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GENDERED ADMISSION:  
TRANSINCLUSIVE ADMISSIONS POLICIES WOMEN'S COLLEGES

by

RUBY KETT

Under the Direction of Susan Talburt, PhD

ABSTRACT

Many women's colleges in the United States are evaluating their mission to educate women in a society where gender is recognized as a social construct. As a result, some women's colleges have changed their admissions policies to include transgender people. By examining the admissions policies of select women's colleges, I analyze who becomes a thinkable student at women's colleges, as well as who is excluded by the admissions policies. Through my analysis of the admissions policies of twelve women's colleges, I divide the colleges into four categories: colleges with self-identification policies, colleges with consistent identification policies, colleges with legal and/or medical policies, and colleges with no specific admissions policies.

INDEX WORDS: Women's colleges, Transgender students, Transgender college students, Women's college students, Women's colleges – Admission of transgender people, Student activism

GENDERED ADMISSION:  
TRANSINCLUSIVE ADMISSIONS POLICIES WOMEN'S COLLEGES

by

RUBY KETT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2015

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Ruby Kett  
2015

THESIS TITLE: TRANSINCLUSIVE ADMISSIONS POLICIES AT ELITE, LIBERAL ARTS WOMEN'S  
COLLEGES IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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## CHAPTER 1 A NEW ERA FOR WOMEN'S COLLEGES?

### 1.1 Introduction

In 2014, Mount Holyoke College, a women's college in western Massachusetts, changed how it defines women. Every year, on the day before the beginning of the fall semester, Mount Holyoke College students rally together in their class colors in the outdoor amphitheater on campus for Convocation, an event that serves to motivate students and faculty for the year to come. At the 2014 Convocation, Lynn Pasquerella, the President of Mount Holyoke and a Mount Holyoke alumna (Class of 1980), announced that the college would now accept applications from any qualified student who identifies as a woman *or* who was assigned female at birth. Pasquerella stated that the college had been working to institute a formal policy as transgender students have been attending and graduating from the college for many years. With tears in her eyes, she explained that she is proud that Mount Holyoke has "a policy that reinforces our commitment to access, diversity, and the dignity of every woman's life," which caused the students in the audience to applaud and cheer.

However, not everyone at Mount Holyoke was happy with Pasquerella's announcement. Some opponents of the college's change believe women's colleges are exclusively for those who identify as women *and* were assigned female at birth. Opponents to this change in admissions policy fear that the college could become coed, college missions and traditions could disappear, and a spirit of sisterhood among students could be lost. This division isn't specific to Mount Holyoke; women's colleges across the country continue to pursue debates about admitting transgender students. Opponents indicate that the question isn't just about admissions policies, but also about what it means to be a women's college, especially in a time

when the term women isn't as solidified as it was at the founding of these colleges. As Barnard College was on the precipice of releasing their admissions policy, the College's President, Debora Spar, stated, "For part of the community, that mission is defined as educating women. For another part, it's about providing a space for gender-oppressed minorities. And when you come down to it, that divide affects how you see the issue of transgender admissions" (Noveck). However, advocates for the college's new admissions policy regarding transgender students argue that Mount Holyoke is leading the way for inclusion for all women with their new admissions policy and other changes on campus.

Most top-tier women's colleges in the United States have policies regarding admitting transgender students. Admitting transgender students isn't only a matter of their academic qualifications, but a question of how that institution defines its students. For some women's colleges, such as Hollins University, their official policy is to exclusively admit, educate, and graduate students who were assigned female at birth and are women or students who have taken specific steps to be women. Unlike other women's colleges, Hollins goes so far as to require that those who no longer identify as women and take legal or medical steps to confirm their identity while at the college must transfer to a different college. Some women's colleges have ambiguous policies regarding admitting transgender students while claiming to support LGBT students, such as Agnes Scott College. Some colleges, such as Barnard College and Wellesley College, admit students who consistently identify as women, whereas some colleges, such as Smith, Mills, and Bryn Mawr, admit those who self-identify as women. Then, some women's colleges have no formal policy, such as Spelman College and Wesleyan College. This

lack of policy does not reflect a lack of concern towards prospective students' gender, instead these colleges use other policies to police students' gender.

Admissions policies aren't the only concern for transgender students at women's colleges. As Lynn Pasquerella told the Mount Holyoke community in her Commencement address, it isn't just about admissions policies, but "about how best to foster a respectful environment for all students." Many colleges, such as Agnes Scott, Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Scripps, Smith, and Wellesley, allow students who transition to men during their college years to continue pursuing their degree. These colleges must also examine questions regarding how to accommodate their changing student population, such as whether to adopt gender-neutral language in the student handbook, whether to change the signs on campus bathrooms, and whether to allow students to change their names on their college ID and official college documents to reflect their chosen name. Women's colleges need to address these questions, along with many more, in order to examine how they can adapt to fit the needs of their changing student body. Additionally, in order to continue as the prestigious educational institutions they are today, women's colleges must analyze their definition of woman and the type of student they wish to educate, in order to evaluate what type of institution they want to become. Amy Kalivas, a graduate of the Mills College Class of 2002, wrote to the *Mills Quarterly*, saying, "Finally Mills has solidified in policy what has been a part of the fabric of Mills for so long. Kudos to all involved in making this policy a reality, and I look forward to seeing how it is implemented and the ways that the College grows and improves in the future" (2). Kalivas' comments reaffirm that women's colleges are continually changing and admitting transgender students is an improvement in their mission. Her remarks also emphasize that an

admissions policy is just one step for transclusion at Mills, and the implementation of the policy is key to creating true inclusion.

I contend that women's colleges should admit transgender students and in doing so, it doesn't make them coed, nor does it ruin their history and legacy as women's colleges, but rather, it enhances their legacy by extending opportunities to another group of people who have been marginalized due to their gender. Transgender students offer another perspective into how gender is upheld and policed, often to the detriment of those who are not cisgender, and by including transgender students, women's colleges can broaden the way in which they invoke and interrogate gender. Through this analysis, I examine the admissions policies of twelve elite, liberal arts women's colleges in the United States to evaluate how they include and exclude transgender students. I employ the Foucauldian concept of thinkable and unthinkable to evaluate how changing admissions policies to include transgender students at women's colleges makes transgender applicants thinkable as students at women's colleges. In making a wider population of students thinkable, women's colleges are deconstructing gender binaries.

In the second chapter, I study the admissions policies or policies that include students' gender from each of the twelve colleges I have chosen to research. In the second chapter, I group the women's colleges into four categories: women's colleges with self-identification policies, women's colleges with consistent identity policies, women's colleges with legal or medical identification policies, and women's colleges with non-admissions policies. By evaluating who is admitted to each college, I name who is thinkable as a student, as well as who is excluded by the admissions policy, and is therefore, unthinkable as a student. In addition, I

examine how each admissions policy reinforces or destabilizes gender binaries, and how gender is policed through the specific language of these policies.

In the third chapter, I evaluate the contemporary nature of these policies, as well as four examples of students' and alums' activism and reactions to admitting transgender students at women's colleges.<sup>1</sup> In this analysis, I demonstrate how students' and alums' activism relates to the policies, as well as how activism can inform future changes.

While I have chosen twelve specific women's colleges, nine of which have policies stating whether they admit transgender students, my argument has implications in a larger body of work of gender studies and transgender studies. By admitting transgender students, women's colleges are disrupting the gender binary, just as they disrupted gender norms in their founding years in the mid to late 1800s by creating higher education for women in a time when women could not attend college. Then, as now, women's colleges are transforming categories of gender. Dean Spade spoke at a Barnard College Student Government Association town hall, where he argued the following:

The message of transphobia is "we don't believe you. You don't exist. You're not who you say you are." Right now, women's colleges in the United States are saying that to trans people. And that matters. That's on blast. It really matters when a big institution that is using a definition of woman that is fundamentally transphobic. And it's like a set of institutions that are tied together in this practice right now. And that is an urgent problem, regardless of whether or not you think Barnard has the coolest strategy in the world for feminism. This is a big problem for all of us.

Spade's comments underline the importance of large institutions, such as women's colleges, promoting the acceptance of transgender students as a powerful message to

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<sup>1</sup> Given that I discuss women's college graduates of many genders, I have elected to use the word alum as it is more gender-neutral than the Latin terms.

transgender people. By admitting transgender students on the basis of their gender, rather than their sex assigned at birth, women's colleges are paving the way for institutions to become less transphobic.

## **1.2. Literature Review**

I have structured the following literature review to look at gender and transgender issues in the United States today, then at colleges and universities today. The third section is devoted to looking at the mission and values of women's colleges, and how transgender students affect those missions and values. By organizing the literature review this way, I demonstrate the increase in representation of transgender people in the US as a whole, at colleges and universities in the US, and at women's colleges.

### **1.2.1 Transgender Today**

Transgender, in this thesis, refers to students who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. I am specifically interested in students who do not identify with the sex or gender assigned to them at birth. In examining the policies of women's colleges towards transgender students, it is important to differentiate between policies towards transmen, those who were assigned female at birth and identify as men, and policies towards transwomen, those who were assigned male at birth and identify as women. On occasion, I employ the term cisgender to describe people who identify as the sex and gender assigned to them at birth.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler states, "gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (6). She follows this by asking the reader, "Can we refer to a 'given' sex or a 'given' gender without first inquiring into how sex

and/or gender is given, through what means? And what is 'sex' anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal...?" (7). Butler asserts this question in order to argue that sex and gender are both socially constructed. After challenging the stability of the relationship between sex and gender, Butler asks, "If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (Butler 7). Given that Butler destabilizes the rigidity of the binary gender system, as well as deconstructing the sex binary by forcing readers to examine how sex is defined, her analysis is important to understand how gender and sex binary systems are socially constructed and how they can be subsequently destabilized in society today.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler also discusses the performativity of gender and states, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (33). The category of woman is not natural nor inherent, but a category that is constantly reworked and regulated. Susan Stryker, in the introduction to *The Transgender Studies Reader*, states, "A woman, performatively speaking, is one who says she is-- and who then does what woman means. The biologically sexed body guarantees nothing; it is necessarily there, a ground for the act of speaking, but it has no deterministic relationship to performative gender" (Stryker and Whittle 10). The social construction of the sex and gender binary systems, as well as the categories of man and woman themselves, are important in my analysis of women's colleges as selective spaces for women. Given that women's colleges are intended to

be institutions exclusively for women, it is important for my research to see how these colleges are defining women and how they are defining their student body.

### **1.2.2 Trans Visibility**

Transgender, as a term, expanded usage in 1991 when Leslie Feinberg published a handout titled *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*. That same year, Sandy Stone wrote an essay she deemed a “posttranssexual manifesto,” and the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, a lesbian-feminist festival, evicted a transgender woman from the festival. The occurrence of these three events in 1991 publicized problems facing transgender people (Stryker and Whittle 4). In 1992, a small group from the activist organization Queer Nation split to form their own group, named Transgender Nation (5). In part as a result of the internet and other transgender groups forming from queer groups, the term transgender and the discussion of issues of violence and exclusion for transgender people increased in feminist and queer circles (6).

On December 31, 1993, Brandon Teena and two other people were killed in Falls City, Nebraska. Brandon Teena’s death received more publicity than the other two victims because he “was a young white person who had been born a woman, but who was living as a man and had been dating local girls” (Halberstam 23). Brandon Teena’s murder captivated the American public in part because he was transgender, which pushed transgender representation into mainstream America. In 1999, the film *Boys Don’t Cry* was released based on the story of Brandon Teena and starring Hilary Swank, who won an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for her portrayal of Brandon Teena.



Today, transgender visibility is increasing in the American public, as evident by Laverne Cox being the first transwoman to play a transgender character in a television series when she was cast in *Orange is the New Black*, Janet Mock publishing her autobiography *Defining Realness*, Barney's Spring 2014 campaign using 17 transgender models, and Jennifer Pritzker becoming the first transgender woman in the Forbes 400 (Brathwaite 80). Barack Obama became the first president to use the word transgender in his State of the Union address on January 20, 2015, which can be seen as indicative of the recognition of transgender people in the United States (Steinmetz). Each of these events, which may seem minor, demonstrates the increase in representation of transgender people in the US.

### **1.2.3 Violence against Transgender People**

In examining the policies of women's colleges toward transgender students, I must consider the larger context in which transgender people face struggles. Drawing from *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, I use the term transphobia "not necessarily to imply the fear of transpeople, but simply any negative attitudes (hatred, loathing, rage, or moral indignation) harbored toward transpeople on the basis of our enactments of gender" (Bettcher 280). Given that my research focuses on women's colleges, I concentrate specifically on the ways in which educational institutions can contribute to the violence transgender people often experience. Transgender people are marginalized in schools and workplaces and often are victims of violence due to their gender identity. The National Transgender Discrimination Survey is the largest survey of transgender people in the US and is a joint project by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality. The 2008 survey reports

that sixty-one percent of transgender people experienced harassment or abuse at school (K-12 and higher education), and fifteen percent experienced severe harassment that forced them to leave school (Grant 3). Transgender people often experience violence in bathrooms, given that they are public gendered spaces. Twenty-six percent of transgender students also reported being denied the use of the bathroom of their gender identity (35).

#### **1.2.4 Transgender Students at Colleges and Universities in the US**

Most literature about transgender students at colleges and universities concentrates on the facilities and programming changes the institutions should make in order to meet the needs of transgender students (Beemyn; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, and Tubbs; Mintz). These are important changes, although my research does not address how such changes could work at women's colleges, it is important for women's colleges to institute campus wide changes.

Colleges and universities should provide students with an academically enriching program that allows them to flourish. But, like many large institutions, colleges and universities are structured by dividing people into a binary gender system, and transgender students can challenge these binaries (Beemyn 78). For colleges and universities that divide people by their sex assigned at birth, the presence of transgender students who wish to be categorized by their gender defies binaries. Transgender college students often report feeling isolated and marginalized (Beemyn 78). Feelings of isolation can be attributed to the fear transgender students often feel towards their peers as well as a fear of transphobia (Mintz 4). Transgender students also feel excluded due to transphobic or gendered language, written and spoken, which can amplify feelings of isolation and marginalization (Mintz 6). When colleges and

universities use gendered language, some transgender students feel excluded, which can negatively impact their feeling of belonging on campus (6). Colleges need to create and implement policies that include transgender students in order to combat the pervasive effect of transphobia on college campuses.

### **1.2.5 Transgender Activism**

Transgender activism is often included as a part of LGBT activism given that sexuality and gender are commonly conflated. However, transgender activism also has its own community concentrating on gender identity and gender expression, rather than issues of sexuality (Sandeem). Transgender activism can highlight the problems with assimilationist LGBT activism, which has often “predicated their minority sexual-orientation identities on the gender-normative notions of man and woman that homosexual subcultures tend to share with the heteronormative societies of Eurocentric modernity” (Stryker qtd. in Currah 96). While mainstream popular LGBT activism seeks inclusion into these gender-normative roles and heteronormativity, anti-assimilationist queer activism and trans activism strive to abandon such binary notions and destabilize gender.

