

MOTHERS OF MEN: THE A&M MOTHERS' CLUBS AND COEDUCATION

A Senior Honors Thesis

by

DOROTHA M. OCKER

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs  
& Academic Scholarships  
Texas A&M University  
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Group: Cultural Studies

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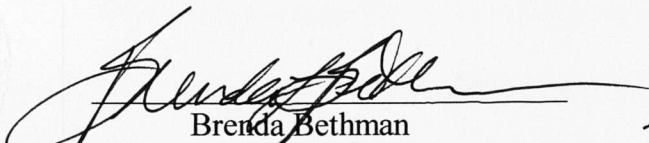
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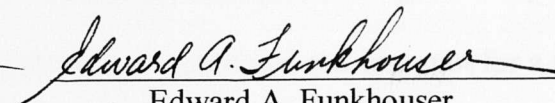
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## ABSTRACT

Mothers of Men: A&M Mothers' Clubs and Coeducation. (April 2003)

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In 1933 the Texas A&M Mothers' Clubs sent petitions and letters to the Board of Advisors requesting that Texas A&M University retain its all-male status. While most studies of women opposed to equal rights center on the women maintaining power through their feminine sphere of influence, the mothers of the A&M Mothers' Clubs at this time were more concerned with being defined as good mothers by maintaining their sons' power.

My research of the action of the A&M Mothers' Clubs focuses on two main aspects: a historical perspective and the social construction of motherhood. In 1933, the United States faced the worst of the Great Depression, with no end in sight. Every spot a woman had in either education or the workforce was considered one less spot for a man. Gender, or the social construct defining roles for men and women, at the time dictated that men become wage earners and support a family. It was very important in a time of high unemployment that men find a way to fulfill their roles. Men spent most of their time outside of the home, and mothers stayed home with their children. Society feared that males raised by mothers would become too feminine, so mothers were advised to

teach their sons masculinity, or their proper gender role. The social construction of motherhood also greatly changed during the 1910s when these women were raising their sons. Society began to treat motherhood as a profession, and like all professions of the times, there was a right way and a wrong way to perform your job. Known as scientific motherhood, mothers during this time were advised exactly how to raise a child. Direct participation in a child's education was also common, with Parent Teachers' Associations springing up across the country. Psychologically, mothers began to bear the brunt of disorders. More and more problems were attributed to the effects of bad mothering upon a child, and mothers strove to earn the label of good mother. The Victorian era glorification of the mother was slowly disappearing when these women entered motherhood.

When these forces combined to work on mothers from the 1910s to 1930s, women cared about the status of their sons. In an effort to maintain their sons' gender role of provider, secure him a spot in education, and be an involved mother, the mothers of the Texas A&M Mothers' Clubs worked to maintain the all-male status of Texas A&M University. Like other women opposed to equal rights, these women organized themselves into an effective group, but unlike those women, the mothers of the A&M Mothers' Clubs strove to maintain their sons' power, and not their own.

## DEDICATION

To my parents, for always believing that I could achieve anything, inspiring me to try, and being the proof that character and determination will create success. Thank you for nurturing my independence and supporting my education. I wish all parents did the same.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Brenda Bethman, my advisor, is obviously the reason why I managed to finish this project. She always knew which book to read or which sentence to rework, but she let me do the project in whichever way I wanted. I appreciate that. Also, I need to acknowledge Rollyn Carlson and everyone at the Women's Center for being sources of inspiration, and for letting me check out books for months at a time.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

“All these facts lie somewhere, presumably, in parish registers and account books; the life of the average Elizabethan woman must be scattered about somewhere, could one collect it and make a book of it. It would be ambitious beyond my daring. I thought, looking about the shelves for books that were not there, to suggest to the students of those famous colleges that they should re-write history, though I own that it often seems a little queer as it is, unreal, lop-sided; but why should they not add a supplement to history? calling it, of course, by some inconspicuous name so that women might figure there without impropriety? For one often catches a glimpse of them in the lives of the great, whisking away into the background, concealing, I sometimes think, a wink, a laugh, perhaps a tear.”

----- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929

Men's deeds, actions, intents, and laws fill the history books. However, women have contributed to society in many ways: as mothers, as wives, and as human beings. At first, research concerning women in history consisted of finding the facts pertaining to women and making books of it, as Woolf suggested. In addition, women's contributions need to be analyzed, not just enumerated (Hogeland 1973). Historians researching American women's history have often focused on white middle-class women who struggled to obtain equality for themselves and all women. Historians switched from ignoring women to portraying them as superwomen, competing against the greatest of odds and winning rights for themselves and their daughters (Hogeland 1973). However, American women did not all work towards the same goals nor did they



have the same experiences. Women who opposed equal rights are often ignored or brushed aside in history texts, except for large, well-organized groups such as those that opposed suffrage and the Equal Rights Amendment (Camhi 1994). We need to research more than just how women have acted as a group opposed to sexism throughout history; we need to research the social interactions that define womanhood (Hogeland 1973). The history of the A&M Mothers' Clubs intertwines the history Texas A&M University, the history of the South, the history of women, the history of motherhood, and also the history of men. This project is not only informative, but also analytical. I have attempted to recreate the "climate of opinion" in which the mothers of the A&M Mothers' Clubs lived in order to offer an analysis of their actions pertaining to coeducation (Hogeland 1973, 1).

