin. Instead of being told that she had failed, she was told that she received a \$150 scholarship for the following year. Her response was, "Happy! well I guess. I can't be so awfully bad or I wouldn't have gotten

⁵⁷ Ordway, 6 October 1911, VCASC.

⁵⁸ Ordway, 1 December 1913, VCASC.

⁵⁹ Ordway, 27 November 1909, VCASC.

⁶⁰ Ordway, 5 February 1910, VCASC.

this.”⁶¹ This was a generous amount and helpful, but the scholarship still did not come close to covering the full cost of attending Vassar.

The scholarship application process requested family involvement. In 1910 she wrote a formal application as to why she needed the additional support. She stated that her father contributed to her financial support, but he was unable to meet the total costs of her education. She wrote that if she would not receive a scholarship, she would like to be considered for a loan. Ordway indicated that she would pay back the loan after she graduated while working as a teacher. In February 1910, Ordway’s father sent a letter on his daughter’s behalf requesting financial assistance. Her father wrote that they were able to pay for their daughter’s clothing, carfare, books, and so on, but they could spend no more than \$150 per year to help support her. Ordway’s father requested that his daughter be given merit aid in the form of a scholarship. If there remained any additional balance due, it would have to be requested as a loan. He went on to say that his daughter was very happy at college and with her work there.⁶² In the fall of her second year of college, she received a check in the amount of \$200 from “Mrs. John H. Strong of Rochester Branch of Vassar Students’ Aid Society”⁶³

Throughout her college years, Ordway had to compete in the scholarship application process, and this financial support allowed her to complete her degree. In March 1911, Ordway made a formal application for the following school year, requesting that it not be given as a loan. She recorded, “If my work is such that I deserve any help to enable me to continue my studies here I request that the generous assistance which you now are giving me may be continued and I

⁶¹ Ordway, 25 March 1910, VCASC.

⁶² Ordway, 28 February 1910, VCASC.

⁶³ Ordway, 27 September 1910, VCASC.

promise to do my best.”⁶⁴ Later that month, she was notified that she received a scholarship for \$150. She was informed that her standing was “all right for that.”⁶⁵ At the beginning of the next fall, Ordway requested money from the Vassar College Students’ Aid Society. She received notice that she would be given \$200 each year from 1911 to 1913.⁶⁶

Feeling pressure to perform well in her academics in order to keep scholarships created stress for Ordway. In 1912, she was called to the office that administered the scholarships. The administrator asked, “Can't you work a little harder? Your work is not very high.”⁶⁷ Ordway was surprised by this and concluded that her “marks must be terribly low.” A little over a month later, she had a conversation with her economics’ professor about her quizzes and paper in the course, all of which she had received C grades. Being a scholarship student, this pressure to perform well in her courses must have placed even greater stress on Ordway. In 1912, she had her father complete an additional endorsement for the scholarship application process.⁶⁸ It was for a scholarship of \$150.00 for 1912 and 1913 school year. In 1912, she stated that she received a check from Rochester branch of Vassar Students’ Aid Society. With the \$200 she received, she settled her college account.⁶⁹ In an entry about a week later, she described writing to the administrator of the Vassar Students’ Aid Society thanking her for the \$200 loan.⁷⁰ It seems that Ordway received both a scholarship as well as a loan based on her letter thanking the society for the loan.

⁶⁴ Ordway, 1 March 1911, VCASC.

⁶⁵ Ordway, 20 March 1911, VCASC.

⁶⁶ Ordway, 12 August 1911, VCASC.

⁶⁷ Ordway, 27 February 1912, VCASC.

⁶⁸ Ordway, 13 February 1912, VCASC.

⁶⁹ Ordway, 12 September 1912, VCASC.

⁷⁰ Ordway, 24 September 1912, VCASC.