In recent transgender activism at schools across the country, bathrooms have become an important issue. For example, in February 2014, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the Orono School District violated Maine’s anti-discrimination laws by not allowing a transgender girl to use the girls bathroom. Nicole Maines and the Human Rights Council sued the school district when Maines was forced to use the staff bathroom after the grandfather of another student complained about Maines to the school (Kuhr). In California on January 1,

2014, Assembly Bill 1266, also known as the School Success and Opportunity Act, went into effect, which requires public schools to allow transgender students to use facilities and participate in the activities consistent with their gender identity (Curtin).

Bathrooms aren't the only space of struggle for transgender activists. Specific institutions make transitioning a difficult process. Sex is considered an unchanging characteristic, written on birth certificates, driver's licenses, medical records, school records, and other such official documents. These documents are often required in order to begin employment or start at a new school, which can "out" people as transgender at the workplace or school when their documents reflect their sex assigned at birth instead of their gender. Activists, like those in the Maines case, are pushing for institutions to identify people by their identity, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth.

### **1.2.6 Impact and Activism at Colleges and Universities**

At colleges and universities nationwide for the past decade, an increasing number of students and faculty have been pushing for colleges to become more inclusive to transgender students and create a college atmosphere that allows transgender students to flourish. While changes have been occurring, "Campus officials say the development of transgender services has been part of a larger inclusion agenda, often driven by students or a single, instrumental staff member" (Grasgreen).

In 2007, Scott Jaschik published an article on *Inside Higher Ed's* website, titled "Momentum for Gender Neutrality," which documents the number of colleges and universities that have made changes to gendered spaces, such as offering gender-neutral housing, all-

gender bathrooms, and covering gender identity in their non-discrimination policies. However, Jaschik notes that 43 percent of the colleges that have gender identity and expression in their non-discrimination policies are located in the Northeast and only 5 percent are in the South. He also writes that all Ivy League schools changed their policies. Jaschik's analysis indicates a difference between private and public institutions, as well as a layer of elitism-- where private, elite colleges are quicker at adopting progressive anti-bias policies.

While coeducational colleges and universities do not have to adapt their admissions policies to admit transgender students, there are other changes they must make in order to admit transgender students. Changes to diversity training, programming, forms and documents, health care, support services, health insurance, residence halls, and bathrooms have the ability to improve the college experience for transgender students. By changing facilities and programming to meet the needs of transgender students, institutions also send a message that they welcome transgender students and care about these students' experience and academic success (Mintz 32). Women's colleges must also make such campus changes as they change their admissions policies.

### **1.3 Identity and Mission of Women's Colleges**

While each women's college has its own identity and mission statement, there are a number of broad themes that emerge in looking across women's colleges. The mission statements of women's colleges indicate a cohesion toward specific goals (Breese 27). Mission statements of women's colleges often allude to "the women's college experience": liberal arts, women-focused, and religious tradition (Breese 23). In addition, the identity and mission

statements of women's colleges indicate that their tradition and history are essential to the college itself (22). As Carol Christ, President of Smith College, attests, when students attend a women's college, "they become heirs to the legacy that generations of women have built. This means not simply buildings, programs, and scholarship dollars, but a history of leadership across many fields, a confidence that women can not only contribute to the piece of the world they choose to inhabit but change it" (Christ). But women's colleges have constantly evolved in order to adapt to the needs of women's education in the United States (Marine 1166). For example, by allowing students to take classes at nearby coeducational colleges through college consortiums, women's colleges give students the opportunity for the typical college experience without giving up on their institutional legacy (Breese 27).

Most women's colleges are small liberal arts colleges with student populations under 3,000. The small student population allows for small classes and more student-faculty interaction (Kratzok and Near 6). Women's college graduates have been shown to be more successful after college than women at coed schools (Marine 1166). Today, women's colleges are said to cultivate leadership skills in students and encourage their interest in traditionally masculine fields of study, such as math, science, and technology (Harwarth, Maline, and DeBra viii).

The leadership skills that women's colleges instill in their students are often attributed to the nurturing environment of these colleges and the higher number of women in high positions of faculty and staff at the college, such as women deans (Kinzie et al 3). Professors at women's colleges are known for "telling students that they have potential, telling them that they are capable, and telling them what is expected of them," although this presumably occurs

at other small colleges, too (Wolf-Wendel 42). This encouragement has been shown to increase students' self-confidence and grades (Kinzie et al 9). Jadwiga Sebrechts, former President of the Women's College Coalition, writes the following:

A women's college is a place where women are in charge--whether as trustees..., as senior administrators..., as faculty... or as student leaders--where female leadership has become normal and has internalized itself as an expectation. It is a place of abundant female role models for achievement and ready mentors to midwife the success of other women. (Quoted in Miller-Bernal and Poulson 198-199).

Women's colleges also provide an environment that encourages students to pursue studies in science, technology, education, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Women's colleges "produce two or three times as many natural science Ph.D.s, medical school entrants, and 'achievers'" (Solnick 506). The higher number of students from women's colleges pursuing degrees and careers in STEM fields is attributed to faculty support and leadership programs available at these schools, as well as the lack of disapproval from men toward women in areas like STEM.

Women's colleges tend to market themselves in particular ways in order to appeal to potential applicants given that only three percent of high school seniors apply to women's colleges (Marine 1166). Marilyn Hammond, the current President of the Women's College Coalition, states, "I think the problem is so many young women have a perception of what it's like to go to a single gender college" (Hammond qtd. in Oguntoyinbo 15). Unfortunately for women's colleges, these high school students' perceptions do not favor women's colleges. Dr. Nancy Gray, the President of Hollins University, explains, "Many high school girls are used to thinking of college as football games and fraternity parties," which are not available on campus at women's colleges, although students can attend such events at neighboring coed colleges

(Gray qtd. in Oguntoyinbo 14). In addition, high school students often perceive the students of women's colleges as lesbians, man-craving, or prudish, intellectual, snobby, or serious, man-hating, conservative, or religious, which women's colleges' admissions departments try to refute (Cook, Daniel, Willis, and Brown 2-3).

The societal perception of women's colleges as "the great breeding ground" for lesbianism started in the early 1900s when sexologists' influence, such as Havelock Ellis, grew in American society (Faderman 49). This link between women's colleges and lesbianism grew in the mid-1900s when lesbianism was insinuated whenever women challenged the patriarchal status quo, through acts such as pursuing traditionally masculine jobs, advocating for women's rights, and seeking out higher education (Inness 35). The link between challenging gender roles and lesbianism serves to derail women's empowerment, and so "Lesbianism became—and still is—the transcendent identifier that a woman has violated accepted gender roles and needs to be punished" (Inness 35). The perception of women's colleges as a hot bed of lesbianism has served to delegitimize these colleges (Inness 39). Even today, many women's colleges have active LGB communities, although students are often quick to say that students at women's colleges are not all lesbian (Turriago).

### **1.3.1 Women's Colleges and the Fear of Coeducation**

The phrase "better dead than coed" is often used by proponents of women's colleges when coeducation is discussed (Creighton). Coeducating is often considered when enrollment declines, such as at Vassar College, which became coed in 1969. During the sixties, the Vassar administration considered merging with Yale or going coed, while other Seven Sisters colleges



started recruiting students who hadn't previously considered applying to a top-tier liberal arts college (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 31). Vassar alums reacted poorly to the news of coeducation and threatened to stop donating to the college (34).

Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts went coed in 1988 after 150 years as a women's college. Many students were not pleased by the decision, and some demonstrated to voice their concerns to the administration (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 53). When turning coed was initially suggested as an option, many college staff voiced their concerns--mainly that they had not been consulted (51). Alums were outraged given that Wheaton had recently had a fundraising drive without any mention of becoming coed (54). In a 1994/1995 edition of the *Smith Alumnae Quarterly Magazine*, Brandi Sikorski, a student at Wheaton from 1986 to 1990, recalls Wheaton's coeducation. Sikorski remembers arriving at Wheaton as a first-year student in the fall of 1986, and remarking, "The philosophy of the institution, which was encouraged by all, was that there were no barriers on or off the campus," and she also remembers, "The college's unique historical traditions were passed down from class to class and generation to generation, such as the customs that only seniors were granted the privilege to sit on the library steps" (23). However, Sikorski argues that the first coed class did not respect the college's values, history, and traditions of Wheaton as a women's college--preferring instead to think of the campus as a new college and ignore the upper-class women and alums (23-24). Sikorski also reflects on how the administration publicized the decision to go coed as "a wave of the future," and, so, by ignoring the college's history as an institution for women, leaving students, like Sikorski, betrayed and alienated (23).

As a response to several women's colleges becoming coeducational, the Women's College Coalition was formed in 1972, which combined the strategies of women's colleges' presidents, such as networking, publicity, and finding money and influential people (Thomas 565). By creating the Coalition, women's colleges began to see themselves as institutions with a similar history and goals (566). While the Women's College Coalition does not release policies that determine how women's colleges should govern themselves, the coalition allows for the presidents of women's colleges to work together to promote the collective image of women's colleges, such as promoting research about women's colleges and releasing reports about the success of women's colleges.

Advocates for women's colleges cite many reasons for resisting coeducating their institutions. Women's colleges still market themselves based on their collective history of women's education (Breese 17). By calling on their individual legacies, their collective history, often thought of as a progressive history, and the numerous successful women's college graduates, women's colleges draw from a history of women's education. Many advocates quote statistics about the percentages of women's college graduates who go on to hold government offices, such as Madeleine Albright, a graduate of Wellesley College in 1959; Hillary Clinton, a graduate of the Wellesley College Class of 1969; and Nancy Pelosi, a graduate of the Trinity College Class of 1972.

The fear of coeducation is compounded by the fear of change, as well as a fear of loss, whether it be a loss of tradition or a loss of a unique women-centric campus. In addition, many students and alums of women's colleges fear that a camaraderie of sisterhood would be lost in coeducation. Unlike at coeducational institutions, sisterhood is frequently used at women's

colleges to describe the student relations and pride students have in their college. While some women's college students choose to use 'siblinghood' instead of sisterhood in an effort to be gender-inclusive, a group of Wellesley students claim the term siblinghood "lacked the warm, pro-women connotation of 'sisterhood,' as well as its historic resonance" (Padawer).

A fear of change isn't just among students and alums; even staff fear change. Susan Marine interviewed a staff member in the career development office at a women's college who described the presence of transgender students, stating, "I've seen these guys putting on their rugged, macho demeanors and going out into the community to shake it up a bit, and I have to tell you, it makes me very uncomfortable. I believe we have a pretty clear statement of mission here..." (Marine 1171). Although the staff member recognizes the precarious position of the institution, describing it as "between a rock and a hard place, I mean, no college in its right mind would kick students out for their gender" (Marine 1172).

### **1.3.1 Transinclusion at Women's Colleges**

When women's colleges were created, colleges and universities were exclusively for men, so the term women and the pool of potential students for women's colleges seemed straightforward. But now women's colleges are having to define who they consider to be a woman. While the known number of transgender students at women's colleges is currently small, "they have raised questions about belonging, agency, self-identification, and the intersection of individual and community identity" (Marine 1166).

During Dean Spade's address at Barnard College, he asks, "So the real question is, why should trans people be at Barnard?" and answers, "In my opinion, broadly, because trans

women are women, right? Because people are who they say they are. That's a really big fundamental anti-transphobic, feminist belief I have, and I hope you share" (Barnard Center for Research on Women). But most importantly, Spade highlights the mission of women's college like Barnard by arguing, "But also because trans people are gender-oppressed people, and this is what I think the mission of a place like Barnard is about." By categorizing the inclusion of transgender people at women's colleges as an issue of feminism, advocates, like Dean Spade, incorporate the legacy of women's colleges, as well as how these colleges wish to be perceived, i.e. as feminist and progressive.

The slow reaction of women's colleges to create official policies regarding admitting transgender students is partly a result of the differences between allowing transmen and allowing transwomen at women's colleges. While many transmen at women's colleges transition during their time at college, most colleges have not adopted policies to expel these students. Julie Mencher, a former administrative staff member at Smith College, states that the presence of transmen at women's colleges initially gave many people fears of the college becoming coeducational. Instead, Smith focused on "what to do with" transmen (Mencher). Jennifer Finney Boylan, an author, activist, and English professor at Barnard, argued for an inclusionary policy for transmen and transwomen at Barnard, saying, "You come to a place like this because gender is at the center of your life. Because the questions you need to answer to become yourself are questions that are best going to be answered at a college in which gender is at the center of the academic enterprise. The more you think about it, the more sense it makes" (Noveck). Now, as transwomen apply to women's colleges, colleges have to formally state whether they want to include transwomen. This can be a divisive question that earned

Smith College a poor reputation among transgender advocates when they denied admission to a transwoman, Calliope Wong (Calliowong).

There is a range of reasons transgender students would choose a women's college. For some transgender people, women's colleges are safer environments where they will not be subject to violence, as cisgender men are usually perpetrators of violence against transgender people (Marine 1177). The President of Simmons College, Helen Drinan, recently wrote in a *Huffington Post* article, "Historically, women's colleges have been safe havens for those who present nontraditional gender identities. Many women's colleges already support vibrant LGBTQA communities and are able to offer support and services for these groups," which illuminates some of the reasons for transgender people might choose to attend women's colleges.

Some transmen who were already attending women's colleges when they began transitioning choose to continue their education at their school for a myriad of reasons, rather than transfer to a coeducational school (Brune; Padawer; Quart). For example, in 2009, Jesse Austin, a student at Wellesley, chose a women's college because of the many strong women on campus, despite not feeling comfortable in his gender. Jesse hoped to fit in at the school and ended up transitioning during his second semester, which made him feel further isolated from the rest of the Wellesley students (Padawer). The presence of Jesse and other students who don't identify as women demonstrates that women's colleges are not women's only spaces. After all, women's colleges still employ people of other genders.

For transwomen, applying to women's colleges tends to be more of a struggle. High school students applying to college are usually seventeen or eighteen years old. At this age,

some transgender people may not be able to change their official identification or school documents to reflect their gender identity due to the struggles of coming out to their family, the finances required to make changes, or state laws preventing such changes. When transwomen who cannot change their documents to reflect their identity apply to women's colleges, they may be rejected based on the gender written on their documents, not their gender identity (Padawer). Yet today, women's colleges can reinforce their mission by admitting transgender students. In doing so, women's colleges can extend their legacy to include another group of people who suffer oppression based on their gender.

