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"Eclectic Affinities": Intimate Friendships in Women's Colleges, 1880-1930

May 2005

"Eclectic Affinities:"
Intimate Friendships in Women's Colleges, 1880-1930

by
Christianne A. Gadd

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Christianne A. Gadd
April 29, 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT
1

INTRODUCTION
2

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE SCARE
14

1880-1900: HALCYON DAYS
21

1901-1915: THE TURNING OF THE TIDE
36

1916-1930: THE END TIMES
57

CONCLUSION
73

BIBLIOGRAPHY
75

VITA
81

ABSTRACT

Popular conceptions of women's intimate friendships shifted radically between the 1880s and 1930s. While widely accepted in the nineteenth century, women's homoaffectionate relationships were pathologized by the fields of sexology and psychology which permeated U.S. popular culture around the turn of the century. Intense friendships between young women were increasingly regarded with suspicion, and women's colleges were scrutinized and criticized for fostering them. In spite of growing public disapproval, students at women's colleges throughout the first decades of the twentieth century pursued and enjoyed intense friendships with each other, appearing to disregard the negative constructions places on them by sexologists and psychologists. This thesis draws upon women's college fiction as well as coverage in the popular press during this period to illustrate the growing impact of the sciences on popular conceptions of crushes and intimate friendships between women, and uses primary sources from students at women's colleges to corroborate and to contradict some of the popular assumptions about their lives at school.

"Probably no chapter of sentiment in modern fashionable life is so intense and rich as that which comes to the experience of budding maidens at school. In their mental caresses, spiritual nuptials, their thoughts kiss each other, and more than all the blessedness the world will ever give them is foreshadowed."
Alger, quoted in Ryder, *Hold Up Your Heads, Girls!* (1886)

"Bring [your daughter] up so that exercise each day, three good meals, and unbroken rest at night are her creed; and she will be sane and happy and able to throw off morbidness and sentimentalism. Don't laugh, ACT; otherwise you may be responsible sometime for your daughter's maimed soul and wrecked body; for her loss of faith in humanity and her loss of joy in life!"
A College Graduate, "Your Daughter: What Are Her Friendships?" (1913)

INTRODUCTION

The comprehensive shift in the tone in which American women's sexuality has been discussed during the last hundred-odd years will not surprise any scholar familiar with the sea change in public opinion which occurred therein. From the mid- to late-nineteenth century, during which "good" women were presumed to be asexual, submitting to conjugal demands to fulfill the requirements of both husband and country, to the birth of the sexually liberated "new woman" during the Progressive Era, and onward to the self-determination on which Second Wave feminists insisted, this period has experienced numerous upheavals of the model of normative female sexuality. While these shifts have become more frequent of late, the earliest paradigm shifts are perhaps the most significant, having bridged such a vast chasm between the "ideal woman" and her real counterpart. These early shifts, too, paved the way for the eventual sexual autonomy enjoyed by many women in the U.S. today, and even in their own times, eased

some social mores about the ways in which women could discuss, display, and act upon their "newfound" sexual natures.

The lessening of tacit restrictions on heterosexuality, however, concomitantly strengthened prohibitions against women's homosexuality; the acknowledgement of women's inherent sexual nature by medical, scientific, and psychological fields brought with it the fear that this nature, if not channeled correctly into normative behavior, could easily be "perverted." Women were perceived to be particularly vulnerable to corruption after they had matured physically, and before reaching the safe harbor of marriage. Coincidentally, widespread acceptance of women's sexual desires, as well as their ability to be distorted by bad company or bad environment, came at the same historical moment that more young women than just the traditionally-privileged upper classes were afforded the opportunity to obtain higher education, which usually entailed leaving home—and the watchful eyes of one's parents—to attend a college or university. As many of these institutions were not coeducational, the majority of women who attended college in this period did so in a homosocial environment.

This, in itself, was nothing new; young women whose families enjoyed financial success had long been able to attend women's finishing schools and colleges. Until the late nineteenth century, however, these homosocial environments had not been regarded as potentially dangerous "hothouses" in which young women's budding sexuality might be corrupted. The popularity of sexology and psychology which began in the 1890s initiated a large-scale change in perception of women's schools. No longer were single-sex institutions seen as places where young women would be safe from the corrupting and baser influences of young men—instead, they began to appear as places where dark

and unnatural influences might spread amongst girls, unhindered, resulting in their victims' potentially permanent corruption.

How did college women, themselves, react to society's burgeoning disapproval of their institutions? Did they internalize these negative messages, policing themselves and others for signs of degeneracy or looking out for friendships which seemed too intense? The answer is twofold, and wears both a public and a private face. While criticism of the intense relationships women's colleges fostered between their students did appear in the popular press, for the most part it seemed to have little actual effect on the behavior of the students themselves. College administrators, too, made token gestures meant to placate critics, but in reality turned a blind eye to their students' behavior, preferring to trust that peer censure would nip any "unwholesomeness" in the bud. As a result, many college archives hold trace evidence indicating that collegiate women still formed intense, often romantic, attachments to other women well after public sentiment towards these attachments had become thoroughly negative.

In order to clearly delineate the massive change in public opinion towards intense same-sex attachments between young women, it is necessary to provide the historical context of this turn in the tide. This tale begins in the late nineteenth century, when the American college woman was becoming more ubiquitous in popular culture and more commonplace in daily life. The years between 1861 and 1900 saw the founding of colleges such as Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, Hunter, Barnard, and Bryn Mawr, which joined Mount Holyoke Female Seminary and Georgia Female College in providing higher education exclusively to women. Concomitantly, notions from the fields of psychology, social science, and sexology were beginning to make their way from Europe

into the collective conscious of the U.S. Not least amongst the repercussions of this migration was that women began to be regarded as more complex creatures than ever before; thanks to the work of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, along with American psychologists, sexologists, and medical doctors, the myth of the non-sexual woman started to be debunked. While American popular culture suggested that proper—read middle-class—womanhood was defined, in part, by the conspicuous absence of sexuality, the institutions of psychology and sexology posited that all women had—consciously and unconsciously—sexual needs and desires.[1]

However, these sexual instincts could all too easily become perverted away from normative heterosexuality through association with similarly afflicted individuals or from indulgence in sexual "vice." The *Medical and Surgical Reporter* of September 7, 1889, carried the text of a clinical lecture delivered by Doctor G. Frank Lydston on "Sexual Perversion, Satyriasis, and Nymphomania." The lecture laid out the variations of sexual perversion—here defined as "the possession of impulses to sexual gratification in an abnormal manner, with a partial or complete apathy toward the normal method"—and divided them into two categories: the congenital and the acquired.[2] The latter condition could arise from fraternizing with individuals already afflicted or simply from having too intense a relationship with members of one's own sex. Lydston warned that "[b]oys who are allowed to associate intimately, are apt to turn their inventive genius...to inventing novel means of sexual stimulation, with the result of ever after diminishing the natural

[1] For a more detailed discussion of U.S. social mores towards women's sexuality in the late nineteenth century, see Carl Degler's "What Ought to Be and What Was: Women's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century." *American Historical Review* 79, No. 4 (December 1974): 1467-1490. *JSTOR.*
[2] G. Frank Lydston, M.D. "Clinical Lecture." *Medical and Surgical Reporter*, September 7, 1889, p. 281. *APS Online.*

sexual appetite."[3] Likewise, girls who associated too intimately with one another might fall prey to the same vices. The gravest danger of being exposed to perversion in youth was, as Lydston ominously suggested, that "any powerful impression made upon the sexual system at or near puberty...is apt to leave an imprint in the form of sexual peculiarities that will haunt the patient throughout his after life...The impression made upon him in the height of his youthful sensibility is never eradicated, but remains in his memory as his ideal of sexual matters."[4] Therefore, the only way to prevent the contamination of future generations with this vice—for Lydston, along with others, believed that moral taints, even if acquired instead of congenital, would be passed down to offspring—was to police the associations of young people to ensure that no immorality could be discovered or shared within them.

Naturally, many young people in the U.S. met within its rapidly expanding network of public and private schools, where the potential for vice to spread, some claimed, was higher if the school was single-sex or involved living away from home. J.G. Holland, writing in 1873, offered the following invective-laden objection to women's boarding schools and colleges:

> [n]o consideration would induce us to place a young woman—daughter or ward—in a college which would shut her away from all family life for a period of four years. The system is unnatural, and not one young woman in ten can be subjected to it without injury. It is not necessary to go into particulars...Diseases of body, diseases of imagination, vices of body and imagination—everything we would save our children from—are bred in these great institutions where life and association are circumscribed, as weeds are forced in hot-beds.[5]

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Quoted in Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984), pp. 74-5.

Historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz suggested that "[n]ineteenth-century readers would have understood that Holland's overheated language meant that he was talking about sexual matters."[6] His hysterical tone was echoed by Ellen Hyde, Principal of the State Normal School in Framingham, Massachusetts, who, in an address delivered to the National Educational Association in 1880, outlined the evils of single-sex education. She claimed that

> [b]y such a regime in school, aided by false home training, the highest mysteries of their physical natures are forced prematurely on the children's attention, and their natural innocence is perverted to unnatural self-consciousness... What wonder that our schools are full of incipient vice... What wonder that in many of our schools is to be found vice so much more mature that, when we remember that here are being formed the characters which are to make the homes and the society of the future, the thought of it is appalling.[7]

Hyde admitted that although the subject was "delicate," it had to be understood by parents and teachers alike to prevent the "horrible social disease"—clearly she intended her listeners to understand that she was talking about sexual perversion—from spreading.[8] The potential for "contamination" was so great that "constant watchfulness" had to be employed to prevent "those children who [were] yet innocent" from catching the germ of sexual precocity (which would no doubt lead to sexual perversion of one type or another).[9] Hyde believed that co-education would quell the spread of sexual vice among young people; young women's natural modesty would be invoked by the presence of young men, and young men would be encouraged by the presence of their female peers to be more morally steadfast.