In addition to receiving scholarship funds, she made money by tutoring students, delivering mail, and general work for the college. Tutoring students involved not only tutoring, but also compiling an invoice and collecting the money due. In December 1909 she submitted a bill for \$4.25 to the student, but the student gave her a check for \$7.⁷¹ To a certain extent, this students' generosity also reflected the wealth gap between the two, as the student could seemingly easily afford to pay more than Ordway felt able to charge. In 1910, Ordway continued to work as a tutor earning \$.75 an hour two to three times a week and sold hand painted objects/artifacts for a commission of \$.05 each.⁷² Still needing to secure additional money, she applied for two jobs within two weeks, one was a general application for campus work and the other was at the library.⁷³ In the fall semester of her second year at Vassar, she started delivering mail in the morning and afternoon.⁷⁴ In October 1910, she reported that her income for the morning mail was \$.0952 and the afternoon mail was \$.0476.⁷⁵ In addition to delivering campus mail, she earned \$.50 for delivering two off campus notes. In 1911, she had to submit a statement to the secretary about how she had earned money at college.⁷⁶ In 1911, she was asked to consider working for the German department with the salary of \$.20 an hour.⁷⁷ In February 1912, she worked as a monitor in Philosophy. She was paid \$8 for doing that.⁷⁸ The next September, she was asked if she would consider being a tutor in German. Her name went before a faculty meeting to approve the appointment.⁷⁹

⁷¹ Ordway, 15 December 1909, VCASC.

⁷² Ordway, 13 March 1910, VCASC.

⁷³ Ordway, 30 April 1910 and 16 May 1910, VCASC.

⁷⁴ Ordway, 26 September 1910, VCASC.

⁷⁵ Ordway, 15 October 1910, VCASC.

⁷⁶ Ordway, 20 May 1911, VCASC.

⁷⁷ Ordway, 30 September 1911, VCASC.

⁷⁸ Ordway, 7 February 1912, VCASC.

⁷⁹ Ordway, 28 September 1912, VCASC.

Although it did not meet the full financial need for attending Vassar, Ordway received financial support from her parents and aunt. In September 1910, her aunt sent her \$50. After writing to her father about these funds, he advised her to send it to him so that he could deposit it for her and earn interest.⁸⁰ From the letter that Ordway's father wrote for the scholarship application, he clearly stated that they provided financial support for Ordway. They were just unable to meet the full financial need of a Vassar education. In 1911, Ordway received a letter from her mother giving her \$5 to use, but her mother advised Ordway to "make it go as far as possible."⁸¹

Both of Ordway's parents took part in her financial education as well as financially supporting her. Ordway's parents appeared to be transparent about their money situation with their daughter. Interestingly, one of the themes that Ordway wrote about in a class was on women knowing about their parents' finances. Additional information was not given regarding what she thought or concluded from this paper.⁸² In 1912, Ordway received a letter from her mother stating that she did not know if the family could visit or not because "all these things take money."⁸³

Not only did Ordway receive financial advice from her parents, she also received it in the form of a lecture from the President of Vassar. In March 1910, the President gave a lecture to the students on managing their expenditures. The President admonished the students because some Vassar students had created debt and left it unpaid for too long. He described using debt in that manner as an extravagance. In addition he would not be responsible for their mismanagement of their funds. He described assuming debt as a moral wrong. In addition, he stated that many men

⁸⁰ Ordway, 30 September 1910, VCASC.

⁸¹ Ordway, 6 October 1911, VCASC.

⁸² Ordway, 11 March 1910, VCASC.

⁸³ Ordway, 12 May 1912, VCASC.

have been “ruined by a girl who never learned to restrain herself.”⁸⁴ Learning to take care of their finances was a responsibility that the students of Vassar needed to do on their own. If the student exceeded their expenses beyond their financial means, it was the responsibility of the student’s father to talk with them about it. The President suggested that the following rules for spending money should be followed. Students should eliminate self-indulgence for money that is wasted on food, spreads, and flowers. Instead they should use their money for books and art, things that will last over time. The second rule the President gave was to not contract debts. The last rule was to contribute to charity by giving it to poor people who needed money for the necessities of life.

Receiving emotional and financial support from her family, community, and college contributed to Ordway’s persistence at college and eventually earning her degree. The financial support that Ordway received during her college years was not without complications. Applying and receiving scholarships for her education helped pave the way for degree attainment; however the added pressure of maintaining satisfactory performance contributed to the stress she felt during college.

Mental Health

Ordway’s struggles with mental health issues in her college years seemed to stem from her perfectionist nature, high family expectations, and low self-esteem, not to mention the stress of continually needing support to remain enrolled. She tended to set unachievable high standards for herself and then proceeded to berate herself when she did not meet those standards. While mental health is a complex issue and there is no definitive evidence of a mental health diagnosis

⁸⁴ Ordway, 7 March, 1910, VCASC.

for Ordway, her diary provides extensive evidence that she struggled with her mental health during her college years.