### 1.3.3 Women's Colleges in the News

The increase in articles about transgender students at women's colleges in popular news outlets shows the growing interest in the need for women's colleges to address transgender students. In April 2007, *The Boston Globe* published an article by Adrian Brune, titled "When She Graduates as He." Almost a year later, the *New York Times* published a similar article, "When Girls Will Be Boys" by Alissa Quart. After that, major news sources sporadically published articles about the growing phenomenon of students transitioning during their time at women's colleges.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most widely discussed accounts of a transgender student applying to a women's college is Calliope Wong, who applied to Smith College. In the summer of 2012, Wong,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example: "When She Graduates as He" by Adrian Brune; "Women's Colleges Are on the Wrong Side of History on Transgender Women" by Avi Cummings and Dean Spade; "Who are Women's Colleges For?" by Kiera Feldman; "Simmons College Opens Its Doors to Trans Students" by Mitch Kellaway; "Single-Sex Institutions in a Multi-Gender World: What's a Girl (To Do)?" by Julie Mencher; "When Women Become Men at Wellesley" by Ruth Padawer; "When Girls Will Be Boys" by Alissa Quart; and "The Wellesley Man" by Katy Waldman.

a transwoman and a high school senior, started contacting the Dean of Admission at Smith College, a women's college in Northampton, Massachusetts, regarding their ambiguous policy towards admitting transwomen. Wong also started a blog to show how hard it was for her to navigate the admissions process at Smith College as a transwoman. Wong applied to Smith College that fall after the Dean of Admission recommended that Wong could be admitted given that she identifies as a woman and that she selected that she is female on all the application materials (Giovanniello). On the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), Wong is identified as male. Once Wong received her rejection letter from the Dean of Admission at Smith, she posted it online in the hopes of changing Smith's policy towards transwomen (Calliowong). After Wong posted her letter online, news outlets, such as *Huffington Post*, *USA Today*, and *BuzzFeed*, began to share her story and question Smith's policy. Ultimately, Smith College made few changes, but Calliope Wong's story brought the question of admitting transwomen to women's colleges to the masses.

Over a year after Wong's rejection from Smith, more news outlets published articles about transgender students at women's colleges. The *New York Times* featured an article titled "Who Are Women's Colleges For?" in the Sunday Review section of the paper on May 24 2014, which again brought the question to the homes of middle class America, the very families that may consider a women's college for their daughter. The author, Kiera Feldman, argues that given the small number of women's colleges remaining today, "it seems worse than shortsighted to deny admission to any women who want to attend." *Slate* magazine published "Can Women's Colleges Survive the Transgender Rights Movement?" although they eventually changed the title to "The Wellesley College Man" after readers declared the original title

transphobic. In the article, the author, Katy Waldman, argues that women's colleges are no longer necessary and by encouraging separate education, these colleges are not in line with feminism. On June 9, 2014, *Time* magazine published an op-ed, "Women's Colleges Are on the Wrong Side of History on Transgender Women," by transgender activists and women's college alumni, Dean Spade and Avi Cummings, who argue for women's colleges to accept transgender students. Julie Mencher, an alum of SMITH and the former Transgender Specialist at Smith College, wrote "Single-Sex Institutions in a Multi-Gender World: What's a Girl (To Do)?" which was published in *Huffington Post* on June 24, 2014. In the article, Mencher says that allowing transgender students into women's colleges isn't as clear-cut as some advocates claim while arguing that women's colleges need to reevaluate their mission in order to address the shift in how we understand gender today.

On August 27, 2014, Mills College released its official policy regarding admitting transgender students, which explains that the college only admits students who identify as women. Less than a week after, the President of Mount Holyoke College, Lynn Pasquerella, announced Mount Holyoke's official policy, too, one that would allow transwomen and transmen to attend Mount Holyoke. After Mills and Mount Holyoke both released their policies online, media coverage intensified with national news outlets, such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Huffington Post*, *USA Today*, the *Boston Globe*, *Elle* magazine, *BuzzFeed*, and the *Advocate*, writing about the changes. The *New York Times* featured an article, "When Women Become Men at Wellesley," on the cover of the Sunday magazine on October 15, 2014, telling middle class America the experiences of a transman at Wellesley College. The article also featured full-page photographs juxtaposing the men of Wellesley today with the women of



Wellesley in the sixties, which demonstrates the changing dynamics of women's colleges, as well as gender in society at large. Simmons College released its official policy over a month after Mills and Mount Holyoke, but fewer news articles were written about Simmons' policy. In December 2014, Scripps College released its "Admission Policy Update," which announced that starting in Fall 2016, Scripps will admit students who were assigned female at birth or who identify as women (Scripps).

In January 2015, Mount Holyoke's transgender community made news again in the *Huffington Post*, *Campus Reform*, and the *Washington Blade* when the student-run Project Theater Board canceled the annual spring production of *Vagina Monologues* (Dean-Bailey). One student from the group stated, "At its core, the show offers an extremely narrow perspective on what it means to be a woman... Gender is a wide and varied experience, one that cannot simply be reduced to biological or anatomical distinctions..." (Dean-Bailey). The theater group sought input from the student body in November by circulating an email about potentially canceling the performance (Kingkade). As an alternative to the *Vagina Monologues*, the group has chosen to create its own feminist, trans-inclusive monologues (Dean-Bailey). School officials reported that the decision to change the play was not a direct result of the new admissions policy (Kingkade). One student stated, "many of us who have participated in the show have grown increasingly uncomfortable presenting material that is inherently reductionist and exclusive" (Dean-Bailey).

As Mount Holyoke receives national news coverage about its new admissions policy and the cancellation of the annual performance of *Vagina Monologues* due to the show's transphobia, it seems that a new time for women's colleges is approaching. As Mount Holyoke

and other women's colleges change their admissions policies, it is important to examine how they are changing the collective identity of women's colleges and how students and alums are involved.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

While my research focuses on the official admissions policies of women's colleges, I also examine informal or related policies, such as at colleges that do not have official policies. I also evaluate the actions and reactions of students and alums surrounding the inclusion of transgender students at women's colleges. To guide my analysis, I concentrate on the following two questions.

- What policies and practices have elite women's colleges adopted regarding transgender students' admission and graduation?
- How do these policies, practices, and changes relate to the identity of women's colleges?

#### **1.5 Methods and Methodology**

There are currently almost fifty women's colleges in the United States, and I concentrate on twelve of these colleges. I used the *US News and World Report's* rankings to determine which women's colleges are considered elite liberal arts colleges. In order to narrow down the number of colleges for my research, first, I excluded schools that base their rules on religion. Second, I excluded any women's colleges that are residential women's colleges of coeducational universities. Given that these schools are usually governed by a larger, coeducational school, their policies are impacted by their relationship with coeducational schools, rather than women's colleges. However, I've included Barnard College, despite its

affiliation with Columbia University, as Barnard classifies itself as “an independently incorporated educational institution and an official college of Columbia University” (Procaccini).

Second, I excluded schools that are religious. While women’s colleges were generally started and rooted in Christianity, I ruled out schools that incorporate religion into their administration. Religious women’s colleges can base their exclusionary policies towards transgender students on their religion, unlike secular schools or schools that do not directly include religion in their policies and practices.

I have also excluded institutions that do not offer bachelor of arts degrees as well as two-year colleges in order to narrow the list to elite women’s colleges. I excluded Chatham University, because on May 1, 2014, they announced their decision to become coeducational as of May 2015 (“Resolution”). I omitted Sweet Briar College from my analysis after the Board of Directors of Sweet Briar College voted to close the College at the end of the summer semester of 2015 (Jackson). However, alums fought this decision, eventually allowing the college to stay open for the 2015-2016 academic year. Given the possibility of the school’s closure, expanding their admissions policy is not on the agenda (Stolberg). However, Sweet Briar’s announcement to close and the subsequent alum activism adds to my conjecture on the state of elite, liberal arts women’s colleges in the United States and the importance of alums in maintaining the presence women’s colleges. After these exclusions, the following twelve women’s colleges remained, which I concentrate my analysis on:

1. Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia
2. Barnard College in New York, New York
3. Bryn Mawr College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania

4. Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia
5. Mills College in Oakland, California
6. Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts
7. Scripps College in Claremont, California
8. Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts
9. Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts
10. Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia
11. Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts
12. Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia

I analyze the specific policies regarding admitting transgender students from each college that has published a policy. The policies, listed below, range from a few sentences to a page in length.

**Table 1 Admissions Policies or Related Documents of Twelve Women's Colleges**

<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Name of Document</b>
Agnes Scott College	"Statement of Support on Gender Expression and Gender Identity"
Barnard College	"Transgender Admissions Policy & FAQ"
Bryn Mawr College	"How does Bryn Mawr treat Transgender Students?"
Hollins University	"Policy on Transgender Issues"
Mills College	"Applying For Admission"
Mount Holyoke College	"Institutional Policy on the Admission of Transgender Students"
Scripps College	"Scripps College Admission Policy FAQ"
Simmons College	"Admission Policy for Transgender Applicants"
Smith College	"Gender Identity and Gender Expression at Smith"
Spelman College	
Wellesley College	"Reaffirmation of Mission and Announcing Gender Policy"
Wesleyan College	

Agnes Scott has a policy titled, "Statement of Support on Gender Expression and Gender Identity," which I analyze in the absence of an admissions policy. Given that Spelman College and Wesleyan College do not have official policies regarding admitting transgender students published on their websites, I examine the absence of such policies, as well as related policies regarding gender, non-discrimination, and dress codes.

I draw on a feminist framework, specifically following Susan Stryker's argument that "A feminism that makes room for transgender people still fights to dismantle the structures that prop up gender as a system of oppression, but it does so without passing moral judgment on people who feel the need to change their birth-assigned gender" (Stryker 3). I incorporate this

feminist framework within a Foucauldian notion of the thinkable. Shelley Lynn Tremain writes about Foucault, saying:

Foucault was concerned with philosophical questions that surround rationalities of government, that is, systems of thinking about the nature of the practice of government. A rationality of government, as Foucault explained, is a system of thinking about the practice of government that has the capacity to *rationalize* some form of that activity to those who practice it and to those upon whom it is practiced, where this capacity entails to render thinkable *and* to render applicable or acceptable. (11).

I am specifically interested in the way in which the rationalizing works within the context of women's colleges to produce certain subjects as thinkable as students and others unthinkable, and how by changing admissions policies, some women's colleges are broadening who is rendered thinkable as students. Drawing from this understanding of Foucault, I examine how the emergence of transgender admissions policies at women's colleges renders transgender bodies thinkable at these colleges. While there have been transgender students at many women's colleges before formal admissions policies were released, these policies allow transgender students to be visible as students at women's colleges. Tremain later states, "Foucault's concern with power makes possible the examination of judgments, decisions, imperatives, prohibitions, and relationships with others that become thinkable and livable in regard to certain people-- and in which those people must recognize themselves as subject" (69). By using Foucault, I am looking at the distinct power that women's colleges have as private educational institutions who can delineate their student body and project upon certain people the role of student, but in some cases, also woman. Using Tremain's understanding of Foucault, I analyze how changes in policies and practices at women's colleges relate to the identity of the

women's college. In this line of thinking, I am examining who these admissions policies allow to become thinkable as students, as well as what type of women's college becomes thinkable.

I use feminist critical policy analysis in examining women's colleges' admissions policies. Catherine Marshall describes the goal of feminist critical policy analysis is to transform institutions, explaining, "Feminist analysis questions the purpose of the academy's structures, practices and values in order to do away with or reform those that disadvantage women and others," and she goes onto explain, "feminist critical policy analysis is openly political and change-oriented" (10). By evaluating women's colleges admissions policies toward transgender students, my research questions the practices and values of women's colleges and the changes some women's colleges have made. While Marshall is specifically concerned with how policies exclude or misrepresent women, I broaden feminist critical policy to examine how policies exclude or misrepresent transgender students (7). In addition, looking at the college admissions policies through this framework, I am able to address how the colleges function dependent on specific understandings of gender.

My analysis requires a nuanced understanding of gender in order to explore how women's colleges are defining women and how they are defining their ideal student. I draw from Judith Butler and other gender theorists, so I can evaluate how gendered language can be seen as neutral. While Butler specifically refers to the ways in which language is inherently masculine, for my research, I employ Butler's understanding of gender in order to analyze how women's colleges are defining women, and the implications these definitions have for transgender students during the admissions process and as students of the college.

When examining women's colleges' admissions policies toward transgender students, I specifically review the language the policies use. I look at how the language of the policy determines who becomes thinkable as a student of the women's college, as well as who the policy excludes from admission. I study the specific language that the policies use to describe thinkable students and unthinkable students, as well as how the college incorporates language about transitioning into the admissions policy.

As part of my research, I employ intertextual analysis. Charles Bazerman states, "Intertextual analysis examines the relation of a statement to that sea of words, how it uses those words, how it positions itself in respect to those other words" and then goes on to explain how intertextuality renders "the ways writers draw other characters into their story and how they position themselves within these worlds of multiple texts" visible (1). Using intertextual analysis enables me to study the discussions that admissions policies are contributing to. I evaluate the ways in which women's colleges' admissions policies for transgender students draw from the colleges' specific missions as educational institutions for women, as well as from the collective history of women's colleges as promoting the education and success of women. By admitting transgender students, women's colleges may be seen as defying their mission, and I examine how the admissions policies address this presumed incongruity. In addition to the language in the policies, I also look at the way in which the policies have been "built or woven to achieve particular effects and structures" (MacLure 81). This analysis contributes to my examination of how admissions policies changes relate to the identity of women's colleges.

In chapter three, I analyze four documents from students and alums that describe the activism leading up to policy changes and the reactions to such changes. These documents each



serve as examples of the contemporary nature of these changes. In order to assess alums' reactions to admissions policy changes, I look at an article from the January 2015/Winter edition of the *Mount Holyoke Alumnae Quarterly*, titled, "My Voice: Being Transgender at Mount Holyoke," by Elliot Ruggles from Mount Holyoke Class of 2006.

My thesis is composed of three chapters. In the second chapter, I specifically examine the policies and practices that women's colleges have adopted in regards to admitting transgender students. In the third chapter, I discuss how recently these policies have been created and the possibilities for the future of the policies and women's colleges.

My research indicates the importance of women's colleges creating official admissions policies regarding admitting transgender students. Given that the first official admissions policy was released in August 2014, and some colleges are still forming their own official admissions policies, my research is only the beginning. Further research must be done as more women's colleges release policies and these policies change the environment of these schools and who becomes thinkable as students of the women's colleges.