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[6] Ibid., 75.
[7] Ellen Hyde, "The Design of the Normal School," *The Chautauquan: A Weekly Newsmagazine*, November, 1880. *APS Online*.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

In spite of these objections, however, many institutions of higher education continued to offer courses to young men or women only. Perhaps this was partially due to the public's reluctant realization that young boys and girls, exposed to each other in adolescence, might give in to their "natural" desires and experiment sexually with each other; perhaps, too, it was the result of the sexual essentialism which pervaded medical and psychological literature of the time as well as popular thought. Men and women were considered to be two very different creatures, psychologically as well as physiologically, and therefore required different pedagogies. Whatever the confluence of circumstance, the single-sex school remained a fixture of education in the United States. In light of this, parents, teachers, and administrators whose concern had been raised by the warnings of writers like Holland and Hyde could only devote their attentions to monitoring the relationships between students at these schools in order to ensure that sexual immorality would not be introduced into, or spread within, their institutions. Popular literature from the U.S. in the periods just before and after psychology and sexology took root in popular culture reflects the growing concern about single-sex schools—particularly girls' schools—and the lasting ill-effects which might afflict their students.

In this thesis, I shall work with popular literature, using the theoretical framework provided by Sherrie Inness in her 1994 article "Mashes, Smashes, Crushes, and Raves." Inness suggested that popular women's college fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century provided a "textual space in which to debate the growing medicalization of crushes and to construct certain guidelines for a crush that the reader

was encouraged to follow."[10] I agree with Inness' assertion that the depictions of college women's intimate friendships with each other may be read "as a barometer of changing social attitudes toward women's homoaffectionate relationships at the turn of the century," but I will proceed beyond the scope of her work by utilizing her methodology to analyze primary source materials, such as student publications and personal records, as well as commentaries in the popular press.[11]

Two major factors contributed to the surge in concern amongst college administrators over their students' crushes. First, the growing influx of immigrants into the United States in the early twentieth century touched off a widespread panic over impending "race suicide," and women's colleges were a convenient target for the pointed finger of eugenicists. Writers such as G. Stanley Hall quoted statistics on marriage- and birth rates amongst graduates of women's colleges and, finding them unsatisfactorily low, claimed that the higher education of women unsuited them for marriage and motherhood, and would result in the entropy of the Anglo-Saxon race. Officials of women's colleges, who had long struggled to have their schools' legitimacy recognized, were aghast at the possibility that their institutions could be criticized via this seemingly irrefutable evidence. Therefore, it was in the administrators—and the colleges'—best interests to discourage any homo-affectionate relationships which might render their participants unfit for marriage and child-rearing after graduation.

Secondly, female college students—particularly those at women's colleges—had long been subject to more rules and regulations about their conduct than their male

[10] Sherrie Inness, "Mashes, Smashes, Crushes, and Raves: Woman-to-Woman Relationships in Popular Women's College Fiction, 1895-1915," *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1994): 49.
[11] Ibid.

counterparts; in the late nineteenth century, these women began to rebel against the constraints and demand more autonomy and self-governance. "The burgeoning of an independent student culture at the women's colleges of the 1890s made more administrative discipline mandatory," Inness wrote, invoking the work of historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, and adding that "[o]ne way to control the growth and intimacy of a student community was to inspect more closely all relationships, particularly smashes. Thus, faculty members, backed by the legitimizing strategies of current psychology, could scrutinize and terminate student relationships 'for the students' own good.'"[12] Inness noted that, "No longer could teachers feel reassured when there was no visible display of sexuality between two students, because sexuality lurked behind every manifestation of a crush."[13] As a result, college officials, parents, and medical professionals were expected to police their charges for signs of the dreaded "crush" so as to prevent it from spreading to other girls.

Inness claimed that, in concordance with Martha Vicinus' findings in English boarding schools, "crushing" was not significantly altered because of the new significance accorded it by the medical profession:

> Boxes of candy, flowers, and small gifts were still given to the loved one. Freshmen still kept photographs of their favorite seniors, and students did not suddenly regard their close attachments as perverse. What did change, however, was that the college authorities subjected these relationships to increased observations. As long as crushes were only a stage in a woman's development that would die a "natural death," they did not warrant more than a fleeting disapproval. But if crushes were potential lifelong abnormalities, they could no longer be overlooked by those in charge of the well-being of women's college students.[14]

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 53.
[14] Ibid., 53.

Although Inness explicitly focused on the "crush" in her essay, I have expanded her framework to explore representations of intimate friendships, as well. Inness acknowledged that the crush was increasingly regarded as the germ which could lead to the growth of an "abnormal," intimate relationship between college women. Therefore it seems reasonable to read much of the criticism of "crushing" as a desperate attempt to curtail the growth of (potentially perverted) intimate friendships. I have found no evidence that late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Americans regarded the two phenomenons as unrelated, and so I have not treated them as such. Although I must acknowledge that there is a definitional difference between the crush—an admiration from afar, or a short-lived affection—and an intimate friendship, both were romantic in nature, and, should a crush be reciprocated by its object, an intimate friendship would almost certainly ensue. This, after all, was the essential danger of allowing girls' crushes to continue unabated.

My thesis also builds upon Nancy Sahli's important 1979 article "Smashing: Women's Relationships Before the Fall," which suggests several reasons for the decline in public acceptance of women's intimate friendships during the late nineteenth century, not the least of which was that "members of the growing professional scientific, medical, psychiatric, and social scientific communities assumed the roles of definers and arbiters of acceptable and desirable—i.e., normal—behavior." As Sahli explained, "Female friendships now began to be seen not only as purely spiritual unions but as sexual ones as well, even if only on an unconscious level."[15] Sahli posited that the pathologization of women's intimate friendships with each other was a knee-jerk reaction on the part of

[15] Nancy Sahli, "Smashing: Women's Relationships Before The Fall," *Chrysalis* 8 (Summer, 1979): 25.

male-controlled institutions—like the scientific fields mentioned above—towards the growing independence of American women. These same-sex "love relationships...posed a basic threat to a system where the fundamental expression of power was that of one sex over another," and the best way to discourage women from engaging in them was to threaten to brand them "abnormal," "unfeminine," or "perverted."[16]

Sahli traced "smashing," as a common occurrence, back to the 1850s, when it was regarded by some as a "stage" through which girls had to pass on their way to becoming healthy, heterosexual adults. Mary Willard paraphrased popular advice writer Josiah Gilbert Holland in a letter she sent while a student at the North Western Female College in the 1850s and early 1860s: "Holland says that all girls have to pass through the 'girl friendship' stage. And as they all have to do so did I, and I am not ashamed to tell of it. So when I first left home to attend a boarding school, I was willing in my loneliness to have a 'little friendship.' So I fell in love just like a boy, and wooed and won, as a friend and a good one, a sweet tempered, sweetfaced girl."[17]

Sahli marked 1896 as a major turning point in American society's attitude towards women's same-sex friendships. The years between 1880 and 1895 saw the publication of the sixteen-volume *Index Catalogue of the Library of the Surgeon-General's Office, United States Army*; the major references therein to lesbianism (then popularly referred to as "inversion") came under the somewhat bland heading of "sexual instinct (perversion and disorders of)." Between 1896 and 1916, the second set of volumes had been produced, containing a listing of references to this subject organized

[16] Ibid., 26.

[17] Ibid., 21. It is particularly interesting that Willard drew comfort from the reassurance of J.G. Holland that "girl friendships" are normal; by 1873, Holland's wrath towards the very institutions which most fostered these friendships knew no bounds (see pg. 6).

into "a remarkably detailed set of subheadings and cross-references."[18] These included new topics such as "masturbation in the female,'" "nymphomania,'" "sapphism," "sexual instinct, inversion of," and "sexual instinct, perversion of."[19] Sahli ascertained that, as there was no major difference between the indexing of the first and second series, the change was the result of the increasingly intense focus of the medical establishment on sexuality.

Largely absent from Sahli's discussion is a comprehensive overview of the contributions of European sexology to the American psycho-medical community's new obsession, an understanding of which is critical to developing a longer-range view of the changes which Sahli began to map out. Using this as a starting point, and building upon Sahli's foundation, I shall demonstrate how the backlash she described was reflected in popular literature during the early twentieth century and how it affected the actual behavior of students and faculty at women's colleges during the same period.

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[18] Ibid., 23.
[19] Ibid.

The Science Behind the Scare

Sexology had its effectual beginnings in Germany, under the leadership of Dr. Carl Westphal, who published a landmark paper in 1869 about a woman who preferred to dress in men's attire and was sexually attracted to other women. Though this behavior itself was not unheard of, Westphal's diagnosis—that it stemmed from "congenital inversion" based on "hereditary degeneration and neurosis," rather than from boredom, lasciviousness, or a desire to shock—was quite modern.[20] Following Westphal's lead, doctors inundated medical journals with case studies of similarly "afflicted" women. The timing of Westphal's "discovery" of this "new type" was significant, too; Lillian Faderman observed that now "those opposed to women's growing independence now could hurl, with credible support behind them, accusations of degeneracy at females who sought equality, and thereby scare them back to the hearth with fears of abnormality."[21] However, it wasn't Westphal but two of his disciples who were responsible for transporting sexology to the United States.