The A&M Mothers' Clubs have long been a part of the history of Texas A&M University<sup>2</sup>, beginning with the first A&M Mothers' Club formed in 1922 by Mrs. Ada Brooks Allen Peoples in Dallas. According to the handout that the Federation of A&M Mothers' Clubs gives to new recruits each year, the purpose of the club was "to contribute in every way to the comfort and welfare of the boys and to cooperate with the faculty of the college in maintaining a high standard of moral conduct and intellectual attainment" (aggiemoms.org 2002). In keeping with this objective, the A&M Mothers' Clubs acted twice in the interest of maintaining A&M College of Texas's all-male policy begun in 1925. The first instance was a letter-writing campaign and petitions of support later used as evidence in a court case initiated by women who were refused admission in 1933. The second instance occurred in 1963 when the A&M Mothers' Clubs sent

representatives to the Capitol building in Austin to demonstrate in support of a bill that would restore Texas A&M University's all-male status. In 1963, Mrs. Fred McGinn represented the Abilene Mothers' Club and asked that the Federation of Mothers Clubs cease contributing monetarily to the university until it reinstated its all-male policy (Smith 2002). While both occurrences are important to the history of Texas A&M University and women in general, my thesis focuses on the social conditions existing the first time the A&M Mothers' Clubs acted to bar women from A&M College of Texas in 1933.

In 1933, members of Texas A&M Mothers' Clubs wrote letters and petitioned the A&M College of Texas to retain its all-male status. White, Southern, middle-class mothers used the protest methods of their time to try to persuade officials to prohibit women from attending A&M College of Texas. These women, unlike anti-suffrage women, were less concerned with gaining political power for themselves or to keep their daughters from becoming unfeminine as a result of college education (Camhi 1994). Instead, these women were influenced by their historical and gender context as mothers of sons to try everything they could to ensure their sons' places in society. Their primary identification was with being "mothers of men," not "mothers of children," or women. In order to understand the reaction of the A&M Mothers' Clubs to the idea of coeducation at A&M College of Texas, I will attempt to recreate the climate of opinion of this time by analyzing the gender views, historical timeframe, and ideas of motherhood that led these women to act in what they perceived to be their sons' best interests.

## *Gender*

In order to understand the actions of the women of the A&M Mothers' Clubs, one must understand gender, gender roles, and the internalization of gender roles by both men and women. Gender and sex are separate in a study of the relationships between women and men. Sex refers to the biological components, e.g. hormones, genetics, secondary sex characteristics, of a person (Paludi 1998). Gender is defined as "the social, cultural, and psychological aspects that pertain to the traits, norms, stereotypes, and roles of women and men" (Paludi 1998, 6). Gender changes throughout history and is both time and place specific. Gender roles are the combination of all the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that society prescribes for each sex (Paludi 1998).

Throughout American history, women's primary role was that of mother, to such an extent that women often lost all identity as a person (Paludi 1998). Indeed, throughout history women have felt a struggle among the forces that shaped womanhood – sexuality, motherhood, and personhood – but motherhood is often the most prominent role that a woman must perform (Stone 1999). Historically, women were required to have as many children, preferably sons, as possible (Paludi 1998).

Gender roles changed dramatically at the turn of the century. Old Victorian ideals of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness for femininity were replaced with the New Woman, a much more independent and free spirited woman (Paludi 1998). However, the women of the Texas A&M Mothers' Club were most likely married by 1910, so they may still have retained the ideals of the Victorian Age. The New Woman

did not fully emerge until the 1920s and was mostly embraced by young, unmarried women (Evans 1989).

Historically, the gender of males has not been studied nearly as much as females. One role that has been prescribed for men has been that of provider. Men were expected to be the source of income for the family, and to spend that income wisely by providing for the needs of the family. While a woman must devote her entire day and life towards childrearing and housekeeping, a man was expected to spend the time and effort necessary to keep his family fed and sheltered (Kimmel 1996).

The ideas of gender, gender roles, and the status society gives to each gender is important when evaluating the actions of the A&M Mothers' Clubs. After analyzing the historical climate and social ideas concerning motherhood, I will show that the mothers of the A&M Mothers' Clubs actively participated in perpetuating and internalizing gender roles. When these mothers identified with their role as mothers of men, and the social expectations that define that role, they chose to write letters against coeducation at A&M College of Texas.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### *Introduction*

As part of recreating the climate in which the A&M Mothers' Club mothers lived, I will explain a few of the historical elements that shaped public opinion by 1933. While each section has a history that continued well beyond 1933, I shall focus on the events leading up to 1933 which influenced the mothers of the A&M Mothers' Clubs in their campaign against coeducation.

The section on the history of women at A&M College of Texas will show how the opinion of allowing women to attend the school changed over time. The history of A&M Mother's Clubs provides an interesting account of the role in which the current members see their past and how the original members viewed their purpose. The history of women in education shows the changing view of society toward female education and how the female students themselves viewed their influence. Lastly, the Great Depression provides a poignant economic backdrop to the education debate. My goal is to show how the history of women at A&M College of Texas, women in the A&M Mothers' Clubs, women in education, and the Great Depression all work together to create a public opinion concerning the ramifications of admitting women as full students into A&M College of Texas.

### *History of Women at A&M College of Texas*

In October of 1876 the Agricultural and Mechanical College began classes. The Texas Senate Committee that was sent to inspect the campus stated their opinion that the school should admit both men and women, even considering the military nature of the school. The catalogs do not mention a prohibition against women wishing to study at AMC, but they also do not mention women at all. Of course, at this time only six students, all male, were in attendance (Smith 2002).

The number of students attending quickly increased, and so did the number of women attending as “unofficial” students. During the 1890s and early 1900s, women attended classes, but the earliest women did not receive credit for their work. Later, women did receive credit, but could not earn a diploma. Instead, they transferred their credits to the University of Texas and received diplomas from that school (Knippa 1995).

During the 1890s, the state considered establishing an industrial school for women, and President Sullivan Ross received pressure to incorporate the school under the A&M College Board of Directors. The demand for coeducation was so high that Ross even proposed housing the school for women on the same campus as A&M College. Local citizens and businessmen extolled the community value of a school for women, and in 1899, the University of Texas and A&M College petitioned the state legislature for rights to build the woman’s college on their campuses. In response, the

legislature created a separate Board of Directors for the new college that would decide upon the ultimate location (Dethloff 1975).

A&M College of Texas first officially admitted women to its summer session in 1901. With the establishment of the new woman's college in Denton, which became Texas Woman's University, A&M College of Texas did not see a need to continue the summer sessions that allowed women formal access to the college (Dethloff 1975).