## CHAPTER 2 INSTITUTIONS GRAPPLING WITH CONTRADICTION

In Dean Spade's speech at Barnard College's Student Government Association Town Hall on April 9, 2014, he states, "Part of what all these schools are doing right now is keeping their policies a little bit hard to understand, which I think is because they're unsure what to do. There's a lot of complexity and politics to it" (Barnard Center for Research on Women). In the year since this speech, women's colleges have produced policies about admitting transgender students, but they're still, to quote Spade, "a little bit hard to understand." The lack of clarity in some of these policies seems to institute more confusion than prior to publishing a policy. The policies I outline include more students as thinkable, but they aren't entirely clear, nor are they inclusive of all transgender or gender non-conforming people.

Nine of the twelve colleges I have chosen have admissions policies for transgender students. These policies vary and could be grouped together into several different categories. I have chosen to look at these twelve colleges in four categories based on how they define who can be admitted. Even within these groups there are some inconsistencies with the language used to describe applicants' gender. For each policy, I examine what language is used to determine a student's gender (either self-identification or legal documents), and then, I look at how the policy affirms gender binaries or not, and who is rendered thinkable as students as a result of the policy. Then, for each college, I look at how the admissions policy relates to their tradition and mission, and how the policy addresses the college's founding as a school for women.

**Table 2 Women's Colleges by Categories of Admissions Policies**

<b>Self-Identity Policies</b>	<b>Consistent Identity Policies</b>	<b>Legal or Medical Identity Policies</b>	<b>Non-Admissions Policies</b>
Admissions policies that only require a student's self-identification for admission.	Policies that require an applicant to show consistent identification through all parts of their application.	Admissions policies that require legal or medical identification.	Policies that do not specify the college's admissions.
Mount Holyoke College	Barnard College	Hollins University	Agnes Scott College
Simmons College	Wellesley College	Bryn Mawr College	Spelman College
Smith College	Mills College	Scripps College	Wesleyan College

Mount Holyoke, Simmons, Mills, and Smith all use the concept of self-identification regarding gender in their official admission policies. However, they don't all use the term the same way, nor do they all explain what they mean by the term. For example, self-identification for Mount Holyoke, Simmons, and Smith refers to how a student categorizes their own gender, whereas for Mills, self-identification requires how a student identifies as well as their ability to demonstrate that identity through all materials in the application, such as the use of she/her pronouns in recommendations from teachers. Consistent-identification policies is the category of policies that require an applicant to be identified as woman on all application materials. The idea of consistent-identification is from the policies of Barnard, Wellesley, and Mills, which all require students consistently live and identify as women.

Self-identification comes to oppose other colleges' policies, such as Scripps' policy, which invokes the concept of legal sex as the criterion for admission. Using the term legal sex reinforces myths about transitioning and transgender people. Legal sex is usually used to refer to government- or state-issued documents, such as a birth certificates or driver's licenses.

However, each organization that produces identification documents has different rules for how to change gender on the document. For example, to change gender on a driver's license, a social security card, or a birth certificate usually requires proof of gender-conforming surgery (*Normal Life* 12). But this requirement to show proof of surgery reaffirms the myth that all transgender people have genital surgery as part of their transition ("Documenting Gender" 754). Requiring proof of surgery to change gender on official documents also excludes those who cannot afford surgery, which is particularly important in my research given that traditional aged college applicants are 16 or 17 years old and may not have the money or parental permission for surgery.

Using terms such as self-identification and legal sex instantiates a binary between cisgender women and transgender women, rather than recognizing all women as women. By defining people who can be admitted by the sex reported on their birth certificate, colleges are ignoring the applicant's gender, which is transphobic. In his speech at Barnard, Dean Spade specifies, "The fundamental message of transphobia is that trans people are not who we say we are. That we are who the government says we are, who a doctor says we are, or who any random person who wants to beat us up on the street says we are. The message of transphobia is 'we don't believe you. You don't exist. You're not who you say you are.'" Defining who can be admitted to a college by the sex assigned at birth and printed on their birth certificate reaffirms this exclusionary myth that transpeople are not who they say they are. Given the different ways each policy uses certain terms, I will outline how each policy uses the terms self-identity and legal sex.

Crucial to my examination is how each policy renders certain people thinkable as students of the college and inherently excludes some people, making them unthinkable students. In evaluating who each policy produces as thinkable students, I also consider how the policy instantiates gender binaries. In addition, by examining how the mission of the college is used within the admissions policy, I make connections between the mission of the college and the thinkable students to argue that transinclusive admissions policies are a way of expanding the missions of women's colleges.

## **2.1 Colleges with Self-Identity Policies**

Some women's colleges have created policies stating that they will admit students who identify as women, but even within this category they differ about whom they will admit. Mount Holyoke admits the most students and includes a list of genders they admit. Simmons College and Smith College use the term self-identification, but don't admit transmen.

### **2.1.1 Mount Holyoke College**

Mount Holyoke College founder, Mary Lyon, motivated the first graduating classes of the college by instructing them to "Go where no one else will go. Do what no one else will do," and this sentiment is embodied in Mount Holyoke's admissions policy ("The Legacy of Mary Lyon"). Mount Holyoke is the only women's college that offers admission to women, gender non-conforming people, and transmen. Mount Holyoke has the longest of the nine policies as well, which helps in making it the most clear policy.

At the 2014 Convocation, Mount Holyoke College President, Lynn Pasquerella, announced the college's "Institutional Policy on the Admission of Transgender Students," and

the detailed policy appeared on the Mount Holyoke website soon after. While some of the wording of the policy is present in President Pasquerella's speech, the posted policy is much more detailed, breaking out the different genders that can and cannot be admitted to Mount Holyoke. Although the language of the policy is exclusionary, the policy is the most inclusive of the twelve colleges. The policy specifically states that anyone can apply for admission who is "biologically born female; identifies as a woman, Biologically born female; identifies as a man, biologically born female; identifies as other/they/ze, biologically born female; does not identify as either woman or man, biologically born male; identifies as woman, biologically born male; identifies as other/they/ze and when "other/they" identity includes woman, biologically born with both male and female anatomy (Intersex); identifies as a woman." By naming the different people who will be considered for admission to the college, Mount Holyoke renders those people thinkable as students. But a person who is "biologically born male; identifies as man" cannot be considered for admission to the college ("Admission of Transgender Students"). The policy includes "biologically born male; identifies as other/they/ze and when 'other/they' identity includes woman," but not (to use the policy's poor language) those who are biologically born male; identifies as other/they/ze and when 'other/they' identity doesn't include woman. The omission of people on the basis of a self-identification that is not "woman" and referring to their biology as "male" ignores the identity of these people through both omitting them from the identities named in the policy and categorizing them as unadmittable due to their sex assigned at birth.

While the term biologically born male or female is incorrect, the policy itself is the most inclusive. Babies are not biologically born male or female, but deemed so by doctors after

seeing the newborn's genitals. However, genitalia is not the only category used to determine sex; in some cases, hormones, reproductive organs, chromosomes, or secondary sex characteristics may be used. The multiple ways sex may be assigned to a person complicates the nature of sex as a category and the conflation of women and vagina, men and penis, which the wording of Mount Holyoke's policy ignores. Using the term "biologically born" reinforces binaries that regard sex as biological and ignores the social construction of sex. Sex is not inherent, but rather, assigned at birth. By using the concept of biological sex, Mount Holyoke nullifies that people are assigned a sex, and therefore, reifies exclusionary language.

The policy also states, "Many students will choose leaving home for college as an opportunity to explore or proclaim new identities. Whether a student transitions suddenly or has a long history with a particular gender identity will not have an impact on how their application for admission is assessed." In this statement, the College announces that self-identification is enough, and that Mount Holyoke recognizes people's identities without the need for confessions of identity or paperwork that is supposed to confirm an applicant's identity.

By admitting these students and having a publicized admissions policy change, Mount Holyoke not only rendered transgender students visible, but also initiated changes to meet the needs of transgender students on campus. The last question of the policy asks how Mount Holyoke supports students who transition while at the College. The answer shows that the student conduct code at Mount Holyoke prohibits discrimination and harassment, and the institutional policy states, "Mount Holyoke is committed to using students' preferred names and pronouns, and may make changes to diplomas and other College records when a name is

legally changed,” it is not clear how student and residential life will be changed in the light of these admissions changes.

Like many other college policies, Mount Holyoke includes a list of questions and answers. The list begins with, “Is Mount Holyoke College still a women’s college?”, which is answered with a resounding yes, as well as a mini-introduction to gender studies. Like President Pasquerella’s speech, this answer mentions that “what it means to be a woman is not static” and makes a connection between early feminists, who argued for women’s inclusion in male-dominated fields, and current feminists’ notion that “gender identity is not reducible to the body.” This part of the Mount Holyoke policy is effective in dismantling gender essentialism and gender binaries while also looking at the mission of Mount Holyoke in a new light. The policy states, “Instead, we must look at identity in terms of the external context in which the individual is situated. It is this positionality that biological and transwomen share, and it is this positionality that is relevant when women’s colleges open their gates for those aspiring to live, learn, and thrive within a community of women.” While referring to cisgender women as biological women is problematic because it may reproduce the transphobic sentiment that transwomen are not real women, the argument resounds. Mount Holyoke has found a way to align admitting transgender students with the historic mission of the college in order to demonstrate that admitting transgender students is not fundamentally changing the college, but expanding its mission.

The third question on the list of FAQs asks, “When did the College begin its internal process of reviewing, researching, and vetting a policy for the admission of transgender students, and what was that process?”. The College’s answer to the question mentions that



faculty and staff “came together to articulate a policy,” while “student leaders were also involved in the discussion,” and “The Alumnae Association’s board was consulted.” Given that my following chapter is devoted to discussing how students and alums are involved in the process of making admissions changes as well as their reactions to such changes, it is important to note that Mount Holyoke considered both of these groups in their decision-making process.

### **2.1.2 Simmons College**

Like other women’s colleges I have described, Simmons College’s “Admission Policy for Transgender Applicants” is presented in a question and answer webpage. Prior to the question and answer page, there is a paragraph introduction, which describes Simmons’ policy.

All applicants to the undergraduate program who were assigned female at birth and/or applicants who self-identify as women are eligible to apply for admission. We do not require government issued documentation for purposes of identifying an applicant's gender identity. Once enrolled, any student who completes the College's baccalaureate requirements will be awarded a Simmons degree regardless of gender identity or expression.

Simmons admits students who were assigned female at birth as well as those who were not, but are women. The use of the language “assigned female at birth” demonstrates more inclusive and nuanced language than Mount Holyoke, for which I praise Simmons. This policy doesn’t specifically state whether gender fluid applicants are considered for admission if they were not assigned female at birth. Simmons deserves credit for stating that they “do not require government issued documentation for purposes of identifying an applicant’s gender identity,” which is repeated twice on the FAQ page, once in the paragraph given above, and a second time, when answering, “What if I have discrepancies in my application materials regarding my gender?”. The page states, “If you are concerned about your materials, you may

speak with your admission counselor to discuss your application. You may also address any of the discrepancies in your essay or personal statement. We do not require any government issued identification to verify gender.” This policy is important in affirming students’ gender identity, rather than “strongly encouraging” them to submit a statement about their gender, like Mills. In addition, not requiring documentation to clarify an applicant’s gender also widens who can apply to those who do not have the ability, resources, or opportunity to change their gender on government-issued documentation.

One of the questions listed on the FAQ page asks, “What does this mean for the Simmons mission?”. The answer states,

Simmons is committed to our historic mission as a women's college. We also recognize that traditional notions of gender are evolving, and increasingly individuals do not conform to the gender binary. As an institution that values inclusion, Simmons College acknowledges this reality and believes that this policy is aligned with our values. We are a campus community that supports a full range of gender identity and expression.

Like Mount Holyoke, Simmons also refers to how gender is changing, but most important to my research, the answer also includes the mention that some people do not conform to the gender binary. Given that other colleges are reaffirming gender binaries through their admissions policy, Simmons’ statement that they “value inclusion” and recognize that “increasingly individuals do not conform to the gender binary,” displays a powerful stride in introducing transinclusion within the college’s mission.

Through the “Admission Policy for Transgender Applicants,” Simmons College makes applicants who were assigned female at birth and “applicants who self-identify as women” as thinkable students. Using language like “assigned female at birth” destabilizes the essentializing language of biological sex, while also asserting the social construction of sex.

### 2.1.3 Smith College

Smith College updated its admissions policy on May 2, 2015, after a year-long formal study by the Board of Trustees and the Admission Policy Study Group. During this process, the group consulted students, alums, faculty, parents, legal experts, and gender scholars (McCartney and Mugar Eveillard). The FAQ section of the “For First Year Students” page online, asks, “How does Smith consider applications from transgender students?”, which is answered with the following:

Applicants who were assigned male at birth and identify as women are eligible for admission. Smith does not accept applications from men; those assigned female at birth and who now identify as male will not be eligible for admission. Smith's policy is one of self-identification. To be considered for admission, applicants must select "female" on the Common Application. For more information go to Gender Identity and Expression.

Like Simmons and Mills, who released their policies earlier, Smith admits women, but not transmen. Smith also excludes those who do not identify as women, stating, “Our focus on women’s education means that we consider for admission applicants who identify as women and who seek entrance into a community dedicated to women’s education.” The final sentence of the policy links to another page, titled “Gender Identity and Expression.” This page is similar to the FAQ pages of Scripps and Simmons in the way Smith addresses how admitting transwomen is consistent with their history and legacy as a women’s college. Throughout the policy and FAQs, the term self-identification is repeated, which indicates the importance of the term. Policies of self-identification are encouraged, and by repeating the phrase, Smith emphasizes that their policy should be grouped under this category. In the two months since releasing the official policy, Smith has gone from stating, “Smith expects that, to be eligible for review, a student’s application and supporting documentation (transcripts, recommendations,

etc.) will reflect her identity as a woman” to completely removing any mention of gender markers on supplemental application materials. This change reinforces that Smith is positioning itself as progressive with their policy of self-identification.

The next FAQ asks, “How does Smith decide who is a woman?”. The wording of this question is unusual because it implies that a college can assign an applicant a gender. The unusual wording is cleared up through the answer, “It doesn’t. With regard to admission, Smith relies upon the information provided by each student applicant. In other contexts, different definitions and requirements may apply. For example, the definition of a woman for NCAA competition may differ from the definition of a woman for purposes of admission to Smith or other single-sex colleges.” This answer starts off positively, by affirming that Smith doesn’t decide who is a woman, but the explanation of the definition of woman changes depending on the context is odd. Stating that the definition of a woman for NCAA competition could be different than for applying to a women’s college introduces the potential for a student to be excluded because of their sex assigned at birth while at Smith. Although Smith isn’t excluding the student, the inclusion of this example demonstrates that a transgender student may be subject to discrimination from school activities while attending Smith.