Richard von Krafft-Ebing's lengthy *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1882) offered scores of case studies with sexually "perverted" individuals; this catch-all term covered everyone from homosexuals to pedophiles, prostitutes, or voyeurs. Krafft-Ebing theorized that sexual perversion was usually the result of degeneration (from the heterosexual norm, of course), and therefore the result of a flaw in the afflicted person's composition. This was the first time that a respected doctor had argued that sexual "perverts" suffered

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[20] Carl von Westphal, quoted in Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981): 239.
[21] Ibid., 239–40.

from a sickness. Krafft-Ebing made the requisite linkage between "sexual inversion" and gender transgression, suggesting that the latter served as unmistakable evidence of the former, and thereby lending credence to popular suspicion of women who wore men's clothing or attempted to emulate their behavior in any way. The esteem in which Krafft-Ebing was held by the turn-of-the-century American medical community may be inferred from the fact that he was cited as a source some forty times in American medical periodicals from 1882 until 1900.[22]

Havelock Ellis, a British sexologist, produced the first installment of his seven-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* in 1896; also a disciple of Westphal's ideals, he was better suited to bring sexology to the U.S. than was Krafft-Ebing, if simply for the fact that Ellis's works were written in English. The second volume of the set, subtitled "Sexual Inversion," built upon Westphal's model of the diseased sexual pervert, and paid specific attention to the dangers posed to normative heterosexuality by a homosocial environment in its appendix entitled "The School-Friendships of Girls." Basing his discussion on a study done by Italian psychologists Obici and Marchesini, Ellis arrived at the conclusion that the homo-affectionate relationships of young women, long regarded as asexual and "innocent," actually had a deeper—and more disturbing—significance.

Translating directly from the Italian of his colleagues, Ellis described the "fiamma," or "flame" ("crush" or "smash" in common American parlance) as a term which both referred to the "beloved person and the friendship in the abstract; but it is a friendship which has the note of passion as felt and understood in this environment. In every college the 'flame' is regarded as a necessary institution." However, he warned, in

[22] See *American Periodical Series Online*.

spite of its "apparently non-sexual nature, all the sexual manifestations of college youth circle around it."[23] Ellis first provided a scenario in which a "flame" might develop:

> The "flame" proceeds exactly like a love-relationship; it often happens that one of the girls shows man-like characteristics, either in physical type or in energy and decision of character; the other lets herself be loved, acting with all the obstinacy—and one might almost say the shyness—of a girl with her lover. The beginning of these relationships is quite different from the usual beginnings of friendship. It is not by being always together, talking and studying together, that two become 'flames'; no, generally they do not even know each other; one sees the other on the stairs, in the garden, in the corridors, and the emotion that arises is nearly always called forth by beauty and physical grace. Then the one who is first struck begins a regular courtship: frequent walks in the garden when the other is likely to be at the window of her class-room, pauses on the stairs to see her pass; in short, a mute adoration made up of glances and sighs. Later come presents of beautiful flowers, and little messages conveyed by complacent companions. Finally, if the "flame" shows signs of appreciating all these proofs of affection, comes the letter of declaration. Letters of declaration are long and ardent, to such a degree that they equal or surpass real love-declarations. The courted one nearly always accepts, sometimes with enthusiasm, oftenest with many objections and doubts as to the affection declared. It is only after many entreaties that she yields and the relationship begins.[24]

This description, along with a later list of attributes which defined a "flame," essentially provided a checklist for concerned readers to use in monitoring the friendships of their young female relatives or charges. Ellis underscored the importance of his findings by alleging—*in italics*—that "there is really a substratum of emotional sexuality beneath it, and it is this which finds its expression in the indecorous conversations already referred to. The 'flame' is a *love-fiction, a play of sexual love*." 25 And lest readers be wont to dismiss his findings as distasteful, but more akin to youthful folly than a "crime against nature," Ellis quoted several graduates of girls' schools, who affirmed that some of the classmates they knew who "flamed" maintained their homoaffectionate

[23] Havelock Ellis. "The School-Friendships of Girls." *Sexual Inversion* 3rd ed., rev. Vol. 2 of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1927). *www.gutenberg.org*
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

predilections after graduation. One woman who had successfully avoided the advances of a predatory upperclassman sniffed that, "Later I heard that she had formed a relationship which was not blessed by any sacred rite."[26] Ellis insisted that a woman who was not suffering from "congenital inversion" would, after graduation and re-entry into a heterosocial world, likely experience a reversion to her "normal," heterosexual state of mind; those who did not wish to marry, or showed little interest in men, ostensibly had either been born inverts, or had caught that "taint" after too much time in the exclusive society of women.

It is particularly important to note that, in spite of Ellis' hopefulness that young women could "recover" from their intense friendships with one another, his view of adult women who maintained homoaffectionate relationships was wholly pessimistic. These women were prone to suicide, showed other signs of mental instability, and generally led unsatisfied lives. Ellis suggested that American women's struggle for sexual equality also played a part in encouraging the proliferation of homosexuality by claiming that "modern movements cannot directly cause sexual inversion, but they develop the germs of it, and they probably cause a spurious imitation. This spurious imitation is due to the fact that the congenital anomaly occurs with special frequency in women of high intelligence who, voluntarily or involuntarily, influence others."[27] The women specified in this last passage, the ones most prone to containing the "seeds" of perversion, then, were easily identifiable as independent, educated women; many readers likely understood that Ellis here alluded, at least in part, to the students and faculty of women's colleges.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, 2nd ed. (New York: Mental and Nervous Disease Publishing Company, 1920). *www.gutenberg.org*

Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* was one of the most influential texts on sexology around the turn of the century, and his suggestion that sexual inversion could be spread to others by those congenitally doomed to it influenced much of the writing on college women's intimate friendships in the twentieth century. Although other psychologists and sexologists posited different theories about the genesis of homosexuality and other so-called sexual aberrations, Ellis' ideas on inversion and perversion were referred to, explicitly or implicitly, with overwhelming frequency.

Sigmund Freud's *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* was published in its original German in 1905, but not until 1910 was it translated to English, supplementing, if not entirely supplanting, Ellis' *Studies* as the reference point for discussions of homosexuality and sexual aberration. Freud, in contrast to Ellis, posited that sexual "inversion" was not congenital, arguing that

> [i]n many inverts (even absolute ones) an early affective sexual impression can be demonstrated, as a result of which the homosexual inclination developed...
> In many others outer influences of a promoting and inhibiting nature can be demonstrated, which in earlier or later life led to a fixation of the inversion—among which are exclusive relations with the same sex, companionship in war, detention in prison, dangers of hetero-sexual intercourse, celibacy, sexual weakness, etc.[28]

Here, Freud openly pinpoints the potential of the women's college and intimate same-sex friendships to cause homosexual "object-choice," although he optimistically mentions that "[h]ypnotic suggestion may remove the inversion."[29] The dismissal of Ellis' model of innate inversion in favor of Freud's theory placed much more responsibility on the shoulders of parents and guardians of young people, particularly; now, if their children reached puberty and made inverted sexual object-choices, they would have only

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

themselves—and their careless custodianship—to blame. Little wonder, then, that after Freud's *Three Contributions* arrived in its English translation, and its ideas became general cultural currency, positive depictions of college women's intimate friendships tapered off and criticism of women's colleges and their "unwholesome" atmosphere increased in virulence.

It is important to note that there appears to be a delay between when these major sexological works were produced and when their key ideas could reasonably be considered as having permeated American popular culture. Freud was mentioned in the *New York Times* just over one hundred times between 1910—when the English translation of his *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* was published—and 1915; from 1915 until 1930, however, he was a point in reference in no fewer than one thousand thirty-three columns and articles in the same newspaper. The disparity seems to confirm the delay in cultural permeation, which is also borne out by the length of time it took from the publication of Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* until it became a frequent point of reference in American popular culture. While Ellis appeared in the *Times* a scant nine times in the first five years succeeding his book's release, he reappeared fifty-seven times in the next fifteen years. It is important to realize that the much higher frequency of citations for Freud than for Ellis does not necessarily reflect that Ellis' theories weren't as popular; instead, it is likely the result of Freud's later arrival in the United States, when middle-class culture had begun to throw off the shackles of bourgeois prudishness which had constrained the nineteenth century. The lapse in time between popular cultural assimilation of the ideas of Freud and Ellis must be borne in mind when trying to draw linkages between them and their effects on popular

behavior. While it may seem surprising that positive depictions of women's intimate friendships persisted for a decade after Ellis' theories of inversion had been introduced, it is due, it seems, in large part to the lapse in time before they were widely understood—albeit sometimes in a bastardized form. Freud's model of malleable sexuality may have permeated the culture more quickly because—as previously mentioned—when they arrived in the U.S., sex and sexuality was discussed much more freely than it had been even a decade earlier.

Freud and Ellis' negative constructions of women's homoaffectionate relationships contributed to the decline—and eventual disappearance—of positive depictions of them, and also informed the increasingly hostile tenor of discussions of women's colleges in the first decades of the twentieth century. Pseudo-psychological discussions in the popular press of the pathology of women's intimate friendships became common, and frequently used or alluded to the language of the sexologists. However, as I will demonstrate, many college women were able to resist the medicalization of their relationships with each other and continued to pursue them within the space of the school. They showed little indication that they recognized themselves to be—as Freud and Ellis suggested—endangering their future heterosexual happiness, or—as the eugenics movement would later claim—abetting an impending "race suicide."