Women continued to study at A&M College of Texas during the first decade of the new century. In 1909, A&M College of Texas received permission from the state legislature to regularly hold summer sessions, but only if the school allowed both sexes to attend the summer sessions as fully enrolled students. Local women who studied at other universities during the long session could come back to their homes during the summer to study at A&M College of Texas. However, A&M College did not fully embrace coeducation. In 1915 the Board of Directors refused an endowed chair for domestic science, fearing that it would make the university fully coeducational. A&M College of Texas was still an engineering and science military school, even if a few women did attend classes (Dethloff 1975).

In 1925, Mary Evelyn Crawford became the first woman to receive a degree from A&M College of Texas. In September of the same year, the Board of Directors ruled that "no girls should ever be admitted to the College" (Dethloff 1975, 413). They had to rephrase their ruling in order to comply with the law that women must be admitted during the summer session, but after 1925 women were no longer allowed to attend regular sessions as formal or unofficial students. (Dethloff 1975; Knippa 1995).

In 1933, the worst year of the Great Depression, local families who were forced to send their daughters elsewhere for an education protested the rule prohibiting women from attending A&M College of Texas because they could no longer afford to pay for their daughters' expenses (Dethloff 1975).

On September 13, 1933, twelve local women, currently enrolled students in other colleges and summer students at A&M College, applied for admission to A&M College for the regular session. All applications were denied. Seven of those women decided to sue the college in order to gain admission. Texas law prohibited women from bringing suit in their own name, so their legal guardians sued President Thomas O. Walton and the Board of Directors in order to force the admission of their daughters and wives (Dethloff 1975). The plaintiffs secured the representation of C.C. Todd, an Aggie himself and the former Commandant of the Corps of Cadets (Smith 2002). *Stanford v. Walton* became a lawsuit of Aggies against Aggies (Dethloff 1975).

The hearings on *Stanford v. Walton* began in the District Court of Brazos County, Texas, on October 3, 1933 (Dethloff 1975). Four A&M Mothers' Clubs immediately wrote letters and petitions asking for the continuance of the all-male admission policy of A&M College, and A&M College quickly entered these letters and petitions into evidence. In a letter dated October 17, 1933, Mrs. A. L. Bendley, President, and Mrs. T. A. Dillingham, Secretary, wrote Dr. T. O. Walton, President of the Board of Directors, "We, the Ft. Worth A & M Mothers Club, in called meeting today voted unanimously in favor of maintaining A & M strictly a boys school" (*Stanford* 1933, 103). Grace Runyon, surprisingly using her first name without a title and clarifying with "(Mrs. J. W.



Runyon)” underneath her name, informed Dr. Walton in a letter dated October 10, 1933, “I am writing to tell you that the Dallas A & M College Mothers Club voted to go on record as being opposed to A & M College becoming a co-educational school. We will be glad to help in any way possible in this matter” (*Stanford* 1933, 103).

The San Angelo Mothers Club submitted a petition on October 6 in which they stated, “We, the San Angelo College Mothers Club resolved at the regular meeting of the Club this Friday October 5<sup>th</sup> 1933, that this petition be placed in the hands of President Walton and the Board of Directors at once, asking that the College be kept strictly a Boys College with no admittance of any girls to its registration. We ask that our petition be given due consideration” (*Stanford* 1933, 104). The letter written as an introduction to the petition also informed the Board of Directors that while the petition may have few signatures, the vote against coeducation at the local meeting was unanimous (*Stanford* 1933, 104).

The final letter submitted stated that “The San Antonio A. and M. Mothers in session October 10, 1933, voted unanimously against A. and M. College being made a Co-Ed College” (*Stanford* 1933, 105). The letter further threatened that these mothers would remove their sons from the school if a co-education policy became enforced. Interestingly, the women justified, but did not explain, their position by arguing that local women would be helped in the long run by attending college elsewhere because that would make them more marketable to local school districts (*Stanford* 1933). This justification hints that the San Antonio A&M Mothers’ Club was not against women

being educated, but instead against women being educated at A&M College, which taught only traditionally masculine subjects.

Missing from these letters are explanations as to why the mothers do not want women to attend A&M College of Texas. It seems odd that a petition asking the Board of Directors to decide an issue like coeducation would not contain some explanation of the women's reasoning. Two possible explanations for the deficiency are that the women did not exactly know why they did not want women attending A&M College of Texas or that the reaction of the mothers was so expected that it did not need to be explained. By looking at the ideas about work, gender, and motherhood prevalent at the time, we can clearly see that if the A&M Mothers' Club women identified primarily with being mothers of sons, then their actions were to be expected, certainly to the point that they would not need to explain their actions.

### *History of Texas A&M Mothers' Clubs*

My major source for this section comes from the website for the current Federation of A&M Mothers' Clubs. The history books on Texas A&M University devote very few lines to the subject of the A&M Mothers' Clubs. I have deviated little from their own presentation of their history and quoted extensively to convey the manner in which the current A&M Mothers' Clubs interpret their history.

While this study is an augmentation to the history of the A&M Mothers' Clubs's own version of their history, let me reiterate that the A&M Mothers' Clubs are some of the few sources that interpret their history, instead of just enumerating their deeds.<sup>3</sup> In

Chapter IV, I will present newspaper articles from the 1920s and 1930s that justify any of my interpretations that differ from those of the A&M Mothers' Clubs. These articles are presented last because one needs the historical and motherhood perspectives in order to understand their significance.

Mrs. H.L. Peoples became concerned for the welfare of her son Harold while he attended A&M College during his freshman year in 1921. The 1800 males who attended the college were forbidden to drive cars, either their own or someone else's, and thus became virtually stranded on the campus. Trains provided transportation home, and students could venture into Bryan by walking or riding the trolley. Human interaction, for the most young men, was limited to their professors and fellow students. In short, there was a "poor quality of life on the campus-no entertainment, no culture, and a complete lack of women's influence" (aggiemoms.org 2002).