Smith’s policy defines women as thinkable students, although only at the time of admission. The policy also clarifies through the last FAQ that “Once admitted, any student who completes the college’s graduation requirements -- regardless of gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation -- will be awarded a Smith degree.” So at the time of admission, only women can be thinkable as students, but from matriculation to graduation, this restriction doesn’t apply.

One FAQ asks, “Is Smith still a women’s college?”, which is answered, “Absolutely. In its mission and legal status, Smith is a women’s college. And, like other women’s colleges, Smith is a place where students are able to explore who they are in an open and respectful environment.” Unlike other colleges, Smith states that both its mission and legal status is as a women’s college. Incorporating this comment about the college’s legal status invokes Title IX without naming it, which serves as a way to ignore how Title IX can be interpreted as allowing women’s colleges to admit transgender students.

### **Discussion of Self-Identification Policies**

Self-identification policies, like Mount Holyoke’s, Simmons’, and Smith’s are valuable in that they support women’s self-identification as women. In addition, policies based on a student’s self-identification work to destabilize the myth of legal gender. By encouraging applicants to explain any gender incoherence on application materials through a confession, Simmons specifically targets transgender students.

However, policies that base admission on self-identifying as women, such as Simmons’ and Smith’s, ignore the gender oppression transmen and other people who don’t identify as women face, which is especially concerning given that transmen attend these women’s colleges. Drawing a line between admitting people who don’t identify as women, while the student body consists of people who don’t identify as women, is an arbitrary line. So by excluding transmen from applying, although transmen are among the student population, Simmons and Smith are creating unnecessary divisions.

## 2.2 Colleges with Consistent Self-Identity Policies

Consistently identifying means that all application materials refer to the applicant as a woman. Mills College, Barnard College, and Wellesley College require that applicants live and consistently identify as women, although none thoroughly explain the nuances of such identification. This creates a complication to self-identification, which warrants a new category. By requiring that applicants live and identify as women, these colleges are demanding more than self-identification, which excludes applicants who are not out.

### 2.2.1 Mills College

Mills College was the first women's college to publicize a written policy for admitting transgender students when the college released its "Applying For Admission," which went into effect on the first day of the 2014-2015 academic year, August 27, 2014 (Asimov). The policy at Mills states that the college "admits self-identified women and people assigned female at birth who do not fit into the gender binary at the undergraduate level" ("Applying For Admission"). While this sentence may indicate self-identification, the policy goes on to complicate that identification. The policy goes on to outline that the college "shall not discriminate against applicants whose gender identity does not match their legally assigned sex. Students who self-identify as female are eligible to apply for undergraduate admission. This includes students who were not assigned to the female sex at birth but live and identify as women at the time of application." In essence, the college will admit women (both cis and transwomen), as well as "students who are legally assigned to the female sex, but who identify as transgender or gender fluid." So while the title of the policy itself names "transgender or gender questioning

applicants,” the wording in the policy refers to transgender or gender fluid students, excluding those who are questioning their gender.

Mills College excludes transmen from admission, stating, “Students assigned to the female sex at birth who have undergone a legal change of gender to male prior to the point of application are not eligible for admission.” However, the policy ends with the sentence, “Once admitted, any student who completes the College’s graduation requirements shall be awarded a degree,” which includes transmen.

The policy at Mills College includes the language of both “self-identity” and “legal sex,” unlike most other college policies, which use one term or the other. The final paragraph of the policy encourages applicants to submit additional information to the College.

Where there is a conflict between the student's self-identified gender and the gender that appears on legal documentation such as an academic transcript or documents provided as part of the financial aid process, the student is strongly encouraged to contact the Office of Undergraduate Admissions for a discussion around their desire to attend a women's college and how they self-identify in terms of gender. This self-identification shall be the driving force behind the College's eligibility decision.

Mills is strongly encouraging students who have varying gender markers on their application materials to tell the admissions department how they identify and why they wish to attend a women’s college. I read this requirement as instituting consistent identification through a confession of gender, where the student must perform this self-identity strongly enough to be considered woman enough to continue in the application process, which is invasive and contradicts the ostensible spirit of the policy.

In the preamble to the policy, Mills cites that they do not discriminate “on the basis of race, color, marital status, age, religious creed, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, or

disability (in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1973 Rehabilitation Act Section 504, and implementing regulations).” Beginning the policy with a mention of the Americans with Disabilities Act is superfluous given that the act does not cover gender identity or gender expression. Nonetheless, including the Americans with Disabilities Act highlights that discrimination based on gender is still legal, which paints Mills’ policy favorably.

### **2.2.2 Barnard College**

On June 4, 2015, Barnard College announced an official policy regarding admitting transgender students, starting in fall 2016. As the most recently released policy, Barnard has had the time to be able to see other women’s colleges’ policies as well as the reactions to the policies. The policy states the following:

In furtherance of our mission, tradition and values as a women’s college, and in recognition of our changing world and evolving understanding of gender identity, Barnard will consider for admission those applicants who consistently live and identify as women, regardless of the gender assigned to them at birth.

In the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section of the admissions website, one question asks, “What does it mean to consistently live and identify as a woman?”. I apply Barnard’s answer to both Barnard and Wellesley since only Barnard defines the phrase. The question is answered, “The applicant must identify herself as a woman and her application materials must support this self-identification. If the applicant is concerned about discrepancies in her application materials, she can speak with an admissions counselor or address any concerns in the essay or personal statement” (“Transgender Admissions Policy & FAQ”). Requiring that applicants consistently live and identify as women restricts admission to those who are out at school and home.



Barnard's policy excludes transmen and gender non-conforming people from admission in an effort to stand by the Barnard mission statement-- "to provide generations of promising, high-achieving young women with an outstanding liberal arts education in a community where women lead," which narrows the thinkable student at the time of admission. By sticking with such a narrow definition of women, Barnard isn't widening their mission. To be admitted as a student at Barnard, an applicant must show that they "consistently live and identify," which creates a necessity for applicants to perform womanhood without any doubts or discrepancies in order to qualify as a thinkable student and for admission.

Although Barnard does not admit transmen, the policy also states, "This admissions policy does not affect students who transition during their time at Barnard. Once admitted, every student will receive the individualized support that is an essential part of the Barnard experience" (Caruso-FitzGerald and Spar). Despite this seeming inclusion, Barnard's admissions policy also states, "We will also continue to use gendered language that reflects our identity as a women's college." While some women's colleges have opted to use gender-inclusive language in official documents, Barnard is choosing to ignore the multiplicity of identities within the student population, and to continue to use gendered pronouns. So while Barnard will graduate any student, until graduation, all students will be feminized.

The letter from the Chair of the Barnard Board of Trustees, Jolyne Caruso-FitzGerald, and Barnard President, Debora Spar, that accompanied the release of the official admissions policy speaks to the process of making the decision. For a year up to the release of the policy, the Committee on Campus Life and the Board of Trustees discussed creating a policy for admitting transgender students. In addition to discussions within the Board of Trustees, during

the first half of 2015, Barnard College officials set up a series of talks and community panels to discuss the possible changes for the college's admissions policy. In these discussions, the letter states, "What came through most strongly was that our community shares a deep love for Barnard and a desire to do the right thing for this institution." The right thing for the institution could be understood a myriad of ways, and the letter continues, "As expected, a wide range of passionate and deeply held beliefs were discussed and debated. But on two main points, the responses were compelling and clear. There was no question that Barnard must reaffirm its mission as a college for women. And there was little debate that transwomen should be eligible for admission to Barnard." The desire to do the right thing for the institution is linked to Barnard's reaffirming itself as a women's college. Through restricting admission to those who consistently live and identify as women, Barnard is sticking to a narrow definition of women in its mission statement, as well as narrowly defining who is thinkable as an admissible student.

### **2.2.3 Wellesley College**

In March 2015, Wellesley College released their policy, titled, "Reaffirmation of Mission and Announcing Gender Policy." As the use of the word reaffirmation in the title suggests, Wellesley is hardly changing its mission to cater to a wider number of applicants. Instead, Wellesley is repeating that they are a women's college that caters exclusively to women, and the college has expanded its definition of women beyond cisgender women. The policy states, "Wellesley is, and always has been, a women's college" and "Every aspect of Wellesley's educational program is, and will continue to be, designed and implemented to serve women, and to prepare them well to thrive in a complex world." Apparently, this "complex world"

includes using gender-neutral pronouns, given that the policy also states, “Wellesley will use language reflective of its identity as a women’s college, i.e., female pronouns and other gendered language, in all institutional communications.” Using she/her pronouns creates a division between students, where students who do not use these pronouns are excluded, which is transphobic. Using gender-neutral language in official college communications would support the gender identity of all students and demonstrate that the college values the identification of all students, not just those who use she/her pronouns.

Beginning the policy with the reiteration of the mission of Wellesley reads as a prelude to the idea that the policy will not ultimately be changing the college’s mission. The official admissions policy is that “Wellesley will consider for admission any applicant who lives as a woman and consistently identifies as a woman.” Given that Wellesley’s policy does not include language about “legal sex,” the college would admit transwomen, but not transmen. As I argued when I explained the problems of the term legal sex, living as a woman and consistently identifying as a woman could be hard for some applicants who are still in high school.

In a list of FAQ, Wellesley explains what the policy means by consistently identifying as a woman, stating, “‘Consistently’ simply denotes a student’s commitment to her gender identity. If an applicant’s gender identity is not clearly reflected in her application materials, the College will request additional information that may include a letter from a parent, healthcare provider, teacher, or clergy, to give a few examples.” To specify that an applicant may be asked to submit a letter from another person confirming their gender aligns with the fundamental concept of transphobia from Dean Spade’s speech at Barnard-- not believing people are who they say they

are. By asking for an applicant to submit a letter from another person to affirm their identity as a woman, Wellesley is restricting admission to those who cannot provide such a letter.

Wellesley's policy ends, saying, "If, during a student's time at Wellesley, the student no longer identifies as a woman and decides that Wellesley, as a women's college, no longer offers an appropriate education and social environment, Wellesley will offer guidance and resources to assist in making choices that are best for the student." I read "appropriate education and social environment" to refer to the exclusion that some transgender students may feel from Wellesley's consistent feminization of students. Offering students who wish to transfer guidance and resources is less comforting than offering students an environment where they feel their identity is valued.

### **Discussion of Colleges with Consistent Identity Policies**

Consistent identity policies are valuable in that they allow for transwomen to be included. However, traditional-aged college applicants may not be able to consistently live and identify as women. By requiring transgender applicants to show that they live and consistently identify as a woman, Mills, Barnard, and Wellesley are requiring applicants for a universal performance of their womanhood in order to qualify for admission, which is restrictive. By placing this burden on those who were not assigned female at birth, these colleges are creating an unnecessary hurdle for transgender students during the application process, while also instantiating a binary between cisgender and transgender applicants. Thus, the self-identification called for in the policies of Mills, Barnard, and Wellesley is more than just a student identifying their own gender; the student must also have their gender reinscribed by

their application, transcript, and recommendations from teachers. Considering that students must be gendered in all aspects of their application, the term self-identification isn't an accurate description, as their identification must also be affirmed by a collection of witnesses.

In addition, by requiring that applicants demonstrate that they consistently identify as women, Mills, Barnard, and Wellesley are dismissing applicants who may not be out at school or at home, and thus, unable to consistently identify as women. Mills College, Barnard College and Wellesley College create the thinkable student as a woman at the time of application, but by placing the restriction that a student must consistently live and identify as a woman, they narrow the potential applicants by requiring that students have a normative transition process across legal, social, and institutional domains. So while Mills, Barnard, and Wellesley should be credited for introducing policies that allow transwomen to be admitted, the policies place unnecessary restrictions on what transwomen applicants must undergo in order to be admitted, which excludes many potential students due to the student's lack of resources. These policies punish applicants who already face many struggles.

### **2.3 Colleges with Legal or Medical Policies**

As I wrote in the introduction to this chapter, legal sex is not a conclusive category. Legal sex can refer to the sex designated on a person's birth certificate, passport, driver's license, or any other government- or state-issued identification, but each identification-issuing entity does not have the same rules on when they will change a person's gender on their identification, which strips the term legal sex of meaning. Basing a policy on medical procedures or steps is also unclear because not all transgender people take these steps, and these people should not

be excluded. By restricting admission based on medical procedures, colleges are producing transphobic and classist admissions policies. These policies are exclusionary because they are based on the presumption that all transgender people must have medical procedures or take hormones in order to confirm their gender. In addition, since the cost of hormone therapy and gender confirming surgery is expensive and often not covered under private health insurance or Medicaid, policies that use medicine or surgery requirements are neglecting those who cannot afford hormones or surgery (“Documenting Gender” 755).

### **2.3.1 Bryn Mawr College**

Bryn Mawr’s online news page published an article titled, “In Affirming Mission, Bryn Mawr Board Sets Inclusive Guidelines for Undergraduate Admission” on February 9, 2015.

Within the article itself, the current policy is described:

Specifically, the board-accepted recommendation strongly affirms the College’s mission—to educate women to be future leaders—and in this mission context more clearly articulates the eligible undergraduate applicant pool. In addition to those applicants who were assigned female at birth, the applicant pool will be inclusive of transwomen and of intersex individuals who live and identify as women at the time of application. Intersex individuals who do not identify as male are also eligible for admission. Those assigned female at birth who have taken medical or legal steps to identify as male are not eligible for admission.

Like other women’s colleges, this article reaffirms that the college’s mission is not changed by admitting transgender students. Bryn Mawr College’s Board of Trustees’ Chair Arlene Gibson ‘65 is quoted, saying, “Bryn Mawr continues its clear mission to educate women to be future leaders, but it also recognizes that conceptions of gender are changing and that the College must respond to these changes.” In this statement, Gibson is tying the mission of the college to the new admissions policy in order to represent the policy as a positive expansion of Bryn

Mawr's mission, "to educate women to be future leaders." By admitting applicants who were not assigned female at birth, but who identify as women, Bryn Mawr is widening who can be educated to be future leaders, which is a good step in promoting the inclusion of transwomen.

The article describes this policy as inclusive, yet transmen are excluded from admission. However, current Bryn Mawr students can change their name and/or gender markers, indicating that transmen attend the college. The difference seems to be that these students had not taken "medical or legal steps to identify as male" at the time of their admission to the college. This dependence on medical or legal steps is ambiguous, given that the specific steps are not named. Instead, the article states, "In cases where an applicant's gender identity is not clearly reflected in their application materials, the College may request additional information, which could include verifiable legal or medical steps taken to affirm gender. In evaluating such additional information, the College fully intends to be as flexible and inclusive as possible." I consider Bryn Mawr one of the women's colleges with a murky legal policy because of this caveat that Bryn Mawr could demand that a student produce "verifiable legal or medical steps taken to affirm gender" if the student's application doesn't clearly reflect their gender. Opening up the possibility that a student will have to show such evidence to prove their gender identity works against Bryn Mawr's policy as a whole and reproduces normative assumptions of what steps a person must take in order to transition. In addition, suggesting that some applicants will have to show "verifiable legal or medical steps taken to affirm their gender" instantiates a transphobic binary that transwomen must complete specific steps in order to be considered women, rather than simply claiming their gender.