1880-1900: Halcyon Days

By the 1880s, an assortment of popular magazines targeted the rapidly expanding population of literate young women. Aside from feature stories on issues such as marriage, education, and work, many of these magazines contained sometimes-sanctimonious columns devoted to advising their readers on dress, deportment, and morality. In addition, numerous non-fiction books were addressed to young women, most of them offering guidance and advice for navigating the treacherous waters of adolescence. Judging from a brief overview of this genre, two of the major sources of concern to young women were friendship and popularity—one could hardly write an advice book aimed at this market without devoting a few pages to these topics. *Hold Up Your Heads, Girls!: Helps for Girls, In School and Out* (1886) contained an entire chapter devoted to the discussion of intimate friendships between young women. Author Annie H. Ryder repeated the question which was just making its way into the collective mind of the public:

> Ought girls to have intimate friends? How carelessly we use that word "intimate." Well, this is a very trying question, and needs a careful answer...But what do you mean by "intimate"? If you understand by that word entire confidence in another under all circumstances; an unbosoming of every thought and feeling; a complete surrender to your friend, or mastery over her; a slavish adoration of her, and hearty concordance in all she does,--do not, then, indulge in an intimate friendship. The majority of women who have passed middle life will utter, out of their own experience, the truth that such confidence, such intercourse and familiarity, cause regret; and that such friendships are seriously detrimental to human happiness, wearing the mind, grieving the spirit; they cannot continue for many years. Our elders go even beyond that, and say that woman cannot love woman as woman can love man.[30]

[30] Annie H. Ryder, *Hold Up Your Heads, Girls!: Helps for Girls, In School and Out* (Boston: D. Lothrop and Co., 1886). *www.gutenberg.org*

In spite of these cautions, Ryder's essay displayed so overwhelmingly positive a portrait of intimate friendships between girls that her remarks above may be read as pandering to the concerns of any adults who might have stumbled upon the book—it is clearly significant that she attributes the sternest dictum against intimate friendships between girls to "our elders." Ryder informed her readers that "[n]othing can conduce more to happiness: nothing is brighter, more charming, more helpful than the interchange of friendship among young women. Who wouldn't be a girl always if she could be sure all the other girls would stay so too, and go on in that delightful exchange of affection and fine feeling which is the very ecstacy [*sic*] of living?" Ryder added, "Surely you must always need the sweet exchange of feeling which takes place between girls and girls." Ryder even proceeded to criticize one critic of intimate friendships, arguing that

> [i]t is not weak, as Grace Aguilar suggests, for women to love women girls to love girls. It is the fashion to deride female friendship, to look with scorn on those who profess it. There is always, to me, a doubt of the warmth, the strength, and purity of her feelings, when a girl merges into womanhood, looking down on female friendship as romance and folly.[31]

Ryder concluded her remarks by agreeing wholeheartedly with the florid take on intimate friendships offered by Horatio Alger: "I want to say, 'Yes, indeed!' to Mr. Alger's remarks about school-girls... 'Probably no chapter of sentiment in modern fashionable life is so intense and rich as that which comes to the experience of budding maidens at school. In their mental caresses, spiritual nuptials, their thoughts kiss each other, and more than all the blessedness the world will ever give them is foreshadowed.'"[32] While Ryder wisely acknowledged—and even intimated that she agreed

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

with—the murmurs of criticism which were starting to be directed towards young women's intimate friendships, her sympathies clearly lay with the young friends themselves.

As there are few statistics on readership of books such as *Hold Up Your Heads, Girls!*, it is impossible to state with certainty that Ryder's abrupt about-face in the chapter on intimate friendships was meant to placate adult readers who might have been aware of the unsettling rumors coming from the psychological and sexological institutions. It is nonetheless reasonable—if a bit cynical—to intuit that Ryder might have had a pecuniary interest in assuaging the worries of parents and guardians by toeing the party line of moderation and passionlessness in girls' friendships. After all, these same parents and guardians provided the pocket money with which their charges purchased books like Ryder's. An element of insincerity is palpable in her facile acceptance of the regrets of grown women towards their youthful indiscretions, particularly when read in context with her criticism of those same women who disavow their same-sex friendships as "romance and folly."

"Social Life at Vassar," published in the May, 1887, issue of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* was written by L.R. Smith, a Vassar student, who had entered it into a writing competition held by the magazine. In addition to her exhaustive report on the institutionalized structures at Vassar, the writer provided some interesting insights into the psychic lives of women college students, as well, admitting that

> [t]he majority of students, some time during their college courses, see in an upper class one who they imagine approaches their ideal. This shows itself in various ways. The impulsive Freshman, not too strong of judgment, perhaps sends flowers to her whom she delights to honor. Another, cooler and stronger, makes her idol the model of her own life, and is often much helped thereby. A third is content if

> she can watch the favored one from a distance and dream dreams of what her life must be. Sometimes all this leads to a real friendship that is a help to both. More often it dies a natural death as the girl grows older and her ideal rises; and in her Senior year she breathes a sigh of thankfulness that that older Senior will ever be ignorant of the emotions she inspired in an impressible Freshman sister.[33]

Whether consciously or unconsciously, Smith downplayed the real significance of these attachments, and assiduously avoided using the word "crush"—an essential part of college parlance—in describing them. Though she freely admitted that many of the girls might see their "ideal" in another student, this comment begs the question: ideal *what*? It is curious to think that young women walked around looking for an "ideal" to emulate; more reasonable—and in line with evidence on relationships between college women—is the thought that the "ideal" sought by a college woman would be her complement, not necessarily someone after whom to model herself. However, the fact that Smith acknowledged the phenomenon of the crush indicates her confidence that the public would not meet this admission with concern or disgust; certainly, she herself was not yet sufficiently conscious of the wary eye of sexology upon women's college friendships to feel she should omit them entirely from her description of college life. In much the same way as Ryder both discouraged and encouraged young women's intimate friendships, Smith acknowledged crushes at Vassar in an understated manner which would likely have escaped the notice of even an adult reader aware of the suspicion under which single-sex schools were falling.

No such concession to critics was made in an article by Annie Ramsey in *The Ladies' Home Journal* of August, 1889. A resounding "Yes!" was the answer to the titular question, "Shall We Send Our Daughters to Boarding-Schools?" This editorial was

[33] L.R. Smith, "Social Life at Vassar." *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, May 1887. *APS Online*.

practically unmitigated in its approbation of boarding schools and colleges, listing amongst their benefits to the young girl that they would make her "appreciate her mother's work for her," and that a "good" school could "transform in a single year, a restless, hawking, nail-biting, stoop-shouldered hoyden, into a quiet, erect young lady." In addition to this miraculous alchemy, boarding schools also afforded the chance to form new friendships, one of the "choicest possessions of one's prime." Ramsey rhapsodized, "The friendships of boarding school and college life are...stronger than they could have become under other circumstances. Young, ardent, loving souls meet and are welded together as they never can be in later years."[34] Nowhere does Ramsey evince any concern that the union of these kindred souls might act as an impediment to future relationships with the other sex. The character of her comments is reflective of the positive public opinion towards women's intense friendships with one another during the early and middle periods of the nineteenth century and disregards the negative constructions being placed on them by sexology and psychology.

Enthusiasm towards girls' intimate friendships was distinctly more tempered by 1893, as clearly indicated by Anna Robertson Brown's "The Girl Who Goes To College." This article, published in *The Ladies' Home Journal*, cautioned readers about the "dangers of college life":

> One of the dangers is becoming morbid. Strange and sad problems of human life inevitably come up for consideration in the course of one's college studies, and the habit of introspection grows. I would not brood upon these problems nor stop long to analyze one's self...Other dangers are from bad books or companions, sentimentality, and a growing indifference to home ties.[35]

[34] Annie R. Ramsey, "Shall We Send Our Daughters to Boarding-Schools?" *The Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1889, 10. *APS Online.*
[35] Anna Robertson Brown, "The Girl Who Goes To College," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1893, 22. *APS Online.*

Likewise, other pitfalls of college life included unwise friendships, particularly those which were suspiciously intense. "Girls that make constant demands upon each other's time and strength, that are unhappy when parted by necessary duties, and that are jealous at the least sign of affection to anyone else are not true friends...How may we dare try to monopolize any other life, however dear?"[36] Brown discreetly cautioned both college students and their female family members who also read the *Journal* to beware of the chum who demanded too much devotion, too much time—she wasn't a *true* friend. The perpetually circumspect *Ladies' Home Journal*, however, wasn't the forum to suggest what she might actually be.