Mrs. Peoples hoped to bring women's influence onto the campus in the form of maternal influence. She expressed this desire to Gov. Pat Neff at a state Parent Teacher Association convention when she stated that "strong ties to home" (meaning to their mothers) would create the sense of security and stability that made the students less likely to drop out of school (aggiemoms.org 2002).

Eager to spread this sense of home to her son, Mrs. Peoples visited College Station to see him, who unfortunately happened to be off-campus for a field trip. Her visit proved productive, however, because she shared her idea for a mothers' club with another male student. He endorsed her idea and expressed his opinion that parents should visit A&M beginning with their sons' freshman year, not just at graduation. Mrs.

Peoples also used this trip to interact with the other students and become familiar with the campus, including the dorms. By the time that she left the campus, Mrs. Peoples had decided that maternal influence was exactly what the students needed, and she was determined that she would help provide it (aggiemoms.org 2002).

On her arrival home to Dallas in February 1922, Mrs. Peoples organized eleven mothers into the first Texas A&M Mothers' Club, and she served as president. The objective of this new organization was "to contribute in every way to the comfort and welfare of the boys and to cooperate with the faculty of the college in maintaining a high standard of moral conduct and intellectual attainment" (aggiemoms.org 2002).<sup>4</sup> In order to determine how to implement this goal, the mothers felt that they needed to visit the campus (aggiemoms.org 2002).

"Traveling in a caravan of Model T's over dusty roads, they presented themselves and their ideas to A&M; they were practically laughed off campus. Undaunted, they organized a second caravan, and being wise mothers and knowing the way to a man's heart, they took with them fixings for what they called 'a spread'. This consisted of fried chicken, sandwiches, pies, and cookies. One hundred Dallas students, plus the President of A&M and his wife, attended the 'spread' which was such a success it became an annual affair and was extended to include the entire student body. Ada Peoples realized that the tender little things the mothers did for their students did not go far enough; many students in the state of Texas had the ambition of an education, but not the money. With this in mind that first mothers' club in Dallas established a student loan fund"<sup>5</sup> (aggiemoms.org 2002).

The second club originated in Forth Worth. Dr. Stout, President of Texas Women's College and the father of a A&M College student, believed that mothers' clubs would greatly improve the quality of life at A&M College of Texas. In October 1922, Dr. Stout placed an announcement in the Fort Worth Star Telegram stating, "All mothers of boys who are attending A&M College will meet at a luncheon Wednesday noon. The A&M Mothers' Club will be formed" (aggiemoms.org 2002). While Dr. Stout was male, he obviously believed that mothers were more important to a support group for students than fathers (aggiemoms.org 2002).

By 1928, there were eight mother's clubs. They formed the Federation of A&M Mothers' Clubs, which still exists today. These clubs were highly organized, with officers and job descriptions, and efficiently run. The A&M Mothers' Clubs became a powerful force in the history of Texas A&M University.

### *History of Women in Education in America*

Throughout the early twentieth century, the general public thought that education was more important for males than females. When public schools experienced overcrowding, administrators and local citizens were more than willing to allow females to drop out, understanding that this would increase the resources available to male students. Most people believed that if men and women must compete for the same educational resources, then instead of sharing, the women should give up their meager share to enlarge the portion available to male students. It was not until the 1930s that states enacted compulsory education laws (Renzetti 1999).

While the original goal of female college education was to train women to become better wives and mothers, college educated women of the late 1800s and very early 1900s had often remained single and pursued careers in public service, such as Jane Addams with Hull House (Stone 1999; Ware 1982). Women did not face social repercussions for their decisions to substitute social work for family life (Stone 1999). Many middle-class white families viewed college as a transition phase between adolescence and full adulthood, but relatively few young people attended college (Ware 1982). During the early decades of the twentieth century, a majority of women attended coeducational institutions instead of the women's only colleges that opened their doors in the previous century (Ware 1982).

With the rising social importance placed on heterosexual relationships and marriage, most women who attended college in the 1930s expected to marry in the near future. During the 1930s, college-educated women placed importance on marriage as their life goal, but still expected to work for a few years after graduation (Ware 1982). While college educated women placed new emphasis on marriage and childraising, Southern women subscribed to the idea that college was a stepping stone to marriage instead of a lifelong career even more than Northern women. Even though college women viewed college as the best place to meet their future husbands, not all of them believed that marriage would preclude their entrance into a meaningful career (Ware 1982). Some women who cared more about their love life than education during their college years went on to actively participate in the civil rights movements. Many Southern women believed that they could harmonize marriage and the workforce, even

though 80% of the population believed that married women needed to stay home (Evans 1989).

### *Great Depression*

The Great Depression hit its worst during 1933. Nearly a quarter of the workforce faced unemployment. Men all over the United States were out of work and desperately trying to support their families. Students lingered in school longer than previous generations because they feared the prospects of finding work in the weak economy (Ware 1982). Americans felt that work was not an individual right, but instead entitled to the provider of the family. Americans also believed that there was a finite pool of work available, and it should be divided among those who most deserved it. The prevailing idea during this time was that every spot in the workforce that a woman, especially a married woman, held was one less available to a man who actually needed it. Married women who worked were thought to be selfishly taking the wages from a job that a married man needed to support his family (Kessler-Harris 1990). Even traditional feminine vocations such as teaching felt the impact of discrimination against married women. For the 1930-1931 school year, over three-quarters of the nation's school districts would not hire married women, and half fired women who decided to marry (Ware 1982).