### 2.3.2 Scripps College

The “Scripps College Admission Policy FAQ” as written on the Scripps College website describes the college’s policy:

Scripps accepts all applications who indicate their legal sex as female submitted through the Common Application. The Common Application addresses the question of sex as follows:

*Federal guidelines mandate that we collect data on the legal sex of all applicants. Please report the sex currently listed on your birth certificate. If you wish to provide more details regarding your sex or gender identity, you are welcome to do so in the Additional Information section. (Italics in the original)*

Scripps’ choice to follow the lead of the Common Application is not progressive or inclusive. After all, the Common Application is using the gender markers on birth certificates to gender applicants, which positions applicants differently. First, each state has different rules and regulations about changing gender on birth certificates (*Normal Life 12*). For example, Tennessee is the only state that will not change the gender on a birth certificate, so transgender applicants born in Tennessee would be automatically excluded from admission, or even the possibility of admission, to Scripps. Second, not all transgender applicants may have changed their gender on their birth certificate, especially since traditional college applicants are seventeen to eighteen years old. At the end of Scripps’ policy, it states, “Scripps College has never asked applicants (or any students) to submit medical documentation to verify sex or gender identity. Adopting this practice would be a significant departure from Scripps College’s historical practices and its culture that respects privacy.” So while the applicants must select the sex as reported on their birth certificate, the College doesn’t ask the applicant about their gender again.



One of the questions on the FAQ page asks, “Has the College matriculated trans individuals in the past?”, which is answered, “We have matriculated students who are questioning their gender. We recognize that the process of identifying trans is not the same for every individual, and we support all students as they engage in the process of self-discovery.” The answer to this question reveals that Scripps has not knowingly accepted a transgender student who has gone on to attend Scripps, although in an answer to one of the FAQs, the policy states, “Scripps is a women’s college where all of the students do not identify as women,” which implies that transmen attend or have attended Scripps. This distinction reveals that while only those whose birth certificate states they are female are admissible, the thinkable student is not necessarily a woman.

The Scripps FAQ asks, “Would the mission of Scripps College change as a result of the new admission policy?”, which directly addresses much of the confusion regarding admitting transgender students to women’s colleges. The answer reveals the complexities of this issue.

No. Women’s colleges are committed to challenging unequal gender dynamics within mainstream society, supporting intellectual and personal growth of their students, and fostering critical analyses of gender. Admitting trans students is harmonious with these commitments and is consistent with the underlying mission of women’s colleges to support, nurture, and value the voices of those who have been marginalized by gender.

This answer articulates the complexities of gender, and how women’s colleges can include transgender students without losing their status as women’s colleges or becoming coed colleges. This answer reinscribes how important it is for Scripps’ admissions policy to coincide with their mission as a women’s college. Through this answer, Scripps affirms that admitting transgender students is an expansion of the College’s original mission, rather than divorcing from the College’s legacy.

However, in answering the question, “Will the presence of trans students prevent Scripps students from bonding around shared gender experiences?”, the College becomes more complex, stating, “As our students express, Scripps is a women’s college where all of the students do not identify as women. Scripps students have a wide range of gender experiences because of the way gender intersects with race, class, ability, and sexuality,” which is valuable. But the answer continues, “Trans students do not introduce difference into an otherwise homogenous student body.” In trying to assert that the student population is diverse, the last sentence skims over the impact of the transgender students attending women’s colleges. Having transgender students at a women’s college introduces difference by straying from the previously held norm of women’s colleges as exclusively for women students. Those who do not identify as women become thinkable as students, but not as applicants, a distinction that is reinforced through Scripps’ policy requiring that applicants select the sex as reported on their birth certificate.

### **2.3.3 Hollins University**

Hollins University has a clear policy, but not one that I endorse due to its dependency on medical and legal steps of transition. The Hollins University Student Handbook lists the College’s “Policy on Transgender Issues” on page 7, which begins, “As expressed in the mission statement, Hollins University offers undergraduate liberal arts education for women. In order to matriculate into, and graduate from the university, an undergraduate student must be female.” By tying the policy so closely to the mission statement, Hollins restricts the student population and prevents the University from adapting their mission.

The policy states, “If a degree-seeking undergraduate student undergoes sex reassignment from female to male (as defined by the university below) at any point during her time at Hollins, the student will be helped to transfer to another institution since conferral of a Hollins degree will be limited to those who are women.” Hollins is the only college to require students to transfer should they transition while a student, which earns it the title of the strictest policy from scholars and student-affairs officials alike (Troop). Hollins defines sex reassignment to include the following:

When an undergraduate student ‘self identifies’ as a male **and** initiates any of the following processes: 1) undergoes hormone therapy with the intent to transform anatomically from female to male; 2) undergoes any surgical process (procedure) to transform from female to male; or, 3) changes her name legally with the intent of identifying herself as a man” (Bold in original).

While I don’t agree with the policy itself, I value that the document defines what the administration considers self-identifying to include, rather than leaving the term open to interpretation.

Hollins’ policy also states that the college will admit transwomen, as long as they have “completed the physical sex reassignment surgery and legal transformation from male to female.” Given the barriers for people who want to start hormone therapy, have surgery, and change their name, especially for those who are in high school, the expectation that a traditional-aged college applicant has the means and opportunity to complete such a process before applying to college seems unlikely. By enforcing these restrictions, Hollins is specifically preventing transwomen who cannot afford hormones and surgery, which are often required to change genders on official documents, from applying (“Documenting Gender” 755).

The distinction in the policies for transwomen and transmen are important. For Hollins students who identify as men and initiate any medical care, surgery, or name change to confirm their gender, they must leave the college. But for transwomen to be admitted to Hollins, they must complete these same steps. The difference between initiating and completing creates a double standard, where students who deviate from what Hollins has determined to mean identifying as a woman renders them unthinkable (and expellable) as students. But transwomen must fulfill what Hollins has defined as the necessary steps of transition to become thinkable students. Hollins creates a binary for students where stepping outside the gender binary makes them not thinkable as students. The thinkable student at Hollins must be certain of their identity as a woman. Hollins is inherently demanding that a student's transition cannot occur at the University, by requiring that students be admitted and graduate as women who are certain of their identity as women.

Hollins is the only institution to specify that degrees will only be conferred on women, while other colleges are mainly concerned with a student's gender at admission and not matriculation or graduation. By only admitting female students and forcing students who no longer identify as women to transfer, Hollins is reinscribing an essentializing definition of woman onto all students.

### **Discussion of Colleges with Legal or Medical Policies**

Policies based on legal sex or medical care are exclusionary because sex is a socially constructed concept that isn't instantiated through the law or medical care. By reinforcing sex through the term legal sex, colleges are implying that a person has a legal sex, when different

government- or state-issued documents can report different gender markers. The discrepancy between a person's identification occurs because it is hard to change sex on official identification as each state or ID-issuing agency has different rules as to what a person must do in order to change their gender on their ID. In addition, these rules can be harder to navigate for traditional college age applicants, who are under 18 and may need the permission of their parents. Basing admission on legal sex is exclusionary through narrowing the thinkable applicant to a normative ideals of womanhood and transitioning. Admitting transwomen who have changed their sex on their birth certificate, which requires genital surgery in most states, presumes that all transgender people have genital surgery and creates a notion of normative steps of transitioning. Basing admission on legal sex or medical care reinforces myths about sex and gender, which clutters admissions policies without definitively stating who can be admitted.

#### **2.4 Colleges with No Admissions Policies**

The following three colleges, Agnes Scott, Spelman, and Wesleyan, do not have an admissions policy for transgender students published on their official website. Instead, I examined other official documents from each college that speak to who the college admits and how they imagine the gender of their student body. Although these are the only three colleges within the twelve I have researched that are located in Georgia and do not have an admissions policy regarding transgender students, I don't wish to categorize their lack of policies through their geographic location given other factors about women's colleges. For example, the Seven Sisters colleges (which are all located in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania) are

usually considered the most prestigious and often likened to the Ivy League colleges, which presumably impacts their governing and endowment (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 6).

#### **2.4.1 Agnes Scott College**

The “Statement of Support on Gender Expression and Gender Identity” is one page long. The Statement begins, “Agnes Scott College is a diverse and inclusive community that strives to provide a safe learning environment for all students, including those who challenge gender norms within our society,” and ends, “We are also proud of the ways women’s colleges have provided students the opportunity to explore freely and pursue ideas, aspirations and identities, including those considered radical or unconventional in their time. Our statement of support on gender expression and gender identity is consistent with the multitude of ways that we seek to live our mission.” By opening with the larger mission of women’s colleges, Agnes Scott asserts that women’s colleges should support transgender students. The section that addresses LGBT students is short and states the following:

In light of these commitments, we support students, including students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex or questioning (LGBTQIQ). This support takes the form of a variety of campus services designed to create a safe learning and living environment for all. We recognize and value individuals across the spectrum of gender and are proud of the trans women, trans men, and non-binary individuals who have been admitted and/or graduated from Agnes Scott. We embrace our identity as a women’s college and as a community committed to inclusive excellence in our mission. We will continue to support efforts to cultivate understanding and acceptance of gender diversity so that all persons regardless of their gender identity and gender expression are fully recognized as citizens and feel safe leading authentic lives.

Agnes Scott's policy does not specifically address admission to the college, although for the policy to mention former students and alums who are transwomen, transmen, and non-binary individuals, the College may admit, or certainly graduate, transwomen and transmen.

The statement can be found on the Agnes Scott website and on pages 134-135 of the 2014-2015 edition of the Student Handbook. These two versions are identical except for one sentence, which was updated in November 2014. As published in the Student Handbook, the policy states, "We admit undergraduate students who identify as female. Our goal is to embrace both our identity as a woman's college and our identity as an inclusive community," indicating that Agnes Scott would presumably admit transwomen, but not transmen, at that time. However, the version updated in November 2014 omits that sentence, which is replaced by "We recognize and value individuals across the spectrum of gender and are proud of the trans women, trans men, and non-binary individuals who have been admitted and/or graduated from Agnes Scott." The time period of this shift, November 2014, indicates that Agnes Scott is aligning itself with the other women's colleges I've outlined who have policies specifying who can be admitted. Hopefully, this shift in the wording of this sentence in Agnes Scott's statement indicates that the college will soon publish an official admissions policy.

The "Agnes Scott College Statement on Gender Expression and Gender Identity" ends with encouragement for students, faculty, and staff to "to educate themselves about how they can support individuals whose gender identity or gender expression may challenge gender norms" through trainings, workshops, and dialogues offered at the College, as well as "Safe Zone and Trans 101 training, a program specifically designed to promote knowledge and sensitivity towards members of the LGBTQIQ community."

Publicizing a statement of support, but not an official admissions policy, may prevent some students from applying. Given that the previous nine colleges I've discussed in this chapter have each published an admissions policy in the last year demonstrates differing levels of support of transgender students without needing a statement of support.

#### **2.4.2 Spelman College**

Spelman does not have an admissions policy that specifically mentions transgender students. Instead, I examine college policies that force students to conform to a specific classed femininity. Each year the College produces an academic planner for all students, which begins with a guide titled "What Every Student Should Know...A Guide to Selected Policies and Campus Resources." The first page, under the heading, "Equal Opportunity Policy," states, "Spelman College admits female students without regard to race, color, religion, creed, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, protected veterans status, genetic tests, genetic information or any other legally protected status." The presence of genetic tests and genetic information in this list opens up the possibility that those who were not assigned female at birth, but are women, may be eligible for admission at Spelman.

Spelman reinforces femininity onto all students through college traditions such as the required student dress code for formal college ceremonies. For events, such as Convocation, the Induction Ceremony, Founders Day, and New Student Orientation for first years, and Founders Day, Class Day, Baccalaureate, and Commencement for seniors, students must wear white. The Spelman College 2013-2014 Academic Planner states, "The dress or skirt suit should be solid white, and worn with neutral-toned hosiery and black, closed toe dress shoes. When



selecting the style of dress or suit, a comfortable fit, with sleeves or a jacket is recommended. Students are also permitted to wear pearl post earrings and a single strand pearl necklace” (6). Requiring that students wear a dress or skirt suit to specific college events reinforces a white upper-middle class femininity.

In this guide, the section, “What it Takes to be a Spelman Sister” states, “Diversity requires that each Spelmanite know how to relate to those qualities and conditions that are different from her own and outside the groups to which she belongs. These include but are not limited to age, ethnicity, class, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, sexual orientation, as well as religious status, gender expression, educational background, geographical location, income, marital status, parental status, and work experiences.” The inclusion of gender expression in this list is important given the following sentence, which states, “These categories of difference are not always fixed: these categories can be fluid. The overall goal of diversity is that each Spelmanite learn to respect the individual rights of her sister, and recognize that no one individual or culture is intrinsically superior to another” (64). Incorporating language about fluidity draws from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, where she argues that when sex is seen as constructed, gender becomes fluid and denaturalized (128). The fluidity of identities, specifically gender, “suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities” (Butler 175). Gender becomes fluid and mobile through its detachment from the rigid notion of sex, which allows gender to be recirculated and parodied. The parodies erase the possibility of an original gender, which also reinforces the fluidity of gender. When Spelman writes that categories of difference can be fluid, I connect this to Judith Butler’s anti-essentialist

notion of gender, which contradicts the Handbook's previous articulations of gender binaries. The use of fluidity and the notions associated with the fluidity of gender opens up the possibility of a thinkable student who identifies as other than woman in the future of Spelman, as well as the mission of the college itself. However, her performances, at least in official ceremonies, will be highly regulated to conform to upper middle-class womanhood.

### **2.4.3 Wesleyan College**

The student handbook, called the Wesleyanne, provides the non-discrimination policy of the college. The policy states:

Wesleyan College, as an undergraduate educational institution for women, admits qualified students to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the College without regard to race, color, national and ethnic origin, age, religion, creed, sexual orientation, disability, or marital status. The College does not discriminate on the basis of sex against its students in the administration of its educational programs or activities, scholarships and loan programs, and athletic and other college administered programs. (4).