As early as 1909, during her first semester of college, Ordway's perfectionist nature, desire to live up to the expectations of her family, and low self-esteem put pressure on her mental health. In her diary that November, she wrote,

I do not feel that I am living up to what papa and mama and Claire are expecting of me and have a perfect right to expect. I work and work but don't come out as I'd like to. Surely I can't be perfect but I can be nearer perfection. This is the hardest problem I've had to solve yet. Hope I get the right answer.⁸⁵

Four months later she wrote, "My faults far overbalance my virtues and if my course so far has not been far short of what it ought to be, what mama and papa expect it to be I am greatly mistaken. I am far from satisfied with my work and my course so far."⁸⁶ Feeling pressure to do well in college, she focused all her energy on her coursework, which left little time for other activities.

The pressure Ordway placed on herself persisted over time. About a year later in 1910, Ordway recorded, "I have not gotten ahead but lived from day to day. My work is absolutely disgusting. It is totally unsatisfactory to me. I am not excelling and I am ashamed of it but, it is a glaring truth."⁸⁷ She described her perceived deficits as "slowness, lack of concentration, uninterestingness and unattractiveness coupled with a failure to see the essential point and think deeply and thoroughly to the bottom of a question. I am not doing my duty to papa, mama, Claire or to Vassar College."⁸⁸ This was her second mention of feeling as though she was disappointing her parents and sister by not excelling in her coursework. Two months later, she again castigated

⁸⁵ Ordway, 23 November 1909, VCASC.

⁸⁶ Ordway, 13 March 1910, VCASC.

⁸⁷ Ordway, 1 November 1910, VCASC.

⁸⁸ Ordway, 16 November 1909, VCASC.

herself for her perceived weaknesses: “Stop being careless and master your work. Learn it once and for all and have always when you have finished studying a piece of work the feeling that you know it and are sure of it. Be abreast of the times and let your classmates say Ask Gretta Ordway -- she knows.”⁸⁹ She fantasized about having so much knowledge that her classmates look to her for answers. Seemingly disappointed in herself for a C in one of her courses, Ordway stated, “Yes, but it ought to be A I said. I tried not to cry but the tears would come.”⁹⁰ This instructor appears to be concerned and supportive, yet all Ordway can concentrate on is the lack of a perfect score. This perfectionism carried throughout all of her years of college and seemed to affect the way she felt about only her work but also herself. Throughout her years at Vassar she wrote about her perfectionist tendencies in her diary. The results of her perfectionist nature and the failure to live up to her high expectations seemed to cause her feelings of distress.

Peer interactions increased Ordway’s feelings of not living up to her full potential. In February 1910, after making a mistake in class, a fellow student asked Ordway, “What’s the matter with you Gretta you don’t do nearly as well as you did last semester.”⁹¹ Ashamed and exhausted, she hurried to her room and cried. Further elaborating on the situation, she described studying the appropriate amount of time yet she still felt discouraged and implored herself to make it “superfine.” She resolved to find a solution to improve her academic work. She strove to become an honor student and receive a Phi Beta Kappa key.⁹²

Not only was Ordway personally ambitious, but her mother also seemed to approach living vicariously through her daughter, increasing the pressure on Ordway to excel academically. In a letter from her mother in 1910, her mother described Gretta’s opportunities

⁸⁹ Ordway, 19 January 1911, VCASC.

⁹⁰ Ordway, 13 April 1912, VCASC.

⁹¹ Ordway, 24 February 1910, VCASC.

⁹² Ordway, 11 April 1910, VCASC.

and the high expectations that she was judged against. Her mother reminded Gretta that she wished that she had had the opportunity to attend college, writing “I want my precious girl to strive for her mother in the world. When I see how I can delight cultured people with my present ability, what might I not have done if I was a college woman, but it is too late now & I can only do my best as I am.”⁹³ In an attempt to meet the expectation that she and her family have set for her, in 1911 Ordway listed the following resolutions: “1. To exercise every day. 2. As a rule to retire at 10 p.m. 3. To plan work as papa suggests 4. To make friends 5. To acquire and exercise executive ability. 6. To honor papa and mama each day. 7. To get clothes fixed before last day of vacation.”⁹⁴

Never feeling included or making friends with the other college students caused her extreme feelings of isolation and loneliness. Struggling with loneliness and perfectionism, her first year in college was full of emotional stress. Although Ordway described the other students as nice, she felt that they did not like her, and she did not feel part of the larger community. Feeling lonely and isolated in her second semester of college in 1910, Ordway demonstrated an intense desire for close friends and to feel connection to the campus, but she did not know how to achieve that. There were three college women that she occasionally spoke to, but she felt as though they talked to her only because they were being nice, not because they liked her. The seat next to her in the dining hall usually remained vacant unless there was a strong demand for seats. In February 1910, she wrote, “I feel that no one cares a flip about me here. I am indispensable to no one. Whether I have a good time or not makes absolutely no difference to a soul.”⁹⁵ She did not want to intrude or invite herself into situations where she was not wanted.