In *A Woman's Wage*, historian Alice Kessler-Harris analyzed the letters ordinary citizens wrote to President Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, and various members of the administration describing their thoughts on the causes of and cures for the Great

Depression. In his letter to President Roosevelt dated May 10, 1933, Early Leiby wrote, “You are probably aware of the fact that homes are being wrecked daily due to the fact that married women are permitted in factories and offices in this land of ours. You and we all know that the place for a wife and mother is at her home, her palace... It is the writer’s belief that if the women were expelled from places of business,... these very men would find employment. These same women’s husbands would naturally be paid a higher salary, inasmuch as male employees demand a higher salary than females” (Kessler-Harris 1990, 420). By 1933, a large number of Americans, including women, wrote hundreds of letters to President Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, the National Recovery Administration, the Secretary of Labor, and the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor calling for the removal of married women from the nation’s workforce in order to accommodate married men, who were thought to be entitled to work. Echoing the common idea providing for a family is a man’s role while domestic duties require a woman’s attention, Miss B. Wohlmaker of Brooklyn wrote President Roosevelt, “I have heard so much about prosperity. I don’t think it will ever return as long as married women are taking the Bread and Butter out of the men who have families to support” (Kessler-Harris 1990, 421). Public outcry against the employment of married women led to pressure on employers to fire married women, state laws banning married women from working as teachers, and the National Economy Act, a law passed by Congress with allowed only one spouse per family to hold a federal job (Kessler-Harris 1990).



Men and women directed their grievances to those who undermined the provider role. The income that married women earned was thought to be excessive and spent on frivolous things that were neither necessary for the survival of a family nor helped to stimulate the economy. If a male found employment, “he marries, buys a home, a car, a radio, etc. But a girl – it’s cosmetics and finery, drifting farther and farther from matrimony, in most cases” (Kessler-Harris 1990, 424). Also, married women who performed paid work were thought to aid in the delinquency of children and the breakdown of the family structure. A lawyer from Washington, D.C. described this attitude when he wrote, “I do not believe these women are making good use of the money they receive as would be made of it if it was paid to the husbands of other women who are desperately in need of employment and whose wives are staying at home looking after the home and children” (Kessler-Harris 1990, 424).

### *Conclusion*

Women who advocated the removal of married women from the workforce did so because they identified not with their sex, but with their family positions (Kerber). The mothers of the A&M Mothers’ Clubs identified with their role as mothers, and specifically as mothers of men. In order for their sons to be productive in society, they must find employment, and decreasing the number of women in the workforce meant that their sons would find paying work easily. These mothers not only fully internalized the role of men as providers, but also of women as domestic partners. Since it was expected that women who went to college would get married, and indeed only went to

college for that purpose in the South, then it was safe to assume that these women did not need the college education that was required to obtain a job. However, college-educated women were better equipped to find employment, and as such were competitors to the sons of the women of the A&M Mothers' Clubs. Also, if women were admitted to A&M College of Texas, married a male student there, and wanted to be active in the workforce, then she would be plunging the country further into the Great Depression according to popular attitudes. By suppressing the number of college-education women competing for traditionally male work, the women of the A&M Mothers' Club were opening up more positions in the workforce for their sons after graduation.

## CHAPTER III

### MOTHERHOOD

#### *History of Motherhood*

The term mother did not always apply solely to women who gave birth to children. Any person who was nurturing, such as an older sister or a loving male, earned the label mother. In colonial New England, every older woman regardless of her participation in birth, was called mother (Gillis 1996). Today, the position of mother in society comes with a set of social rules or prescribed behaviors (Paludi 1998). However, motherhood as the natural, instinctual state of one woman with a child is a fairly new concept. Throughout history, having a child did not necessarily define motherhood, which was considered more a compilation of learned tasks. Maternity is the state of a woman with a child, but motherhood is the cultural expectations associated with the proper way to raise a child, which had not always been limited to women as individuals (Gillis 1996). Prior to the twentieth century in the United States, infant and maternal mortality rates remained consistently high enough to ensure that there were many children without mothers and many mothers who could not devote their entire lives to their children (Gillis 1996). Mothering became a function not solely of the woman who birthed the child, but also of a group of women and relatives. Women of the upper classes often employed wet-nurses to feed their infants and white women in the south often relied on slave nannies to supervise children during the day. Family members also informally adopted children, especially if a woman had many children or died while giving birth (Gillis 1996). Women were still expected to be good wives before being

good mothers, so it was not unnatural that caring for children be shared among women of the same family.

During the nineteenth century, ideas of motherhood changed. Motherhood became more and more an expression of a woman's profession after marriage. As soon as a woman married, she was expected to produce children and raise them for most of her adult life. During the Victorian era, mothers were idealized and revered as the foundation of society. Numerous odes and poems were dedicated to mothers, and motherhood itself was held in great esteem by all of society. Maternity and motherhood converged, and consequently women of the upper and middle classes replaced wet-nurses with breast or bottle feeding, and women were expected to maintain a more active role in their children's care and upbringing. Fewer children were sent to live with other relatives. The twentieth century saw the extreme of this change: all children stayed at home and mothers were expected to provide complete care until the children married and moved away, which were not always simultaneous (Gillis 1996).

Many women at the turn of the century thought that women who attended college were turning their backs on their highest callings: those of wifedom and motherhood, which were the "happiest estate of woman" (Harrison 1900, 128). Women who attended college and wanted a career were forgetting that they were best suited for the "profession of home life" (Harrison 1900, 128). Many conservative women were not opposed to women learning valuable skills in college; they just wanted the women to apply these skills in their homes. Women's accomplishments should be evaluated by how well they enrich and enliven the domestic sphere, or the happiness of their husbands and children.

Instead of thinking of men as competitors, women were supposed to think of men as lovers and husbands. Instead of wanting to be a man, women needed to be “mothers of men” (Harrison 1900, 128).

Societal expectations of homemaking and child raising also changed during the turn of the century. No longer did society assume that mother knew best, and that all women inherently knew how to care for young children. Instead, society embraced the new idea of scientific motherhood. More women gave birth in hospitals, and now women turned to child-rearing manuals to learn how to properly care for their children. Mothers became scientists in the home, accurately measuring amount of formula and keeping their newborns on strict feeding schedules. Even recipe books began using more “scientific” methods by using measurements instead of approximations. Women became scientists of the home, and motherhood became a profession (Thurer 1994.) Mothers had to learn to do almost everything involved with raising children because the fate of the nation lay in their ability to mold the next generation according to strict scientific principles (Rothman 1978). Every child had the possibility of becoming a “president or messiah” (Thurer 1994, 230).