Just a year later, *The Ladies' Home Journal* carried an essay by Ruth Ashmore on "Your Own Familiar Friend." While writing in a confidential, understanding tone, Ashmore made no bones about her feelings about intimate friendships between young women. The body of the essay provided a model of one such type of association:

> You have discovered for yourself a real friend, one who loves you simply for yourself. She has such a lovely name, too. You think you never heard such a musical one—Florence. And then you show me the little notes she has written to you, notes that are as sentimental as possible, full of 'darling' and 'sweetest,' and making protestations of love such as Romeo might have made to Juliet. And then you tell me how on your desk you find a rose from her; and you show me the ring you are wearing which is hers, and which she begs you to kiss every day.... Florence is as jealous as if she were your sweetheart, and you pride yourself on this. She writes you most despairing notes because some afternoon you take a walk with some other girl, or because you broke an engagement with her to go out with your mother. You think it is very desirable to be known among your girlfriends as 'Florence's crush.'[37]

Ashmore's allusion to a heterosexual romance—that of Romeo and Juliet—as well as her direct comparison of the feelings of "Florence" with those of a male suitor

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ruth Ashmore, "Your Own Familiar Friend." *The Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1894, 16. *APS Online*.

makes it clear that the concern here is that friendship is overflowing its banks, so to speak, and threatening to flood into the land of romance. Ashmore was forthright about the effects that such friendships would have on the future heterosexual relationships of their participants, cautioning that

> [B]y mincing up one's love as if it were a piece of citron, and giving a little of it here and a little of it there, there is left a portion not altogether desirable to be given to Prince Charming when he comes to claim his bride. I like a girl to have many girl friends; I do not like her to have a girl-sweetheart...Now, I want you to like each other, to be good comrades, but I think it will be wiser if you make this good-fellowship, in number at least, one of three or five, rather than of two or four, for then you will not be so likely...to reach a state of sickly sentimentality that is as undesirable physically as it is mentally...When two girls are very intimate...they are apt to, unconsciously...cause an undesirable morbidness to spring up.[38]

"Morbid," a catch-all pseudo-psychological term, was used to describe any unhealthful and potentially destructive behavior, and was usually found in discussions of sexual "perversions" from masturbation to homosexuality; as a euphemism for any of them, it left an unmistakable negative impression.

On the campuses of women's colleges, there was a marked duality in the attitude towards crushes and intimate friendships. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz suggested that the general student opinion of the "crush"—as inferred from the editorial pages of college newspapers—was noticeably more negative by the turn of the century, offering as proof an 1893 essay in *The Wellesley Magazine* which condemned "the disgrace to our students, to our college, that the sickly sentimentality of a boarding-school should be carried out in the use of the word, and in the fact that there are in college, 'crushes.'" The writer of the essay labeled crushes "unwholesome attachments" and tellingly compared

[38] Ibid.

them to physical illnesses like whooping cough, suggesting that the victims be isolated in order to prevent their disease from spreading to others.[39]

There may have been an element of public posturing involved in this severe reproach. In marked contrast to the stern words of the Wellesley columnist, Horowitz discovered that letters written in the 1890s by students demonstrated a wide acceptance of women's homoaffectionate relationships. One letter, from Vassar junior Edith Rickert to her parents, happily recounted that she and "[d]ear, ridiculous old Ellen... been having [*sic*] quite a 'spoon' tonight!"[40] Students such as Rickert might have been mindful to protect the reputation of their school in all public forums—college publications, particularly—by denying or decrying women's intense friendships, indicating an awareness of the scrutiny with which they were now regarded. Speaking within the private realm of family and friends, though, students do not seem to have allowed the insinuations of psychologists to have affected their perceptions of the propriety of their close friendships with each other.

Some fictional accounts indicated that college women were aware of the growing suspicion of crushes and intimate friendships as "abnormal." In Abbe Carter Goodloe's *College Girls* (1895), for instance, one such student serves as the author's mouthpiece for a strongly-worded warning against developing too much intimacy with another girl. Eva Hungerford, the object of the affection of Betty Harmon, is "rather aggrieved" that her classmate has inundated her with "notes, roses, and requests to go boating," and furthermore she

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[39] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984): 166.
[40] Ibid., 166-7.

> strongly objected to such proceedings, not only because she did not wish to be rendered ridiculous by an insignificant freshman from Iowa, but also because she was a very sensible girl, and entirely disapproved of the "eclectic affinity" business, and she had no intention of allowing the young girl's admiration for herself to develop into that abnormal sort of attraction that exists between girls in so many schools and colleges.[41]

This passage is of particular importance because of its bold assertion that a crush—so long regarded as an innocent fixture of girls' schools—could easily develop into an "abnormal sort of attraction." Even the use of the word "abnormal" suggests Goodloe's familiarity with the psychological and sexological discussions about women's intimate friendships which had recently begun to take place. That she concurred with the negative opinions is made explicit in her warning that "[t]he temptation to exalt some upper-class girl into an ideal and lavish upon her an affection which in society would naturally fall to the lot of some very unideal boy, or man, is one of the greatest ordeals a college girl goes through, and one who successfully resists all inducements to become a 'divinity student,' or who gets out of the entanglement without damage to herself, is as successfully 'proven' as was Lieutenant Ouless after his little affair with Private Ortheris."[42] Goodloe expressly likened the feeling of college girls for one another to the feelings which "normal" young women would have for young men, and suggested that the passionate affairs between women could easily leave them damaged—psychologically, one supposes—for life. This bore an unmistakable trace of contemporary psychological wisdom.

If two girls' friendship became suspiciously intense, or a student's behavior threatened to overstep the conventional bounds of acceptability, their classmates could be

[41] Abbe Carter Goodloe, *College Girls* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895): 231-2.
[42] The reference is to "His Private Honor," a story by Rudyard Kipling in which a military man of high rank risks his commission to right a wrong he has done to a subordinate.

counted on to rein them in, as demonstrated in two stories published in *The Ladies' Home Journal* of March, 1900. Included in an article entitled "College Girls' Larks and Pranks," the brief vignettes assured readers that the students at women's college were just as concerned about protecting normative femininity and combating "perversion" as their elders. In the first, "How A Case of 'Mannishness' is Cured," students are given the authority to diagnose, treat, and cure the social—and, it is implied, potentially moral—transgressions of a classmate. The "Freak," a member of the Freshman class, "went about in bloomers, had her hair cut short, and...doffed her fore-and-aft cap like a man when she met her classmates." Her disapproving peers plot to correct her gender-transgressive ways her by sending her into town, where she encounters young "men" who take her to be one of their own, much to her chagrin and dismay. "'I think she'll be more like a girl now,' " one of the plotters reports back, watching her unfortunate classmate retreat to the safety of the campus, in tears.[43]

While the treatment doled out by the Freak's classmates might seem unduly harsh, and not at all in keeping with the deep bonds of class spirit which were a hallmark of women's colleges during this period, it is crucial to note that the author regards the actions of the conspirators as good, right, and necessary. Nowhere in this short tale is there any authorial disapproval of the humiliating scheme. Class spirit is of paramount importance, and to construct and maintain this, all members of the class must fall within prescribed boundaries of dress and deportment. In order for the Freak to join the freshman fold, she must sacrifice her individuality, accepting the harsh treatment as her due for attempting to flout tacit rules about act and appearance.

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[43] A Graduate, "College Girls' Larks and Pranks." *The Ladies' Home Journal*, March, 1900, 7. *APS Online*.

In another vignette from the same article, college women are shown to be keenly aware of even the faintest whiff of impropriety in an intimate friendship, and know exactly what steps to take to make their awareness known to the offending duo. The author set the scene thusly:

> The violent, short-lived affections which grow up between college girls—oftenest Freshmen—are termed in college vernacular 'crushes.' Now it happened that a girl in A_____ building had a most overgrown 'crush' on a girl in B_____building. It happened, too, that these two hearts, which beat as one over Latin verbs and conic sections, one day yearned to beat together at an early service at a church nearby. The girl in A_____ building was to steal over to B_____ building to stay all night with her friend.[44]

Although there is nothing apparently lascivious, or even particularly romantic, about the pair's plans to attend church together, the distrustful eyes of their peers are upon them. Determined to deny them any blissful communion, their classmates sneak into B_____'s room and set up a number of alarm clocks which will ring each hour of the evening, thereby constantly rousing the pair from sleep. Considering that many women's colleges at this time did allow friends to spend the night in each others' rooms, the concern of these fictional undergraduates about A_____and B_____ spending the night together seems unwarranted—and what (other than making the duo aware that they were being scrutinized) would be accomplished by waking them up throughout the night? The concern about A_____ and B_____ stems from the romantic attachment they share; their night together might be spent less in sleeping than in other activities. In this light, setting up the alarm clocks to ring periodically might be intended not so much to disturb sleep as to interrupt an unseemly romantic interlude. Every shrill ring of the alarms would remind the girls that their classmates were watching them, and that they could be

[44] Ibid.

caught *in flagrante delicto* very easily. This story supports Sherrie Inness's findings that in much of the popular college literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the school environment replicates Foucault's "panopticon" with its "hierarchical surveillance, continuous registration, perpetual assessment and classification."[45] A_____ and B_____ appear the next morning, sleepy-eyed and contrite, to the satisfaction of their classmates.

Although much popular literature for, and about, college women was beginning to bear distinct impressions of psychology and sexology, readers in 1900 could still find fictional accounts which treated crushes and intimate friendships lightly and positively. Josephine Dodge Daskam's fictional *Smith College Stories* contained a number of brief selections set on the stage of one of the most famous women's colleges; two of these, in particular, illustrated the commonplace nature of crushes, and showed them to be more frivolous than threatening. "The Education of Elizabeth" is comprised of letters sent from a fictional Smith College student to her family and friends. The cataclysm which sets the plot in motion is a letter which Elizabeth has written to Arnold, her ex-fiancé:

> My Dear Arnold: It is only fair to tell you that it can never be. No, never!...In the first place, I am, or at least you are, far too young. The American woman of today is younger than her grandmother. I mean, of course, younger than her grandmother is now. That is, than she was then. Also I doubt if I could ever love you as you think you do. Love me, I mean. I am not a man's woman. I much prefer women. Really, Arnold, it is very strange how men bore me now that I have known certain women. Women are so much more interesting...so much more exciting! This will probably seem strange to you, but the modern woman I am sure is rapidly getting not to need men at all! I have never seen so many beautiful red-haired girls before. One sits in front of me in chapel, and the light

[45] Sherrie Inness, "Mashes, Smashes, Crushes, and Raves: Woman-to-Woman Relationships in Popular Women's College Fiction, 1895-1915," *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1994): 50

> makes an aureole of glory around her head. I wrote a theme about it that is going to be in the *Monthly* for November.[46]

The absurdity of Elizabeth's rejection of her male suitor in favor of the company of women is heavily marked by the ineloquent inanity of her chatter. The reference to the "theme" Elizabeth writes for the school's literary magazine is certainly based in fact; until just after the turn of the century, many of the literary magazines produced by women's colleges contained passionate odes from one student to another.[47] The essential inconsequence of these same-sex obsessions is underscored by the tale's end; after a volley of letters to and from friends and family, Elizabeth decides to reinstate her "understanding" with Arnold, apparently having been convinced that same-sex love is no substitute for heterosexual bliss.