This policy, while ambiguous, would indicate that the college may include transgender students given that it states that they admit qualified students, while also imposing womanhood on these students. I read the statement that the College doesn't discriminate on the basis of sex as a way of including Title IX without specifically mentioning the admission of transgender students. Given that gender is not specifically named as a category covered from discrimination indicates to me that Wesleyan would not admit a transgender student with differing sex and gender markers on application materials. In addition, the policy states that students would not face discrimination based on sex in educational programs or activities, which indicates that the college would allow transmen to continue pursuing their degree at

Wesleyan during and/or after their transition, unlike Hollins. This supports my assumption that Wesleyan does not admit transgender students, although they do not have a published admissions policy. I read the inclusion of scholarships and loan programs as a reference to Calliope Wong, the transwoman who was denied entrance to Smith after her federal loan papers marked her as male. Wesleyan reinforces that it is “an undergraduate educational institution for women,” before stating that they admit qualified students. This disconnect between an institution for women, but not naming all students as women, indicates that not all Wesleyan students identify as women. Reaffirming that Wesleyan is an institution for women allows the College to include these students through an expansion of their legacy without bringing attention to students who do not identify as women. This omission indicates that students who do not identify as women are at the college, it also shows that their identity is often unnamed.

### **Discussion of Colleges with Non-Admissions Policies**

While Agnes Scott, Spelman, and Wesleyan all have official material that implies transgender students may be admitted, they do not have official admissions policies for transgender students. These colleges need official admissions policies in order to attempt to clearly state who can be admitted. While the nine colleges I have written about that do have official admissions policies may not be clear, their policies indicate attempts at addressing the needs of transgender students. It is important to clarify who is eligible for admission so transgender students who wish to attend these colleges can find out whether they can be admitted, as well as to encourage the student population of each of these colleges to engage in

campus dialogue about what the mission of their institution is, and whether the college will include transgender students.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The way that each college incorporates their mission into their admissions policy exemplifies the way that college officials are careful to navigate the line between liberal (by admitting transgender students) and exclusionary without eschewing the identity of the college. The repetition of the mission and history of each college in each of their admissions policies highlights the importance of legacy and history to women's colleges in the present.

In each of these policies, admitting transgender students is painted as in line with the college's mission. As Jennifer Finney Boylan, author and English professor at Barnard, points out, "Transgender issues have been accelerating in the culture," citing the *Time* magazine cover with Laverne Cox and the accompanying article, "The Transgender Tipping Point," the TV show "Transparent," which won a Golden Globe, and Caitlyn Jenner's cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine in July 2015. Boylan says, "These issues are changing the game... It might seem like it's all happening at once, but why didn't it happen sooner? I'm delighted that all of these colleges are trying to figure it out" (Noveck). By introducing and publicizing transinclusive admissions policies, women's colleges are maintaining their relevance in a climate when popular news articles are asking questions such as, "Are all-women's colleges still 'relevant'?" and "Are Women's Colleges Doomed?".

But, there are also some inconsistencies between the policies, specifically in how they invoke and understand Title IX. Title IX states that "No person in the United States shall, on the

basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Lhamon). On April 29, 2014, Catherine E. Lhamon, the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, issued a “Dear Colleague” letter, which addresses the ways institutions must respond to complaints of sexual violence. This letter and the “Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence” that accompany it include transgender students under the protected parties, stating, “Title IX’s sex discrimination prohibition extends to claims of discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity and OCR [Office for Civil Rights] accepts such complaints for investigation.”

Title IX has previously been used by some women’s colleges to justify their exclusionary admissions policies. In “Trans-cending Space in Women’s Only Spaces: Title IX Cannot be the Basis for Exclusion,” the author, Katherine Kraschel, Harvard Law School student and Mount Holyoke College alum, argues “that women's colleges could utilize Title IX affirmative action to admit transgender students and do so without losing Title IX funding or exposing themselves to the risk of forced coeducation on equal protection grounds” (479). In the article, Kraschel summarizes how women’s colleges were using Title IX to exclusively admit cisgender women, stating, “The rationale is as follows: although Title IX allows single-sex colleges to discriminate based on sex, they would be in violation of Title IX if they were to admit a student who was not the sex the particular institution serves,” which we have since come to discover is not true. She continues with this rationalization, saying, “Therefore, if a women's college were to admit a student identifying as male (or not identifying as female), the institution would jeopardize its federal funding.” She goes onto explain, “Alternatively or additionally, institutions argue that if

they admit individuals who do not identify as women they will be required to provide equal access accommodations, and their failure to do so would result in a Title IX violation” (466). The publication of many women’s colleges’ admissions policies for transgender students indicates that Kraschel’s larger argument has proven to be true: women’s colleges can admit transwomen without violating Title IX. But, women’s colleges’ admissions policies haven’t yet resolved the finer details.

The policy of Mount Holyoke states, “a transwoman admitted to Mount Holyoke is protected from harassment, gender-based stereotyping, and other forms of discriminatory behavior that would limit full participation in programs, activities, and services of the College.” Mills states that their admissions policy is “informed by Title IX... which allows for single-sex admissions policies in institutions of higher education that have historically served women,” and that “Mills does not discriminate on the basis of gender identity and expression in its admission policies, scholarship and loan programs.” While Mount Holyoke and Mills indicate a common understanding of Title IX, Scripps’ policy confuses this. Scripps also states that their policy is informed by Title IX, which “does not cover admission policies for private undergraduate institutions, [but] it does extend to policies related to matriculating students.” Scripps’ interpretation of Title IX suggests that women’s colleges’ admissions policies are not covered under Title IX.

## CHAPTER 3 CONTINUING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COLLEGES IN FLUX

### 3.1 Examples of Activism by Students and Alums of Women's Colleges

At the beginning of my research, I had an additional research question, which asked, how are students and alums advocating or resisting the inclusion of transgender students at women's colleges? When I had created this question, there were no admissions policies for transgender students at women's colleges, and when I proposed my thesis, I only had a few policies. However, as the 2014-2015 academic year ended, more women's colleges created admissions policies for transgender students, which gave me more material to analyze. So I chose to withdraw my third research question, as stated above, and focus my research on the nine policies for a heartier discussion.

While I withdrew this as a formal research question, next, I will discuss some examples of women's college students and alums advocating the inclusion of transgender students, in order to demonstrate the continuing movement in the creation and implementation of women's colleges admissions policies. While I have chosen to examine four specific activist groups and articles, there are many more, although not all are publically available online. As a student at Mt Holyoke and Agnes Scott, I remember many campus conversations about transgender students. Prior to the publication of Agnes Scott's "Statement of Support," there were numerous meetings among the administration and lawyers, as well as the administration and a group of students. Each of these examples demonstrates how recent the conversation about admitting transgender students to women's colleges is, and that students and alums can shape these conversations and expand the legacy of women's colleges through admitting transgender students. After looking at these student and alum activism, I will show how these

activists acts contribute to the categories of women's colleges' admissions policies that I have created and analyzed in the previous chapter.

### **3.1.1 “An Open Letter to Bryn Mawr College, Calling for the Inclusion of Trans Women”**

In September 2014, shortly after Mount Holyoke announced its policy, “An Open Letter to Bryn Mawr College, calling for the inclusion of Trans Women” was published and signed by over fifty Bryn Mawr students and alums and published on Change.org. Since being posted on the website, the petition has been signed by over two thousand people. The letter argues for Bryn Mawr to adopt a new admissions policy that allows transwomen to be admitted by October 15th, 2014 so that transgender students can apply to the Class of 2019. The authors also demand gender-inclusive signs on bathrooms by the Spring 2015 semester, the addition of gender, gender identity, and gender expression in the College's non-discrimination policy, the use of gender-inclusive language on all documents and signs, a procedure for students to change their names on college email and other communications, and ongoing education for students, faculty, and staff.

The timing of the letter, which was released shortly after Mount Holyoke's policy was announced, emphasizes the similarities between the demands of the petition and the policy Mount Holyoke instituted. Bryn Mawr's petition argues for a policy of self-identification, like that of Mount Holyoke, and argues against Mills' policy of contacting the admissions office if the application shows differing gender markers. Unfortunately, Bryn Mawr did not adopt a policy like the one that students and alums argued for.

The petition argues that Bryn Mawr “continues to neglect its essential educational mission. Bryn Mawr has a long history as an institution that offers educational opportunities to



students who face discrimination because of their gender.” Similar to my argument, the petition calls for the Bryn Mawr administration to admit transgender students in order to expand the College’s legacy and mission. The authors place the College at the precipice of a big decision, stating, “Bryn Mawr faces a great choice: return to our historical mission of helping students break through the gender-based limits imposed on their education, or stand still and watch as others make change.” By placing the impetus on making a change, rather than being left behind, the authors emphasize that conversations about transinclusion at women’s colleges are happening across the country.

Ultimately, the administration at Bryn Mawr did make a choice. The petition is partly successful given that Bryn Mawr did publish an official policy for transgender students, which allows for trans women to be included. However, the policy came out in February 2015, which was too late to go into effect in time for the Class of 2019. The petition demonstrates that students and alums care and want to be a part of the changes on campus, which is a particularly powerful message to those who oppose transinclusion at women’s colleges. Hopefully, the passion that students and alums demonstrated in writing this petition will be transferred to trying to adapt the policy that Bryn Mawr adopted.

### **3.1.2 “Strong Women, Proud Women, All Women?” by Anonymous**

Mills College’s student newspaper, *The Campanil*, published a letter to the editor, titled “Strong Women, Proud Women, All Women?” on April 8, 2011. The author is not named, but states they are a transgender student of Mills who is “exhausted from trying to provide proof. Proof I should be here, proof that I am my gender, proof that I exist.” The author argues that Mills has pervasive transphobia and cisgenderism, and needs a clear admissions policy for

transgender applicants. The author describes Mills' case-by-case policy at the time, stating, "This discriminatory unofficial policy invokes the essence of feminist transphobia, wherein women's spaces need to be 'protected' from the 'threat' of trans people and the boundaries of 'true womanhood' are policed by cisgender women."

This is just one letter, but reading the letter today, with hindsight, demonstrates the changes Mills and other women's colleges have made in the past four years. For example, the author mentions "transwomen applicants are required to provide government-issued 'proof' of their gender," which has rightfully been discontinued at most colleges. The author also asks, "Will Mills college be the first or last women's college in the U.S. to stop beating around the bush and start addressing the reality of trans students?" and years later, Mills became the first women's college to have a specific admissions policy for transgender students.

While this is one letter expressing one student's opinion, given the changes that took place in the years following its publication, this letter serves as an example of the activism of students at women's colleges seeking a transinclusive admissions policy. In addition, the author's remark that they are transgender serves as an example of transgender students already being at women's colleges, prior to official policies. The letter demonstrates that transgender students at women's colleges isn't a recent or new occurrence, although the media may make it seem so.

### **3.1.3 Open Gates' "Trans Women Belong at Mt Holyoke" Zine**

Open Gates, a student-run organization at Mount Holyoke promoting the inclusion of transgender students at the College, distributed a mini-zine in Spring 2014 about their mission. The name Open Gates is partly a nod to Mount Holyoke's stone gates, the official entrance to

the College, and, as the zine describes, “the icon associated with Mount Holyoke. They’re everywhere on postcards and admissions material-- they’re even written in our logo.” The gate is officially named the Fidelia Nash Field Gate, after the daughter of a donor to Mount Holyoke during its beginnings as a seminary, and was donated to the college by her children. The gate stands outside one of the first buildings of the college, which is named after its founder, Mary Lyon. Using the stone gates as a namesake draws on Mount Holyoke’s history and legacy. The symbolism of the gates of Mount Holyoke works to connect Mount Holyoke’s history as the first women’s college in the United States with Open Gates’ aim to admit transgender students at Mount Holyoke, which exemplifies what I have argued women’s colleges need to do--position admitting transgender students as an expansion of their legacy, rather than in opposition to their legacy. In addition, the gates are commonly used as a descriptor for the college community, with outside the gates referring to leaving the college. By naming the group Open Gates, the zine states that the group is “following the theme of gates policing **inclusion and exclusion.**” Open gates as a phrase refers to the group’s aim to open admissions to transwomen, who, at the time of the zine, were outside the gates because they were not able to become students at Mount Holyoke.

The zine answers some common questions about transinclusion at women’s colleges, similar to the FAQs listed alongside college’s official policies, while also highlighting how the group, Open Gates, has initiated conversations on campus. The zine mentions the Open Gates photo campaign, where the group took photos of Mount Holyoke students holding signs encouraging transinclusion on campus. This photo campaign was featured in *BuzzFeed* and

*Autostraddle*, which shows how students can put the College and issues of transinclusion in the spotlight.

#### **3.1.4 “My Voice: Being Transgender at Mount Holyoke” by Elliot Ruggles**

Elliot Ruggles, an alum from the Mount Holyoke College Class of 2006, wrote a short article in the Winter 2015 issue of Mount Holyoke Alumnae Quarterly. Ruggles describes his experience at Mount Holyoke, where he initially decided to transition, and states, “My most formative memories of being able to express my gender authentically happened at Mount Holyoke. Whether it was dating, dressing for a Drag Ball, or being able to speak my mind in class without fear of being seen as “too smart,” I had freedom in this community that I had not otherwise been granted.” These moments of reminiscence are a reminder of the ideal culture of most women’s colleges—an environment where gender and sexuality are fluid, so students can adopt roles often unavailable to them in patriarchal society. In addition to providing students an atmosphere to cultivate leadership by refuting traditional gender roles, women’s colleges can also provide an environment to destabilize the gender binary. For Elliot Ruggles, Mount Holyoke’s classrooms and the College’s annual Drag Ball provided him the environment to explore his gender, and that environment should be available to others.

### **3.2 Conclusions About Categories of Admission**

These examples of activism by students and alums at women’s colleges shape and inform the categories I created and the policies I analyzed in the previous chapter. Students at Mount Holyoke, Barnard, and Bryn Mawr all advocated for policies of self-identification, as I

have argued for. While Barnard and Bryn Mawr ultimately did not institute self-identification admissions policies, continued student activism could lead to more changes in these policies.

Each category I have created to group the twelve women's colleges represents inherent problems, which are partly due to the recent publication of these policies. Some of these policies went into effect in late 2014 and early 2015 for applications for the Classes of 2019, while others, such as Barnard, will not go into effect until the fall of 2016, for students applying to the Class of 2020.

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, I believe self-identification is the best admissions policy, but none of the policies currently published embodies this practice. Mount Holyoke comes the closest in its emphasis on self-identification, although the language about applicants being "biologically born" male or female demonstrates that Mount Holyoke doesn't fully comprehend the complexity of the assignment of sex and gender. However, Mount Holyoke has one of the few policies to admit transwomen, transmen, and gender fluid people, which I think is important given the nature of women's colleges as institutions where missions seek to work against gender oppression.