Also during the early third of the twentieth century, as families moved to the suburbs, fathers spent most of their days away from the home either working or commuting. Fathers became less important to the daily functions of the family, and often contributed little more than a paycheck, whether they wanted to do more or not (Thurer 1994). Society worried that mothers’ influence on small boys would create a generation of effeminate men. In response, mothers were urged to encourage their sons

towards masculine activities and to raise them to fulfill their proper roles as income-earners and heads of households. Mothers could not fully masculinize their sons themselves, and so the Boy Scouts of America was created in 1910 to provide masculine training for young boys (Stone 1999; Kimmel 1996). Most Americans during this time expressed a preference for sons, especially as only children. Freud asserted that women could realize fulfillment (or the possession of a penis) by giving birth to a child, especially a male child. (Renzetti 1999; Thurer 1994) While Freud's theories of femininity are hotly debated, the idea that a woman must give birth, and that birth of a son is preferable to that of a daughter, were deeply entrenched in society.

Boys were thought to be inherently different than girls. While debates raged over whether pink or blue was the better color for boys (indeed, the experts were split), debates over the true nature of boyhood emerged. In the late 1800s, boys and girls were treated essentially the same during their first few years. However, during the early part of the twentieth century, society began to fear that women would feminize young boys. In response, parents were supposed to encourage boys to fight at least six times per week in school, dissuade boys from unmanly pursuits such as reading, and encourage sons to remain strong and relatively wild (Kimmel 1996). Since mothers spent more time with their sons than fathers, but fathers were supposed to raise their sons alongside the mothers, part of the responsibility for socializing manly boys fell to the mothers. Mothers had to teach their sons to be men and encourage them in masculine pursuits (Kimmel 1996).

### *Mother Blaming*

“Bad” mothers are as culturally and temporally specific as motherhood itself. Women who broke the gender norms of their times have often been labeled bad mothers. Bad mothers are defined in relation to the society ideal of the good mother. As the ideal of the good mother became increasingly associated with complete and total devotion to children, the label of bad mother began to be applied to more mothers (Ladd-Taylor 1998). While mother blaming did not gain mass acceptance until the early twentieth century, the roots for it lie throughout American history (Ladd-Taylor 1998).

During American colonial times, women remained in the “private sphere,” or the realm of domestic duties within the home. Society believed that women were innately suited to only the demands of the household and created laws that prohibited women’s access to the “public sphere” of politics and work outside the home. After the American Revolution, the private sphere became the determining force for the success of the new democracy. America needed educated citizens and voters (while male property owners), and mothers bore the responsibility of raising “citizen-sons” (Ladd-Taylor 1998, 7). Male productivity and citizenship depended on the way their mothers raised them, and female productivity was measured in the success of their sons. While mother blaming was not a persistent force in society, a new idea emerged that children were innocent and impressionable (Ladd-Taylor 1998).

During the Victorian Era, white women were put upon a shaky pedestal. While few (if any) women reached the ideal woman defined as pure, pious, domestic, and

submissive, most (if not all) women strove to embody the ideal. Society began to equate maternal presence in the home and self-sacrifice with good mothering, but complete and total devotion to children was not yet the standard by which society judged the fitness of mothers (Ladd-Taylor 1998).

By the 1920s, the idealized mother of the Victorian age gave way to the mother blaming associated with popular perceptions of Freud. While the Victorian ideals of domesticity, selflessness, and devotion to children persisted, the reverence that society had for mothers subsided. Increasingly, women who did not reproduce the ideal at all times earned social contempt (Ladd-Taylor 1998). Many problems afflicting children and adults were blamed on mothers and improper raising of their children. Childhood diseases were no longer the will of God, but instead a testament to the inefficiency and domestic ineptitude of the mother (Ladd-Taylor 1998). Mothers faced almost impossible expectations in order to be labeled a good mother, something that all middle-class white women who stayed at home were considered by default a few decades earlier (Ladd-Taylor 1998). A good mother had to be white, part of the upper- or middle-classes, able-bodied, married, heterosexual, but more than that she had to work to earn her good mother status (Chase 2001).

In response, mothers tried even harder to raise good children. The beginning of the twentieth century ushered in a new era of scientific thinking, which white middle-class women soon applied to their domestic duties and households. Mothers now had to keep abreast of the latest news in childrearing manuals, and the house needed to be run like a factory (Thurer 1994). Instead of trusting women to follow their own maternal



instincts, society demanded that mothers look to scientists and child psychologists to learn the proper way to rear a child. Now women had to do more than just be home, they had to take an active participation in all aspects of their children's lives and direct their children according to new scientific methods (Ladd-Taylor 1998). As Sheri Thurer succinctly wrote, "The impetus for mother's fall from grace was the rise of science" (Thurer 1994, 225). An author in a popular women's magazine of the day expressed the idea that women had to prove their worthiness when she suggested the motherhood be considered a career, complete with the requirement that a woman demonstrate her ability, or fitness, to excel (Thurer 1994). The test of excellence was the success of the child in later life. A child's success depended not on natural ability, but instead how well he was raised. A behaviorist at the time claimed that he could take any infant at random and create a child that would grow into whatever he selected, be it a lawyer or a thief (Thurer 1994).

Society began more than ever to differentiate good mothers from bad mothers. Mothers' pensions were only distributed to good mothers who were thought to be worthy of support from social workers. White people began to fear the death of the superior white race and placed new importance on the education and production of children by white mothers. Only white middle-class women could become good mothers, but even their status depended on the productivity of their children, especially sons (Ladd-Taylor 1998).