The other story in this collection which concerns crushes and intense female friendships is entitled, "The Evolution of Evangeline." This story has been discussed by scholars such as Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz and Lillian Faderman, as it provides a clear demonstration of the significance and ubiquity of same-sex romantic attachment at women's colleges. The story revolves around an unattractive, somewhat morose freshman, Evangeline Potts, whom a sophomore—Biscuits—is obligated to escort to the first dance of the year. "Though Evangeline Potts was the last person she would have selected for her companion, and visions of the pretty little freshman she had had in mind on filling out her programme flashed before her with irritating clearness, she smiled

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[46] Josephine Dodge Daskam, "The Education of Elizabeth," in *Smith College Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900): 45.

encouragement and remonstrated cheerfully."[48] Fortunately, Biscuits is able to exact a miraculous transformation upon hapless Evangeline, making her so lovely, in fact, that a number of girls at the dance can't take their eyes off her. The description of her loveliness—she has "milk-white shoulders," "wonderful hair," and "long, round arms gleam[ing] against the black of her skirt"—"unwittingly exposes the play of sexual attractiveness among women students in the setting of college dances," according to Horowitz.[49] Faderman dryly noted that even though "[i]t is assumed in Daskam's universe...that these [same-sex] loves would be superceded by heterosexual attachments...while Daskam's characters are at Smith College, their passions are primarily for each other."[50] This story is essentially moralistic, attacking the fickle, superficial nature of popularity that turns Evangeline, scorned while frumpy and taciturn, into a celebrated (but still laconic) class icon once her hair and clothes are altered. Daskam's choice to reserve judgment on the propriety of the Smith students' attractions to one another indicates that, although she may have found them silly and immature—as in "The Education of Elizabeth"—she did not find them demanding of censure.

Though popular treatment of women's intimate friendships during the waning years of the nineteenth century showed a tendency to step away from the whole-hearted acceptance which had been common in the early and middle parts of the era, and advocated moderation and temperance in these relationships, these depictions did not, for the most part, base the bulk of their objections on psycho-medical grounds. Many of the

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[48] Josephine Dodge Daskam, "The Evolution of Evangeline," in *Smith College Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900): 72.
[49] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984): 155-6.
[50] Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981): 300.

criticisms of women's intimate friendships were based on an aversion to "sentimentality," which Nancy Sahli suggested was a natural concomitant of the growing push towards equality of the sexes; as women were asserting that they, like men, had the ability to think analytically, using reason rather than emotion, they simultaneously distanced themselves from all things emotional.[51] Passionate friendships amongst young women would damage the carefully-crafted image of woman as a level-headed, cool, and eminently rational creature. Another key element in these early objections to women's homo-affectionate relationships was their emphasis on decorum and temperance; this was simultaneously reflective of past conceptions of women as naturally chaste and moderate, and prophetic of the future role middle-class women would play as arbiters of morality in early twentieth century American culture. But criticism of women's intimate friendships in the years to come would be more complex and more medicalized than the comparatively benign assessments of the "naïve" nineteenth century, and ever more determined to nip these potentially empowering, and possibly threatening, relationships in the bud.

[51] Nancy Sahli, "Smashing: Women's Relationships Before the Fall," *Chrysalis* 8 (Summer 1979): 26.

Fictional depictions of crushes and intimate friendships at women's colleges continued to proliferate in the first decade of the twentieth century. As Sherrie Inness observed, "[H]undreds of popular novels and short stories [were] published in the...early 1900s about student life at northeastern women's colleges" and, for the first ten years, at least, crushes remained an important part of life at a women's school.[52] It should come as no surprise, then, that the vast majority of college stories published during this time featured a depiction of a crush or an intimate friendship. Although many of the books were formulaic—in fact, some seem to be little more than carbon copies of each other, simply using different appellations for their schools and characters—it is nonetheless significant that they largely featured only positive portrayals of crushes and intimate friendships in spite of the negative turn being taken by public discussion of the topic.

One especially florid, although overwhelmingly positive, representation of an intimate friendship was published in *Janet's College Career*. Released in 1904, the novel follows its main character throughout four years of higher education, culminating with her graduation. The eve before commencement, Janet's roommate "Teddy" discloses to her the feelings she has been hiding for four years:

> "And this is the last evening you and I will ever be here together," said Teddy, with a catch in her voice..."Oh, I know it doesn't mean so much to you," said Teddy, reckless of disclosing her real feelings. "You never cared much. You always loved Polly more, and even Lillie, but I loved you best, Janet. I always did. Nobody ever came first, and now we are going to part and you will drift away from me altogether...You never loved me half as much as I have loved you."[53]

[52] Sherrie Inness, "Mashes, Smashes, Crushes, and Raves: Woman-to-Woman Relationships in Popular Women's College Fiction, 1895-1915," *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1994): 49.
[53] Amy E. Blanchard, *Janet's College Career* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs and Co., 1904): 360.

Instead of reacting with surprise at this passionate admission, Janet responds much like a lover reassuring the object of her affections. "'You dear Teddy,' she said, 'just because I am so used to you and haven't been demonstrative, do you think I don't care? Do you think that any one will ever quite take your place? Teddy, why you are a part of me, almost...Have you felt that way all along? Have you been hurt and indignant when I have made love to Polly? Have you, Ted? Have I hurt you?'"[54] When Teddy responds in the affirmative, Janet protests her love so strongly that the weeping girl is convinced.

> "[Y]ou believe that I love you, and that you must always come first among all my girl friends, you do believe it?"
> "Yes, I do now."
> "And you are satisfied?"
> "Yes, oh, yes. Kiss me, Janet; you never do, you know."
> Janet put her arms around her and kissed the trembling lips again and again, the tears standing in her own eyes.[55]

This is the closest facsimile of a "love scene" to be found in almost any of these collegiate novels; Janet and Teddy pledge their lifelong fidelity to one another, and promise not to allow marriage to separate them—although, to Janet, this means that Teddy should marry the brother of her own fiancé. As Sherrie Inness noted in her discussion of this story, the message is somewhat ambivalent in its treatment of crushes, indicating that "they are normal relationships only so long as the women involved realize that a smash must not interfere with a woman's social role as wife and mother. A romantic relationship between two women is depicted as 'naturally' inferior to the relationship between a man and a woman; if a woman desires to reach maturity and

[54] Ibid., 361.
[55] Ibid., 362.

achieve complete emotional fulfillment, she must marry."[56] However, this climactic closing scene imbues the relationship between Janet and Teddy with as much emotional power as it can, within these societal guidelines.

In the same year, the *Betty Wales* series, set at fictional Harding College, came into print. It followed the scholastic careers of the titular Betty and her coterie—comprised of stock characters like the tomboy, the grind, the class beauty, and the chubby, good-natured best friend—from freshman year all the way through to their post-graduate adventures. Continuing to be published until 1913, the series is populated by college women who regard crushes as normal, harmless, and completely common.

Betty Wales, Freshman (1904) introduces the main characters and devotes its time to establishing the structures which will shape the future books. If, as Sherrie Inness claimed, these college stories were intended not only to entertain, but to educate young girls about college life, then it is surely significant that the book includes an exchange in which one student (Katherine) asks another (Mary) whom she shall take to the sophomore reception. "'Roberta, of course,' said Mary. 'Didn't you know that Roberta and I have a crush on each other? A crush, my dears, in case you are wanting to know, is a warm and adoring friendship.'"[57] Any adult reader, or even a young woman already at college, probably would not need this term defined; only a girl who had not yet experienced or witnessed a "crush" would benefit by this seemingly superfluous statement. Warde normalizes the crush by defining it—literally—as a common and positive part of college life.

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[56] Sherrie Inness, , "Mashes, Smashes, Crushes, and Raves: Woman-to-Woman Relationships in Popular Women's College Fiction, 1895-1915." *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1994): 63.

[57] Margaret Warde, *Betty Wales, Freshman* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Co., 1904): 47.

One particularly interesting passage in the book occurs during a discussion of the upcoming college play. "'I wish I could act,' said Alice. 'I should love to be a man. But my mother wouldn't let me, so it's just as well that I'm a perfect stick at it.' 'Roberta's father wouldn't let her either,' said Betty, 'but her mother didn't mind, as long as it's only before a few girls.'"[58] The fictional college students are acutely aware that assuming masculine dress for dramatic effect will meet with social disapproval, but give no similar indication that their romantic friendships with each other might be suspect, too. The obvious concern which the exchange between Betty and Alice addresses was a very real one: college administrators were ever wary that tales of their charges dressing as men might be leaked to the press, thereby providing ammunition to those who claimed that women's colleges actually encouraged their students to emulate the other sex.