⁹³ Ordway, 29 April 1910, VCASC.

⁹⁴ Ordway, 1 March 1911, VCASC.

⁹⁵ Ordway, 1 February 1910, VCASC.

She went on to say in the same entry, “I feel like a floating island, on the great sea of life, fighting my own battles, doing my own work, having no share in the lives of others, yes, utterly detached from the numerous human beings, of my own age, around me.”⁹⁶

In March 1910, writing that she did not dance and did not have the easy sociability that other girls had, she continued to struggle with isolation and loneliness. “I haven’t a close friend in this whole college with whom I am seen as a rule and who is my recognized chum. . . I hope there are girls here particularly a girl, one girl whom I may have for my very own friend.”⁹⁷ She described herself as passive and unoriginal. Striving to be a “perfect woman with high ideals,” she wrote, “I long to be loved and have the girls go down the corridors and across the campus with their arms around me as others are encircled.” While she wanted to do the best she could in her coursework, she longed to have strong friendships. Missing out on key aspects of college life contributed to Ordway’s loneliness and isolation. The majority of Vassar students who were included in college life wrote home about how happy they were to participate in this aspect of college.⁹⁸ According to historian Helen Horowitz, students at private women’s colleges divided themselves into “cliques, which formed a hierarchical scale.”⁹⁹ Two months later, Ordway still struggled with loneliness. “Oh.....I have had the BLUES and have been so lonesome.”¹⁰⁰ In 1912, her last year of college, she still struggled to find a close friend and dealt with the stress of perfectionism, both of which contributed to her unhappiness.

Attempting to paint an accurate verbal description of herself and her personality, in 1910 Ordway recorded several personal reflections that reflected the status of her mental health and

⁹⁶ Ordway, 1 February 1910, VCASC.

⁹⁷ Ordway, 13 March 1910, VCASC.

⁹⁸ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 148.

⁹⁹ Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 152.

¹⁰⁰ Ordway, 8 April 1910, VCASC.

seemingly low self-esteem. As far as physical appearance, she described herself as unattractive because of a big nose, acne, and sideburns on her face. To finish off the description of her appearance, she described not being able to style her hair well and her clothes were not as “smart” as other girls, challenges that were attributable in part to her limited economic resources. Moving beyond her physical appearance, she recorded that she worked most of the time, but not with as much concentration as she would like. She did not read any leisurely material throughout the week even though she enjoyed it. With regard to athletics, she was not particularly strong or gifted in that area.¹⁰¹ She recorded her schoolwork as average, but that she lacked accuracy because of carelessness and complained that her writing was “abominable.” She struggled with conversation with others because she did not know what to say or how to say it clearly, and she did “not employ a rich vocabulary.” Her personal reflections were filled with negative comments regarding her physical appearance, her performance, and lack of involvement in student life. Demonstrating insight into her tendency to have a negative perspective, she wrote, “I am inclined to brood over my faults and think about myself.”¹⁰²

She attributed few positive qualities to herself. On the positive side of her personality, Ordway appreciated that she loved her family and her religion. She described Jesus as her friend and companion, without whom her life would be empty. In addition, she described herself as “kind hearted and willing to do anything I can to help another.”¹⁰³ Reveling in one of the happiest and pleasing days of her Vassar career the next month, she listed having awakened early feeling intellectually stimulated and alert all day. She listed all of the ways in which she was prepared and participated in class. This is one of the few times that she has expressed satisfaction

¹⁰¹ Ordway, 13 March 1910, VCASC.

¹⁰² Ordway, 13 March 1910, VCASC.