### *Maternalism*

During the 1920s and 1930s, millions of white middle-class women extolled the virtues that good mothering would bring to society in a social reform movement called maternalism. Maternalists originally were feminists who sought to elevate the position of mothers in society by placing importance on the maternal function, but the movement instead led to a mandate that a mother become a highly active participant in her children's life in order to earn the good mother label (Ladd-Taylor 1998). Maternalism also required women to perpetuate the notion of motherhood that supported the creation and raising of children in accordance with prevailing sex roles (Chase 2001).

Maternalist achievements included the creation of Parent Teacher Associations, the founding of the National Congress of Mothers, encouraging public funds to be spent educating young mothers in sanitation and health issues, prohibition of child labor, and other laws that they believed protected women and children (Ladd-Taylor 1998). Mrs. Theodore Birney, the first President of the National Congress of Mothers, stated that her goals were "to reconstruct motherhood" and "to recognize the extreme importance of the child" (Rothman 1978, 104).

The new demand that good mothers be actively involved included participating in their children's school and social life. The National Congress of Mothers printed a pamphlet in 1909 detailing exactly how to organize a Parent Teachers' Association at the primary and secondary school level. The pamphlet emphasized how important the role of mothers was in the development of their young children. Suggested topics for

meetings included everything from discussing how children are performing in schools to bringing in specialists to teach mothers how to teach their children to brush their teeth more effectively (“How to” 1909). The National Congress of Mothers believed that any woman could organize a club, and soon clubs sprung up in every major town (Rothman 1978).

The A&M Mothers’ Clubs followed the goals and traditions of the Parent Teachers Associations by actively participating in their sons’ education and social lives. These women chose to strive for the label of good mother, which according to the standards of the time meant that a mother of a son had to help perpetuate her son’s gender role. The letters from the A&M Mothers’ Clubs against coeducation stemmed from their identification as mothers of men.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will present evidence from local newspapers that support the ideas that the A&M Mothers' Clubs functioned like Parent Teacher Associations and that the mothers considered themselves mothers of men, and as such wished to make sure that their sons achieved a high social status. These articles supplement the history of the A&M Mothers' Clubs as recounted by the current A&M Mothers' Clubs in Chapter II. These articles also give clues about the intentions of the A&M Mother's Clubs in their work to better the A&M College campus. After combining the historical and motherhood perspectives with the goals of the A&M Mothers' Clubs evident from these articles, one can see how the actions of the A&M Mothers' Clubs against coeducation were in keeping with the social climate and public opinion concerning the proper actions of mothers of men.

Four articles from *The Eagle*, the newspaper for College Station-Bryan, published during the 1920s, illustrate the A&M Mothers' Clubs highly organized nature, willingness to defer to the judgement of male A&M Clubs, limited scope of their involvement to only A&M College of Texas, and contrasting nature to political women's organizations.

In an article entitled "Dormitory Proposed at A&M to be Known as 'Rountree Hall'," *The Eagle* reports the results of a meeting of the Dallas A&M Club. During this meeting, "approval was given to the efforts of the Dallas A&M Mothers' Club to raise a student loan fund" ("Dormitory" 1923). The year was only 1923, the A&M Mothers'

Club had existed for only one year, and yet they were ambitious enough to start a project as big as a student loan fund. The article does not mention that the Dallas A&M Club offered to instruct the women, or even to support their efforts. In effect, all they did was approve the efforts, meaning that the women of the Dallas A&M Mothers' Club actively sought and deferred to male judgement. These clubs did not wish to obtain complete autonomy. Also, their efforts are limited to the A&M College of Texas campus and the students there.

Another article, "President Texas Federation Women's Clubs Writes of her Impressions of A.-M. College," written by Mrs. J. U. Fields highlights the differences between the Texas Women's Federation and the A&M Mothers' Clubs. While Mrs. Fields applauded the efforts of the A&M Mothers' Clubs, the tactics and scope of her recommendation to other women's clubs to contact the legislature about the problems at A&M College of Texas differs from the tactics and scope that the A&M Mothers' Clubs utilized. Mrs. Fields began her article with a description of her tour around the campus, including the sight of the students during some military exercises. She was impressed with what she saw and wrote, "Then, too, the thought came, how pleased we should be to know that we, this generation, are giving to the lads of Texas the advantage of such a splendid institution" (Fields 1926). The A&M Mothers' Clubs hardly ever claimed credit for their work beyond mentioning that they are making the stay for their sons more comfortable. Mrs. Fields wants women, especially Texas women, to feel that they are responsible not only for the boys' comfort, but also their contribution to Texas as a whole (Fields 1926).

Mrs. Fields also records in her impressions that A&M College of Texas desperately needs new barracks, (as some students are forced to sleep in tents), an indoor armory, and a better library. In her efforts to better the situation for the boys of A&M, Mrs. Fields asked, "Do you not think we women of the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs should become more interested in the needs of our boys and join with the A. and M. Mothers' Clubs of the state in creating favorable public opinion for immediate improvements for our great Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas?" (Fields 1926). Mrs. Fields wants the women's clubs to act without obtaining male approval, and she wants more of a political action (Fields 1926). The Texas Federation of Women's Clubs should present a problem and persuade the government else to solve it. However, the A&M Mothers' Clubs were less political, and they would have approached the problem with the understanding that they would solve it themselves. They would have tried to raise the money themselves and given it to the College, so that the men could implement the improvements themselves. That would have kept the scope of their involvement limited to A&M College of Texas instead of involving all of Texas, especially the legislature which appropriated the funds A&M College of Texas receives.

An article entitled "Fort Worth Boys at A.-M. to Enjoy Feed Saturday" provides further evidence of how the A&M Mothers' Clubs were more dedicated to the needs of their sons than political aims. The A&M students could "observe Mother's Day Saturday afternoon with a 'feed' to be furnished by the Texas A. and M. Mothers' Clubs there" ("Forth Worth" 1926). The mothers willingly and gratefully gave up their day of pampering to provide food for their sons. They also "voted to send boxes of 'eats' to the

boys” (“Forth Worth” 1926). Not only are the Mothers’ Clubs working for their comfort of their sons, but by voting on issues such as which treats to send, they show the highly organized structure of their organization. Just in case the boys did not receive enough food, the A&M Mothers’ Clubs also “plan to stage a banquet at the Women’s Club” (“Forth Worth” 1926). Again, the A&M Mothers’ Clubs show their non-political approaches to serving their sons, their self-sacrificing nature, and their high level of organization, while the only prize to be won is status as a model mother.