One manifestation of this fear was demonstrated by Bryn Mawr College's rule—firmly in place through the first decade of the twentieth century—which forbade men to attend plays in which Bryn Mawr students dressed in male costume. Other women's colleges also remained vigilant against allowing outsiders to see their students in men's attire; many even forbade photographs to be taken of young women so dressed.[59] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz suggested that these strict rules stemmed from the concern of college administrators that this documentary evidence would expose "the most carefully guarded secret of the women's colleges;" namely, that "in a college composed only of women, students did not remain feminine."[60]

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[58] Ibid., 107.
[59] Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984): 165.
[60] Ibid., 166.

This fear was still paralyzing college administrators in 1910, when the *New York Times* ran a piece entitled "No Photos in Trousers," in which was announced a new "faculty edict" at Wellesley that "all existing photographs of girls playing masculine characters" were to be "cut off at the waist" in response to the publication of two students in "full male dress, taken after the Senior play." The writer redundantly concluded that "[t]o these pictures the Faculty took strong objection."[61] The extreme reaction of the Wellesley faculty may be attributed to their desire to be seen as guardians of normative femininity; moreover, such an emphatic gesture indicated that the college would not accept any *gender* transgression and effectively pre-empted the question of whether it would tolerate sexual transgressions.

In *Betty Wales, Sophomore*, snobbish Eleanor Watson escorts awkward freshman Dora Carlson to the first dance of the year. In much the same way as Josephine Dodge Daskam's "The Evolution of Evangeline," published a few years earlier, the story gives hints of the romantic undertones of "girl dances." Further, a casual suggestion from one student to another reveals the voyeuristic pleasure available at such gatherings: "If you want your brother to fall in love with Harding, you must be sure to have him see that dance. Men always go crazy over girl dances."[62] The participants, as well as the onlookers, received a pleasurable *frisson* from the event:

> Dora Carlson arrived at the gymnasium in a state of mind that she herself aptly compared to Cinderella's on the night of her first ball. She had a keen appreciation of the beautiful, and she had never seen any one so absolutely lovely as Eleanor in evening dress. It was pleasure enough just to watch her, to hear her talk to other people, and to feel that she—Dora Carlson—had some part and lot in this fascinating being, who had suddenly appeared to her as from another world. "Do

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[61] "No Photos in Trousers," *New York Times*, May 19, 1910, 1, *APS Online*.

[62] Margaret Warde, *Betty Wales, Sophomore* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Co., 1905). *www.gutenberg.org*.

> you dance?" asked Eleanor, when the music for the first waltz began. And when Miss Carlson answered with a delighted "yes," Eleanor, who always refused to lead, and detested both crowds and "girl dances," resolutely picked up her train and started off.[63]

The comparison to a heterosexual (albeit mythical) romance—Cinderella's—coupled with Dora's assessment of Eleanor as a "lovely...fascinating being" indicates that what is being described here is a crush, in the truest sense. Even the girls' classmates recognize it as such. The villain of the series, Jean Eastman, "had a great deal to say about Eleanor's freshman crush, as she called Dora Carlson. It was foolish, she said, and not in good taste."[64] Eleanor's friends gently chide her about Dora's devotion: "Please don't encourage the poor thing so," laughed Katherine, one day not long after the reception. "Why, yesterday morning at chapel I looked up in the gallery and there she was in the front row, hanging over the railing as far as she dared, with her eyes glued to you. Some day she'll fall off, and then think how you'll feel, when the president talks about the terrible evils of the crush system, and stares straight at you."[65]

By the book's end, however, Eleanor's desire to "deserve" Dora's love causes her to repent her selfish ways; the crush, in this sense, has served as a positive force which works for the good of the whole college community. It is telling, too, that the students regard the lectures of administrators about "the terrible evils of the crush system" as little more than a joke, as exemplified by this passage; this can be read as proof that teachers and administrators exercised little actual authority over their students' relationships with one another, although they made requisite empty threats to prove their concern. In this

[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

way, they would be able to deflect any critical suggestions from the public that their institutions did nothing to discourage crushes from occurring.

By 1907, crushes were still treated impartially, as an everyday occurrence. In a conversation contained in *Betty Wales, Senior*, the "crush" is again defined, both for the edification of naïve readers and perhaps to reassert its inherent innocence to more suspicious minds. The following scene takes place during light "hazing" of the incoming class by their elders:

> "This is for you, Miss Butts," announced the tall ghost, after a whispered colloquy with her companions, "and as you don't seem very happy to-night we've made it easy. Tell us the name of your most particular crush. Now don't pretend you haven't any."
> "I won't tell," muttered Miss Butts sullenly.
> "Then you'll have to make up Lucile Merrifield's bed for two weeks as a penalty for disobeying our decrees. Now all the rest of you may tell your crushes' names. I will explain, as some of you look a little dazed, that your crush is the person you most deeply adore."[66]

The "deep adoration" of a classmate could hardly be considered threatening to the heteronormative standard, particularly if every girl at school had one—"don't pretend you haven't any," the freshmen are warned—because, by this time, most Americans were likely to personally know a collegiate woman. Chances are, too, that most of these real-life female college students were considered normal and well-adjusted by their friends and families—in short, quite unrelated to the mythical monsters which populated psychological criticism of college life. The innocence of the crush is reiterated in a passage which briefly mentions some of its methodology:

> Polly smiled luminously. "I've got a good many freshman friends," she explained. "Which means violet-bestowing crushes, I suppose," said Madeline severely. "You shouldn't encourage that sort of thing, Polly. You're too young." "I'm not a bit younger than Lucile," Polly defended herself, "and they

[66] Margaret Warde, *Betty Wales, Senior* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Co., 1907): 58.

> all worship her." Polly giggled. "Only instead of violets, they send her Gibson girls, with touching notes about her looking like one."[67]

"Touching notes," bunches of violets, pictures of Henry Dana Gibson's all-American girls—none of these gifts carry any strong sexual connotation. Although Madeline's suggestion that Polly is "too young" to have a crush subtly likens it to a heterosexual courtship—for which there is a socially-appropriate age to begin—there is relatively little in these books to suggest that the crushes were cause for any real concern.

In one of the last books of this series, published in 1911, however, the climate at Harding has changed—and so, too, has the author's tone towards same-sex relationships. When Marie, a freshman, shows her naïveté about college life, two upperclassmen spring into action and put her in her place.

> "Got a crush yet?" inquired Fluffy sweetly.
> "A what?" Marie's face was blank.
> Fluffy explained.
> Marie giggled consciously. "You embarrass me, Miss Dutton. You go off and stand in a corner of the hall for a minute, and I'll tell the rest of these girls whether I've got a crush or not,--and what her name is."
> Fluffy slipped obediently off the table, and then pulled the amazed Marie roughly after her. "Freshmen aren't allowed on this table," she announced sternly. "You'd better go home and read the rules of this college. There's a rule about crushes, too."[68]

Marie's attempt to play the coquette with Fluffy is repelled, the latter no doubt acting in the manner prescribed in the college handbook which prohibits crushes. Of particular note is the fact that Marie seems to be ignorant of crushes—unlikely in a young girl of this time period. More significant is that the author declines to explain to the reader, as she did in other books in the series, what a crush is, preferring to substitute for a definition the terse "Fluffy explained." This indicates that Warde was convinced that

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[67] Ibid., 50-1.
[68] Margaret Warde, *Betty Wales Decides* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Co., 1911): 38-9.

her readers were not as naïve as Marie and did not require the definition—there was certainly a good likelihood of this—or, perhaps, that she had recently come into agreement with popular wisdom which stated that crushes were unwholesome and potentially dangerous, and therefore refused to describe them to young readers. Lending support to the latter scenario is a passage later in the book, which makes clear Warde's disapproval of post-collegiate intimate relationships between women. In need of some china, Betty visits the home of two female members of Harding's faculty who live together:

> The scouting trip disclosed the fact that Celine was good-natured, if set in her ways. Also, she had not smashed any of the gold and white Raymond-heirloom china. Instead she kept it under lock and key, and Miss Raymond and Fraulein Wendt were compelled to be satisfied with a plebian, modern blue and white set purchased by command of the thrifty Celine, who had an obsession to the effect that some day Miss Raymond would marry and have a real home of her own. For this happy consummation Celine insisted upon hoarding the ancestral silver, china, mahogany, sternly refusing to waste what she shrewdly recognized as real treasures upon this make-believe, makeshift housekeeping, divided between a drab little German lady and a distrait and absent-minded professor in petticoats, whom Celine adored and scolded by turns.[69]

The French maid becomes the arbiter of normality here, correctly identifying the partnership of Fraulein Wendt and Miss Raymond as a shabby copy of a real marriage—it is "make-believe" and "makeshift," and so counterfeit that Miss Raymond is not even entitled to use her heirloom dinnerware. Here, Celine is clearly acting in sympathy with Warde's own feelings; her actions are not portrayed as tyrannical or irrational—or, even more unbelievably, as grounds for termination—but simply as shrewd, thrifty, and sage. It cannot be a coincidence that the woman with whom the naïve, absent-minded Miss Reynolds lives is German, and described as "drab;" though Warde does not expressly call

[69] Ibid., 153-4.

her "unfeminine," it is not difficult to read between the lines to determine that this was precisely what she intended readers to infer. This subtle disparaging of Fraulein Wendt's character serves to further encourage readers' approval of Celine's actions.