¹⁰³ Ordway, 13 March 1910, VCASC.

with her work and feeling as though she met her goals. “Oh today has been so happy . . . Retired 10.50 P.M. tired but very happy. [in margin] I have been master of my work today.”¹⁰⁴

The pressure to perform exceptionally well at Vassar often demonstrated through perfectionism, pressure from self, parents, and peers, as well as feeling isolated from other students, caused Ordway great stress during her academic career. This lack of satisfaction with her performance, isolation, and feelings of loneliness kept her on the periphery of the student life she desired.

Future Career

Ordway began to plan what she would do after college in her last semester of college. There is evidence that Ordway wanted to continue her higher education, but was unable to do so because of limited financial means. In 1913, during her last semester of college, she applied for a fellowship at Columbia to study English and German.¹⁰⁵ There were only four fellowship recipients and she was not one of them. After graduating from Vassar, Ordway paid \$2 to join the Pratt Teacher’s Agency. She then began interviewing for teaching positions.¹⁰⁶ In addition to interviewing for teaching positions, she traveled. She attended the WCTU World’s Convention at the Academy of Music in Brooklyn, New York.¹⁰⁷ She traveled with the Ladies’ Missionary Society. While waiting on a teaching appointment, Ordway taught Sunday school and mission study classes in her hometown. In December 1913 she was offered a position to teach high school in Sharon, Connecticut. She continued her diary by writing about her daily life and experiences teaching there. She recorded receiving a salary of \$500 per year.

¹⁰⁴ Ordway, 18 April 1910, VCASC.

¹⁰⁵ Ordway, 22 February 1913, VCASC.

¹⁰⁶ Ordway, 9 July 1913, VCASC.

¹⁰⁷ Ordway, 24 October 1913, VCASC.

Ordway persisted in her habit of writing in her diary after she secured a full time teaching position. In 1914 she recorded that her first day of teaching was pleasant. She taught German, geometry, and Cicero. She was invited to the Sharon Women's Literary Society and met several women, one of who was wearing a Vassar pin.¹⁰⁸ Ordway was appointed for a second year of teaching at that school with a hundred dollar raise for a total salary of \$600. The consultation with her parents regarding financial matters continued after college. When discussing her salary and subsequent raise with her parents, they advised her to save \$200 of her salary and put it in the bank.¹⁰⁹ In 1920 she began graduate coursework at New York University earning her Master's degree in 1926. She taught high school English until she retired in 1959.

Conclusion

College allowed Ordway to achieve the purpose of financial independence that she set for herself. It was not without struggle and challenges, but she received support and persisted to graduation. She did not enjoy the campus life or social experiences at college due to financial constraints, which caused her emotional distress. She struggled with perfectionism and low self-esteem contributing to mental health issues that prevented her from fully enjoying her coursework and time on campus. These things could have easily derailed her goals, but she had a strong social support system that allowed her to persevere. Given that the majority of women who attended Northeastern women's colleges during this time period were wealthy, it is not often that we read about the experiences of women in prestigious colleges who were from middle-class backgrounds. By documenting her struggle with paying for an elite college, we learn how a middle-class student accessed and persisted at a wealthy private college, but not without emotional toll. Ordway was fortunate that she had parents who supported her

¹⁰⁸ Ordway, 5 January 1914, VCASC.

¹⁰⁹ Ordway, 1 June 1914, VCASC.

emotionally and financially through her collegiate years, even if her mother sometimes provided harsh feedback. While her parents were unable to pay the full cost of her college, they gave her guidance and support in other ways that allowed her to fulfill her dream of graduating from Vassar and independently supporting herself. She received financial support from the college in the form of scholarships and loans. She also supported herself by working all four years of college. While Ordway did not go on to become a well-known popular figure, her story is important because college helped her realize her dream of financial self-support and autonomy and documents the emotional turmoil that paying for her college education cost.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The intention of this dissertation was to connect the findings from the historical scholarship and individual studies in order to create a bigger picture of the impact that socioeconomic status had on White women's experiences in higher education from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Socioeconomic status affected the experiences of White women in higher education during this period regarding the purpose of higher education for women, college experience, and their lives after college. Overall, as the historiography in Chapter 2 highlights, the purpose of women's higher education depended on the socioeconomic background of the students; wealthier women were training their minds and less wealthy women were training for paid employment. Women from higher socioeconomic backgrounds had more choices for their lives after college than women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The individual case studies in Chapters 3 and 4 highlight the emotional toil that paying for a college education had on both a lower class woman at a private Midwestern institution and a middle class woman at a wealthy institution in the Northeast. Both of these studies highlight a similar struggle at two different institutions within the time frame included in the larger historiography in this study, and they provide historical perspective to the phenomena of students attending colleges where the average student is wealthier than they are.