The most enlightening article is entitled “A.&M. Mothers Clubs Hold Important Conference at Mothers and Dads Day Celebration – Discuss Club Room.” The A&M Mothers’ Clubs organized an annual meeting and conducted their meetings in an extremely organized manner. The A&M Mothers’ Clubs wished to create a meeting room on campus “to be used as headquarters for all Mothers’ Club activities, and to provide club room facilities for under classmen. This latter movement anticipates the ultimate provision of a permanent club room and hostess house with an official hostess of chaperone in charge” (“Forth Worth” 1926). The mothers wanted their own room, but were more than willing to give it to their sons when they were not using it. Also, the mothers planned to create this room through their own resources, not through a public campaign.

Most importantly, during the conference “Mrs. Duke Burgess of Fort Worth offered a resolution to make a request of both State and District Parent Teacher Associations that College Mothers’ Clubs be assigned a definite place on all state and district convention programs in their future; and providing that a committee be formed to

prepare publicity material setting for the aims and ideals of the College Mothers' Club activities so that groups desiring to organize may proceed in a uniform manner" ("A&M Mothers" 1927). This statement once again highlights the organization and professionalism of the A&M Mothers' Clubs, but it also shows that the mothers felt they were more akin to Parent Teacher Associations than activist groups. They firmly believed that their job was to serve their sons, both as sons and as students at a university. Also, the A&M Mothers' Clubs believed in the idea that there is a best way to organize a Mothers' Club and intended to compose and distribute materials resembling the pamphlet published by the National Congress of Women on how to organize a Parent Teacher Association.

An interesting detail is that the "A. and M. Mothers' Clubs represented in this conference were: San Antonio, Waco, Dallas, Fort Worth, San Angelo, Temple, and Brazos County" ("A&M Mothers" 1927). These clubs maintained close contact and disseminated information among themselves during the annual meetings. This is important because the A&M Mothers' Clubs that petitioned and wrote letters opposing coeducation were the A&M Mothers' Clubs of Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, and San Angelo. All these clubs attended the statewide meeting and most likely attended the annual meetings thereafter. The letter writing was coordinated, and the clubs all had contact with each other, and the same aims and ideals.

The Texas A&M Mothers' Club was originally founded to help support the boys of A&M College since their mothers lived far from campus. The mothers of the A&M Mothers' Clubs tried to continue their support and involvement in their sons' education



and social lives much like they did through the Parent Teacher Associations. In fact, the A&M Mothers' Clubs started and continued more like a Parent Teacher Association, which limits its scope to A&M College of Texas than a women's club of the Progressive era. The A&M Mothers' Clubs were apolitical, and often sought male approval and support before beginning projects.

Mothers cared that their sons find work in the shrinking workforce of the Great Depression. If their sons did not become income earners and support their families, then they had failed to be "good" mothers in two ways. First, they had failed to raise masculine sons to take their rightful place in society, and second, they had failed to involve themselves enough in their sons' lives. In society at the time, anything wrong with a person was automatically the sign of a bad mother.

When the mothers perceived that coeducation would hurt their sons' chances at gainful employment, the A&M Mothers' Clubs wrote letters and petitions to the Board of Directors asking that A&M College of Texas remain an all-male college. Unlike anti-suffragists, the mothers of the A&M Mothers' Clubs did not look to gain their own political power. Their functions on campus and in their own meetings show nothing but intention to create a better environment for their sons. Anti-suffrage women were concerned with the proper role of women in society. Instead, the Aggie Moms were concerned with the proper role of men.

Further research needs to be done to determine the social conditions surrounding the protest of the A&M Mothers' Clubs against coeducation in 1963. Perhaps we will find that the A&M Mothers' Clubs had a preference for male students into the latter half

of the twentieth century. The A&M Mothers' Clubs are a strong force at Texas A&M University today, and the history of their influence and actions needs to be fully researched. Hopefully, once we know why the A&M Mothers' Clubs consistently resisted women's access to education at Texas A&M University, we will discover a way to channel the influence and power of the A&M Mothers' Clubs into a force that helps female Aggies.

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis follows the style and format of the *National Women's Studies Association Journal*.

<sup>2</sup> In 1963, the Board of Directors of the Agricultural and Mechanical School of Texas officially renamed the college as Texas A&M University (Smith 2002). For the years preceding this date, I will refer to Texas A&M University as A&M College of Texas.

<sup>3</sup> The only other interpretation of the conduct of the A&M Mothers' Club that I could find was in Knippa's thesis "Salvation of a University: The Admission of Women to Texas A&M." She states, "The mothers of male cadets at A&M backed a policy which would exclude themselves and their daughters from an education" (39). While hinting that the women's identity as mothers of males influenced the women's decision to actively oppose coeducation at A&M College of Texas, Knippa incorrectly interprets their actions as stemming from a desire to limit the education of women in general. I will show that her assumption is directly refuted by the content of the letters of the A&M Mothers' Clubs and indirectly refuted by the fact that the A&M Mothers' Clubs kept their actions and goals limited to the campus of A&M College of Texas.

<sup>4</sup> Their website goes on to say that "The objective remains the same today." This makes one wonder if the women have overlooked the fact that the original goals excluded women or if the mothers of today still identify with being mothers of males, even though Texas A&M University is coeducational.

<sup>5</sup> I have decided to use this rather long quote because it conveys the spirit in which the A&M Mothers' Club mothers consider the first acts of their founding mothers. The commitment to students' needs, even when the students don't appear to care, is given an almost heroic value. Also, the student loan fund was only for male students who attended or planned to attend A&M College of Texas.

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