While self-identification is a good start to a policy, the genders of students that are admitted are also important. For example, Mount Holyoke admits women no matter the sex they were assigned at birth, transmen, people who were assigned female at birth and identify as neither man nor woman or identify outside the gender binary, people who were assigned male at birth and identify as other than man or woman when this identity includes woman. However, Smith created a self-identification policy that is much narrower by only admitting those who identify as women. Both Smith and Mount Holyoke's policies are valuable, but

ultimately, admitting students who self-identify as other than woman opens up the possibility of admitting more students who experience gender oppression, which makes Mount Holyoke's policy more inclusive, and as I've argued, better overall. An emphasis on self-identification is a crucial part of an admissions policy, but who becomes thinkable as a student is also important.

Consistent-identification policies rest on the idea that gender identification is consistent and can be reinforced through others. The nature of transitioning in itself shows that gender changes. In addition, consistent-identification policies require applicants to be able to convey their gender in a way that adheres to admissions counselors' view of the thinkable student. In a *Columbia Spectator* article by Barnard student J. Clara Chan, she summarizes a quote from the President of Barnard College, Deborah Spar, saying, "while the College still needs to figure out how the policy will be implemented, applications concerning the 'consistently live and identify as women' aspect of the policy will probably be reviewed on a case-by-case basis." In addition, Spar is quoted saying, "I think we'll have to see how it evolves. I think the language is quite clear... We will have to see how individual cases present themselves." Instituting an admissions policy that still depends on reviewing applications from transgender students on a case-by-case basis does not seem like a step forward. After all, prior to this admissions policy, that was Barnard's official stance. The Co-Chair of the Board of Trustee's Campus Life Subcommittee, Frances Sadler, is quoted as saying, "I really can't say what is going to happen, but the policy says, applies to those who consistently live and identify as a woman. Maybe it means not as a man, I don't know...how it will be determined." So while a year of discussions took place among the members of the committee, the group is not united on an understanding of the policy. If a

group of college administrators cannot come to an agreement on how a person can consistently identify as a woman, it seems unlikely college applicants will understand it either.

However, that isn't the only fault. By refusing to admit transmen even though there are students who are transmen on campus, colleges are excluding transmen as admissible applicants. At the time of admission, transmen cannot be admitted because they are men, but as students, transmen are accepted. While I think that transmen should be admitted to women's colleges, women's colleges need to use more gender-inclusive language to reflect the many genders of students in order to include all students. When women's colleges only admit women, then categorize all students as women, they ignore students who transition after admission. By including transmen under the category of women, women's colleges erase these students' gender and perpetuate the "belief that trans men are still somehow women enough to be part of 'the sisterhood' — a belief that comes with a corollary one that trans women are not really women" (Dusenbery). By denying transgender people's gender, women's colleges are ignoring their very mission. I further examine this omission in a discussion of the fluidity of gender in a subsequent section.

Consistent identification policies may sound like a medium between self-identification and legal or medical identification, but they are not. Consistent identification policies use aspects of legal or medical identification, which will limit the number of students who can pass under these restrictions. For example, under consistent identification policies, students must be gendered as woman on all application materials, which is not possible for students who are not identified as female on their birth certificate. These students have to submit extra materials in order to demonstrate their gender, which places an unnecessary burden on the applicant. So,

consistent identification policies are relying on legal and/or medical identification as a means of narrowing the applicant pool, even though these steps are arbitrarily determined by state- or government-issuing identification procedures.

Admissions policies that depend on legal identification and/or medical procedures are inherently exclusionary. As I argued in the previous chapter, these colleges are excluding those who don't want to undergo medical procedures or change identification. They exclude those who were born in or live in a state that doesn't allow for changes to gender markers on identification. They exclude those who do not have the means to obtain medical procedures.

In relying on legal or medical steps or identification as proof of an applicant's gender, these schools are denying applicants' gender and insisting that gender is dependent on biology, which isn't accurate. Sex is a socially constructed category that is often assigned based on the categorization of genitals at birth, but it can also be determined by hormones, chromosomes, secondary sex characteristics, and reproductive organs, although these are not binary opposites, as some may believe. By depending on medical procedures to determine whether a student can apply, women's colleges are asserting that transwomen are not women because they don't have enough estrogen or they don't have a vagina, which also implies that women must have estrogen and vaginas in order to be considered women. By determining who is eligible to apply by their gender markers on legal documents and/or the medical treatment they have received, these colleges are ignoring the applicant's gender in favor of reinforcing arbitrary state and government regulations.

Relying on legal sex for admission has other problems. In his speech at Barnard's Student Government Association Townhall, Dean Spade states, "We are feminists. We don't



believe the government tells you what gender is. Our whole thing is fighting against bad ideas the government has about what gender is. That's been our project forever, right? So the idea of saying, 'We'll just let the people at Social Security or over at the DMV of Virginia decide whether or not you get to come to Barnard. That's not a principled approach to the project of education that's against gender oppression.'" While Spade's wording is casual, his point isn't. Women's colleges engage with commonly held beliefs to fight gender oppression, and by using government- or state-issued identification to determine a student's eligibility for admission, women's colleges are reinforcing institutional gender oppression.

Women's colleges with no published admissions policy regarding applications from transgender students need to produce policies. In not publishing an admission policy, these women's colleges are not addressing the complex nature of gender and ignoring the foundations of their mission, to fight gender oppression. The lack of a policy at these colleges also indicates that these colleges would only admit students who can demonstrate their identification as women through all elements of their application and financial aid paperwork, which is discriminatory.

In examining these admissions policies, or lack thereof, a discrepancy emerged in how Scripps' policy invokes the Common Application compared to other colleges. Scripps' policy states that the Common Application requires applicants to "report the sex currently listed on your birth certificate." Scripps uses this to justify their policy of only admitting those who are listed as female on their birth certificate. However, each of the twelve schools use the Common Application, and most do not mention that students must report their sex as listed on their birth certificate. I understand the lack of statements about how applicants should represent

their gender on the Common Application as most women's colleges recognizing that the sex designated on an applicant's Common Application may not reflect their identification. However, for colleges that require consistent-identification, it seems that students who identify as women, but aren't listed as a female on their birth certificate would have to select female, and falsely report the sex listed on their birth certificate in order to consistently identify as women and be eligible for admission. Smith's "Admission Policy Announcement" states, "Smith's policy is one of self-identification. To be considered for admission, applicants must select 'female' on the Common Application," which, along with how the Common Application defines sex, I interpret as applicants either have to successfully change their gender markers on their birth certificate or lie about what their birth certificate states.

However, I do not know if the Common Application allows women's colleges to receive applications from those who mark male on the application. The Common Application states, "If you wish to provide more details regarding your sex or gender identity, you are welcome to do so in the Additional Information section," which is effectively inviting applicants to write a confessional on their gender for the admissions counselors of each college they apply to. As I argued previously, recommending applicants write about how they identify is invasive. In light of the creation of the nine admissions policies I've researched, I hope the Common Application would allow for a more nuanced understanding of sex and gender by allowing students to select their gender, rather than mark what is written on their birth certificate. I hope that the Common Application will change its understanding of sex and gender in order to allow students to better convey their own gender. Given that women's colleges are now openly admitting students based on their self-identification of gender, rather than the sex or gender listed on

their birth certificate, demonstrates that the Common Application needs to change their requirements in order to address these women's colleges' policies.

### **3.3 The Workings of Gender and Women's Colleges**

By admitting transgender students, women's colleges are opening up who becomes thinkable as a student and broadening their mission to educate a group of people who traditionally face gender oppression. The expansion of who is now thinkable as a student doesn't inherently destabilize gender, but it expands the gender identification of those who are thinkable as students. While many of these new admissions policies allow more people to become thinkable as students at the women's college, there are still many restrictions on who is a thinkable student.

While policies may present themselves as progressive by calling for the expansion of the category of women, it is a marginal expansion, which does not destabilize gender. For example, Mount Holyoke, in using terminology about prospective students being biologically born as a man or a woman, reinforces biological essentialism, rather than destabilize it. Women's colleges with consistent identity policies, by expanding admissions to trans women who can produce consistent womanhood throughout their application, don't destabilize gender. Instead, these women's colleges are reinforcing femininity onto certain women. Women's colleges have gone from skirting around whether they admit transgender students to publishing a policy on admitting transgender students, but requiring transgender students to demonstrate how they perform consistent normative womanhood, which creates a problematic binary. For example, cisgender women who are non-normatively gendered do not have to demonstrate femininity,

but transwomen have to take measures to confirm that they're normatively feminine in order to be considered for admission. By creating rules specific to transwomen, colleges with consistent-identity policies are producing a binary between cisgender women and transwomen, which ultimately reproduces an essentializing view of gender and reinforces that people are not the gender they say they are. This is against the spirit of these admissions policies and of women's colleges' missions to address gender oppression. These colleges have to go further than the admissions policies as they're written now. Instead of creating admissions policies that force transgender students to perform normative femininity and womanhood, they need to interrogate why they're enforcing femininity onto prospective students and challenge these behaviors.

While women's colleges must stop enforcing femininity onto prospective students, doing so doesn't make it less of a women's college. There is a difference between being a women's college that isn't only women and being a coed college. Women's colleges were founded because of gender discrimination in higher education. In the foundational years of women's colleges in the mid to late 1800s, a societal understanding of gender and gender roles led to women being excluded from most colleges, which for my argument, rendered women unthinkable as college students. Women's colleges were created in order to provide higher education to women. Even during the early years of women's colleges, students transgressed gender roles in and out of the classroom by leading traditionally masculine activities, such as competing in aggressive team sports, taking up leadership roles, and creating organizations (Horowitz xxiv). In the 1860s, women's colleges became associated with women's rights, which separated them from being seen as finishing schools or providing an education not comparable

to men's colleges (59). With the rise of feminism in the 1960s and as many men's colleges became coeducational, women's colleges shaped their mission to educate women without the restrictions of gender stereotypes (352). This sentiment is similar to how women's colleges are adapting their admissions policies now to include the social construction of gender and transinclusive admissions policies. Women's colleges, from their founding to the present day, give students the opportunity to take up roles that may otherwise be unavailable to them because of perceptions of their gender.

Today, by including transgender students, women's colleges are still providing equal higher education to a group who has been traditionally oppressed due to gender, just as they have historically done. However, now women's colleges are expanding those who are eligible for that education, expanding who is thinkable as a student. But coed colleges aren't as limited in who is thinkable as a student, particularly in terms of gender. The expansion of the mission of women's colleges stems from the very issues that led to their founding, but with a more contemporary view of gender and gender oppression. This new perspective of the mission of women's colleges can strengthen their collective legacies through offering educational opportunities embedded in challenging gender oppression, which some colleges have reinforced through incorporating their mission statement into their admissions policy. In doing so, these colleges are making a dramatic change from their previous practices, but structuring it as undramatic and simply an expansion of their mission.

Admitting transgender students and reshaping the mission of women's colleges will bring more changes. By becoming a women's college that isn't only women students, colleges have the power to reassess ideas of sisterhood from a shared connection between people of

the same gender identity to the shared environment, experiences, and opportunities that are available to students at women's colleges. In doing so, women's colleges can separate themselves from overgeneralizations of womanhood, which ignore race, class, sexuality, and other intersection identities. In addition, by moving away from the women's college as a place for only women, these colleges have the ability to challenge stereotypes of women's colleges, whether those stereotypes are girls gossiping in the dorms or women's colleges as a haven for lesbians, which are stereotypes that often prevent prospective students from attending a women's college. By shaping their mission around the shared experience of gender oppression, women's colleges can embrace the fluidity of all students' gender identities and open up a way to challenge biological essentialism, which opens up the possibility of destabilization of gender, or at the least, a more capacious understanding of gender. Although women's colleges seek to address gender oppression, ultimately, they will still exclude certain people based on their gender (those who were neither designated female at birth, nor identify as women), which differentiates them from coed colleges. For example, women's colleges would still exclude the feminine man, even though he experiences gender oppression because he isn't seen as masculine enough.

Transinclusive admissions policies do not completely open up the category of the thinkable student, but they do broaden who becomes a thinkable student, which is another distinction between women's colleges and coed colleges. Addressing gender oppression requires more than policies about who can be admitted to the college, and women's colleges need to address gender oppression and become transinclusive throughout their practices and curricula.

### 3.4 Implications

As I conclude this thesis, I must note that my identity as a cisgender woman impacts my writing about admissions policies for transgender students at women's colleges. My hope is that my gender identity does not detract from my research. Being a former student of Mount Holyoke College and a graduate of Agnes Scott College has also shaped the knowledge I have of the atmosphere and policies at both colleges, although I have tried only to use policies and writing about policies in my research and not general conjecture.

Given that my research is centered on the time immediately after the release of numerous colleges' admissions policies and not their practice, implementation as well as student and alum activism will mean that in the future, colleges will make changes to their policies. My research is a first pass at organizing how women's colleges have created their admissions policies, and as these policies continue to adapt, more research will occur. Due to the inevitability of changes in these policies as well as changes in language about gender, research on these policies will be in flux. As society changes its views about transgender people and research in transgender studies occurs, the language of women's colleges' admissions policies will also adapt.

In addition to changes to admissions policies, conversations about how to best meet the needs of transgender students on campus need to occur. For example, for some colleges, like Mount Holyoke, their admissions policy also states that the College will change a student's name on official communications, as well as their diploma. As I indicated in chapter one, when colleges do not meet the needs of transgender students, these students suffer. So if women's

colleges create admissions policies to admit transgender students, they also must introduce policies across campus to ensure these students' needs are met.

Ultimately, practice will cause more changes to women's colleges' admissions policies. As admissions policies go into effect, admissions offices will have to learn how confessions of gender aren't as simple as stated in a policy. Admissions counselors will need ongoing education. Pictures and publications by admissions offices need to change to reflect the new thinkable student, but these changes will take time. Hopefully, as women's colleges institute these policies, some colleges will recognize that using medical documentation is not simple and that legal documentation doesn't refer to one specific document, which complicates the work of admissions offices. As states change their requirements for changing gender markers on birth certificates and driver's licenses, the policies dependent on these IDs will also have to change, which will also impact women's colleges' admissions policies.

At the time of my research, most of these policies have not gone into effect. In addition, some policies, such as Barnard's, were released during the summer when students are usually not on campus. As students return to campus, they can take up these conversations again, and push the administration for more changes. Through my discussion of student and alum activism, I have demonstrated that those outside of the administration can call upon college officials to make changes. By naming the injustices of these policies, students and alums can create changes in order to improve these policies and their colleges.

So while my research is contributing to early conversations about admitting transgender students at women's colleges, these conversations are ongoing. Just as student and alum activists at Bryn Mawr encourage the college's administration to make changes to the



admissions policy rather than stand idly by as other colleges make these changes, women's colleges need to adopt transinclusive admissions policies in order to demonstrate that they are building on their history and legacy as institutions fighting against gender oppression. As the conversations continue, admissions policies will change, and I hope that they will move towards a policy of self-identification and erase categories of medical or legal identification, which will broaden the genders of thinkable students and admissible applicants at women's colleges.

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