Drawing from a wealth of scholarship that has been written from historians of higher education, I constructed a historiography of White women's higher education from the late nineteenth century until the early twentieth century in Chapter 2. The three waves of scholarship have increased our knowledge of the history of women's higher education. Wealthy women at single-sex institutions in the North had a richer, more diverse academic and campus life than

other women students in higher education. Coeducational institutions in the Midwest and the West had more academic opportunities than women in higher education had previously known, but it came with a price of exclusion from campus life if you were from a lower socioeconomic background. College women at normal schools experienced a more equal campus experience compared to their male peers because all students had similar socioeconomic backgrounds and the proportion of women was high.

Previous historians have studied Mable Madeline Southard's life, but none have paid careful attention to the impact of her college years on her impressive career. There is a direct link from Southard's influential college years at Southwestern College to her life's work of advocating for women preachers in the Methodist Church, suffrage, sex, and women's rights. Studying the college experiences of Southard provides a more nuanced perception of the experiences of women students from low socioeconomic backgrounds but also the significance of higher education for them. Southard detailed her struggle during her college years. Dealing with financial and food insecurity while a college student often affected her mental health. She received support from her faith, family, church leaders, peers and professors. Southard was a remarkable figure pushing the boundaries of gender, education, and career for her time. Southard's story demonstrates how a low socioeconomic student successfully paid for her college education and used her experience to stretch gender boundaries and fight for equal rights for women.

Careful examination of Katherine Gretta Ordway's college years at Vassar College portrays the college life and mental health of a middle class student at a wealthy prestigious college. After graduating from Vassar, Ordway became a teacher and eventually earned her master's degree from New York University. College paved the way for Ordway to achieve the

independence that she desired. Feeling excluded in the campus life of college due to her socioeconomic background negatively affected her mental health. While this could have easily derailed her goals, she had a strong social support system and scholarships that allowed her to persevere and obtain her college education. The study of Ordway's life reveals the trials and triumphs of a middle-class socioeconomic student at a prestigious college.

Using a historiography of women's higher education to provide context, I synthesized and analyzed secondary materials as a literature review and showed change over time. The scholarship provided some information about socioeconomic status and experience, but none had used this as a central focus or argument. I used the chapters on Southard and Ordway to begin to fill the gap of the experience of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and the impact this had on their mental health. They were chosen because they fit the criteria of time in question, socioeconomic background, and their inclusion of mental health. Their stories and contributions provide us insight into what it meant to be a middle to lower socioeconomic student during this time. Scholarship on lower socioeconomic status students is scarce because they were not the dominant population of students who attended college.

While we want to believe that education is the great equalizer in our country, a complicated truth exists that socioeconomic status affects students in higher education. This has been the case in the past and it remains the case today. Students from different socioeconomic backgrounds experience higher education differently. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds seem to be less involved in student clubs and groups than their peers, work more outside of school, spend less time studying, and report lower grade point averages than their

peers.¹ According to Jenny Stuber, upper-middle class students come to college with cultural resources that motivate them to participate in campus activities as well as social resources that allow them to be involved.² According to Joan Ostrove and Susan Long, institutions of education have class-based markers that suggest to others who belongs and who does not.³ College students experience systematic discrimination based on social class. Socioeconomic backgrounds tend to affect students' lives after graduation with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds earning less income and attending graduate school at a lower rate than their peers. Not only do they experience higher education differently, the two case studies that I have included indicate that there could be a relationship between low socioeconomic status and mental health. Historians of higher education have given some attention to socioeconomic status, but there is room to delve deeper. We need to understand the past to be more sensitive to the present.

Understanding early college women's experiences and the impact of socioeconomic status provides insights into the present situation women in higher education experience today. Many historians have recognized to a certain degree the socioeconomic status of the women they study, but that has not been a most important focal point in their work and there is room to study this topic further. According to Jana Nidiffer, "socioeconomic status predicts both college attendance and persistence better than any other variable".⁴ Understanding how this happened over time might help us reverse this development. In addition to affecting attendance and persistence, contemporary students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to borrow more

¹ Walpole, "Socioeconomic Status and College: How SES Affects College Experiences and Outcomes."

² Jenny Stuber, "Class, Culture, and Participation in the Collegiate Extra-Curriculum," *Sociological Forum* 24, no. 4 (2009): 877–900.

³ Joan M. Ostrove and Susan M. Long, "Social Class and Belonging: Implications for College Adjustment," *The Review of Higher Education* 30, no. 4 (2007): 363–89.

⁴ Jana Nidiffer, "The 'Poorest' in American Higher Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1999): 336.

loans to finance their education than other students. Using student loans to finance higher education can have an impact on student access and success.⁵ In 2015, Nicolas Hillman suggested that most students who borrowed money to pay for their education reported feeling upset that they had to borrow money for college. This was demonstrated by stating that they were worried, guilty, anxious, nervous, and stressed out. There are emotional as well as financial costs associated with acquiring student loans.⁶ According to Hillman, student loan debt can help or hinder students. When student loans remove money constraints, loans help students persist. When student loans introduce new barriers, such as financial stress about paying back the loans, loans can discourage persistence. Having student loan debt has been linked to decreased mental health while in college as well as into early adulthood.⁷ As has been demonstrated by this study, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds miss out on many important aspects of college life.

While historians tend not to provide specific recommendations for practice from their studies, the experiences of Southard and Ordway do suggest some things that contemporary higher education should be aware and address. First, financial insecurity clearly contributed to mental health challenges for both of these women students. Rarely having enough money to pay for tuition, boarding, food, and other basic necessities of life, Southard often wrote about her financial struggle and its resulting anxiety. This anxiety manifested physically through extreme fatigue. Ordway struggled with mental health issues due to the pressure to perform well in

⁵ Nicholas W. Hillman, "Borrowing and Repaying Student Loans," *Journal of Student Financial Aid* 45, no. 3 (2015): 35–48.

⁶ Carrie L. Johnson et al., "What Are Student Loan Borrowers Thinking? Insights From Focus Groups on College Selection and Student Loan Decision Making," *Journal of Financial Counseling and Planning* 27, no. 2 (2016): 184–98.

⁷ Katrina M. Walsemann, Gilbert C. Gee, and Danielle Gentile, "Sick of Our Loans: Student Borrowing and the Mental Health of Young Adults in the United States," *Social Science & Medicine* 124 (2015): 85–93.

academics, a perfectionist personality, and low self-esteem. Further contributing to Ordway's decreased mental health was a lack of inclusion and sense of belonging in campus life due to being a less wealthy student at a primarily wealthy college.

The mental health issues that the women in the case studies experienced happened over 100 years ago yet are relevant for contemporary college students. Mental health issues have been reportedly increasing at colleges and universities.⁸ Students experience anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, adaptation problems, and psychological distress. Leaving crucial social support systems from family and home often contributes to these issues. Student affairs practitioners, higher education counselors and higher education administrators should be aware of the mental health issues that students can face especially those students from disadvantaged groups. Positive mental health behavior should be promoted on college campuses by all faculty and staff. Programs that teach positive coping techniques for students and promote positive adaptation should be incorporated especially for first year students.

Some other recommendations for practice based on the findings in this dissertation are to create programming opportunities designed specifically for lower socioeconomic students to form friendships with similar others and to develop support networks that create a sense of belonging and combat those feelings of loneliness that some students experience. Facilitating programs that encourage engagement and participation from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be helpful for their mental health and academic success. Also, something as simple as encouraging students to stay connected with their families and their spiritual practices or faith could help alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation. For women students from lower

⁸ Julie Marcotte and Geneviève Lévesque, "Anxiety and Well-Being Among Students in a Psychoeducation Program: The Mediating Role of Identity," *Journal of College Student Development* 59, no. 1 (2018): 90–104.

socioeconomic backgrounds, it is important to recognize the intersection of gender and class and the discrimination that can contribute to an unwelcoming campus environment. Focusing on programs that alleviate unwelcoming environments, providing academic and social support, and creating a sense of community might be able to soften negative department climates for women students in certain fields.

While the examples that are included in this study are rich, thick descriptive examples from the historical research, there are many opportunities to study this area further. More case studies from various institutions of higher education could be included. The following questions are ripe for exploration: What were the experiences of minoritized students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds? How have experiences of lower socioeconomic students at specific institutions changed over time? What impact has institutional policies had on the experiences of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds? If education is indeed the great equalizer, then we need to understand the implications and impact that socioeconomic status can have on students and use this information in practice to improve the support of college students.

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