After the turn of the century, discussions about homoaffectionate crushes and intimate friendships continued in the mainstream press; cautions to young women against engaging in overly intimate relationships with each other grew somewhat sterner. L.H.M. Soulsby's *Stray Thoughts for Girls*, published in 1903, contained the following recommendations for avoiding "folly" in friendships:

> [D]o not day-dream about your friend, brooding over the thought of her weakens your fibre [sic] more than being with her...Make a rule of life for yourself about your intercourse; walk and talk with her more than with others, but at the same time sandwich those walks and talks by going with other friends—it is a great pity to narrow your circle of possible friends by being absorbed in one person....Do not write sentimental letters, and, finally, do not sit in your friend's pocket and say "Darling."[70]

Soulsby alluded to the concern that paying too much attention to another girl could have lasting effects, weakening one's moral fiber, and further makes clear her disapproval of girls' emulation of heterosexual courtship rituals—i.e., writing sentimental letters or using terms of endearment such as "darling." Similar in sentiment was a column published in *The Ladies' Home Journal* of February, 1903, entitled "A Talk with the Romantic Girl." It contained similar warnings, claiming that when a friendship grew too intimate, too intense, that "romance of this form is a thing to be dreaded and avoided, a veritable poison-ivy upon character."[71]

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[70] L.H.M. Soulsby, *Stray Thoughts for Girls* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1903), *www.gutenberg.org*
[71] "A Talk with the Romantic Girl," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, February 1903, 33, *APS Online*.

Taking a completely different tone, Grace Latimer Jones's 1907 excoriation of girls' intimate friendships in "The Evils of Girls' Secret Societies" employed stronger terms than those written a few years earlier. It even alluded to psychology. Speaking of college sororities, she warned that

> Out of this absorbing society interest may come good things—but less worthy things, too, can come of it. It is conducive to that sentimental relationship between the older members and the younger, vulgarly known as the "crush."...All who have seen the "crush" in a developed state, however, will testify that nothing is less conducive to a proper state of mind. As a morbid manifestation it is to be suppressed, for it is a hopeless passion, and is seldom anything but harmful to those who indulge in it...[T]he secret society makes it possible for...friendships to be far too intimate...It is well known that one girl of evil mind and wrong habits may exert a powerful influence over another, and that she may even vitiate a whole group.[72]

This morbid, "hopeless passion" was not only apt to destroy those who engaged in it, but, as Jones shrilly cautioned, could spread to other girls, destroying large numbers of them in one fell swoop. The clandestine nature of the "girls' secret society" only encouraged the growth of this virus—Jones's use of the word "vitiate" made it clear that she did, in fact, regard the crush as a sort of contagious disease—and this large-scale threat to the future sexual normality of the girls was reason enough to eradicate them. It is curious, however, that Jones blamed sororities and other "secret societies" for fostering the spread of the crush, largely exempting women's colleges in her remarks.

In spite of the increasingly negative tone of much of the popular press' coverage of college women's homoaffectionate relationships, many of these women did not show signs of having internalized the negative messages. In letters to family and friends, as well as in diaries, collegiate women acknowledged the presence of same-sex crushes and

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[72] Grace Latimer Jones, "The Evils of Girls' Secret Societies," *The Ladies' Home Journal*, October 1907, 26, *APS Online*.

intimate friendships at their schools. Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Van der Veer, a student at Vassar from 1902 until 1906, wrote to her "most intimate friend Edith G." that her new roommate had an annoying habit of burning incense in their room. "You know how I hate the odor," Van der Veer complained, adding, "But I have not told you the worst. She kisses me Edith. Every night before we go to bed we meet in a fond embrace. Sometimes she sprinkles in a few kisses during the day." Van der Veer tempered her criticism, adding that "besides all this she is nice...I think after she has...gotten over that distressing kissing habit we shall like each other greatly."[73] Van der Veer's objection to her roommate's oscular overactivity seems, in the context of her other letters, to be based less on any revulsion to being kissed by another girl than by the fact that she did not reciprocate her roommate's fondness. Van der Veer admitted, in a later letter, that she "had quite a crush on Miss. B.," her "sweet and pretty" French teacher.[74]

Still later, she recounted a prank, centering on girls' crushes, played on her by some classmates: they conspired to send her a fake invitation to dine with a classmate of whom Van der Veer admired from a distance. In a letter to a friend, she complained, "Those plagued girls. The other day when we were out walking it came out. Margaret wrote the first note and sent the violets. Then she got afraid that I would write to the real girl [under whose name the first note was written] and tell her I couldn't come to dinner with her so she wrote the second note saying that she was sorry but couldn't have me etc. Just think what a fool I have been making of myself. How those girls must have laughed

[73] Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Van der Veer to Evelyn Van der Veer, circa 1902-03, Gaston family papers, Special Collections, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.
[74] Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Van der Veer to Evelyn Van der Veer, February 9, 1903, Gaston family papers, Special Collections, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

to themselves when I came upstairs to dinner sporting my violets."[75] The ability of the Vassar undergraduates to mock the crush system only demonstrates how accustomed to and accepting of it they were.

Elizabeth Congdon, a member of the class of 1902 at Bryn Mawr College, carefully preserved, in an elaborate scrapbook of collegiate memorabilia, an anonymous note she received while a sophomore at the College. Sent anonymously, the brief missive is evidence that, in spite of admonitions to avoid doing so, students at women's colleges still commonly used romantic language to communicate with one another. "My Dear Miss Congdon, I don't suppose you remember the lonely Freshman whom you asked to dance with you at the Sophomore dance, but I want to tell you that your kindness was the brightest spot of the evening to her, and that she will never forget, nor you, for you seem the loveliest and sweetest girl in the College to her, and she will consider herself very happy if she can ever give another Freshman as much joy as you gave her."[76] In light of the fact that advice columnists in the popular press had been discouraging young women from using sentimental terms between each other, this note suggests that these negative messages had little effect on the actual behavior of the women to whom they were targeted.

Intimate friendships were accepted as a commonplace occurrence at women's colleges, and even met with parental sanction. A letter written by the mother of Louise Marshall, Bryn Mawr class of '05, to the mother of Louise's best friend, Helen, said simply, "I am glad she and Helen are so devoted to each other and hope their friendship

[75] Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Van der Veer to Evelyn Van der Veer, March 16, 1903, Gaston family papers, Special Collections, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

[76] Elizabeth Congdon papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

can continue through their lives."[77] It is clear that neither mother found anything extraordinary about their daughters' intimate attachment, and that they viewed their devotion as a positive affair, to be prolonged indefinitely. Another indication that homo-affectionate relationships between college women were considered acceptable, and run-of-the-mill, was that *The College Girl's Record*, a scrapbook published by Paul Elder and Company in 1903, contained a blank space in which the owner was to fill in the name and details of her "Upper Class Love;" the book also contained two blank pages to fill with the names of "Men I Met While at College."[78] One can surmise, from the coexistence of these pages, that the college crush was still not widely regarded as a threat to post-graduate heteronormativity.

There is evidence from this period which bears out Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's assertion that turn-of-the-century college publications represented "official student opinion" turning against the crush; Bryn Mawr College's literary magazine, *Tipyn O'Bob*, published an editorial in 1904 which aroused passionate feelings in student and alumnae correspondents. In "The Length of Enthusiasm," author D.D. lauded the fact that the ancient rivalry between the Freshman and Sophomore classes had finally been abolished, but warned that "[a]nother spirit, however, the spirit between the Freshman and Junior classes has grown up to take the place of the old one. It resembles the old in that it is artificial, in that it is silly, in that it is injurious to those possessing it and to the

[77] Mary L. Marshall to Mrs. Sturgis., circa 1903-04. Helen Sturgis papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.
[78] Virginia Woodson Frame, *The College Girl's Record* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Co., 1903).

institution as a whole. Therefore, like the old, it should be criticized and done away with."[79]

While admitting that "it would indeed be sad if upper classmen, with academic years behind them, were unable to inspire some respect...in those of less experience," D.D. contended that the present spirit demanded that "every Freshman should tacitly agree to everlasting worship for every Junior, and that every Junior must properly respond to this adulation, in college, and then afterwards whenever they may meet," and created an "unnatural and unwholesome" relationship "Furthermore," she continued, "what injures the welfare of a large part of the college has of necessity a bad effect on the college as a whole." Older students, she insisted, should squelch the "fanatic worship" of their subordinates, and seek to inspire "respect, not adoration." She ended her impassioned plea in a somewhat apologetic manner, suggesting that "a criticism of this phase of college life may seem out of place and unnecessary. I hope that it is unnecessary, that the passing of a college tradition beyond the bounds of sentiment into the realm of sentimentality is only the result of a short-lived enthusiasm."[80]

D.D.'s essay dealt explicitly with the devotion of one college class to another; the essay makes no overt connection between this devotion, and the more general phenomenon of homoaffectionate relationships between her peers. However, much of her criticism—particularly her description of the Freshman-Junior relationship as "unnatural and unwholesome" and "injurious to those possessing it"—utilizes the rhetoric introduced by psychologists and sexologists in their discussions of women's intense friendships, and made part of the common vernacular through use in popular

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[79] D.D., "The Length of Enthusiasm." *Tipyn O'Bob*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (January 1904): 31.
[80] Ibid., 33.

publications. By describing the Freshman-Junior "spirit" with the same terms used to discuss intense homoaffectionate relationships more generally, D.D. slyly elided the two conditions; also, her use of the word "artificial" to describe the inter-class bond furtively sets it in opposition to that which is "natural"—it is not a far stretch to suggest that readers in the early twentieth century would understand these terms as representative of homosexuality and heteronormativity.

The response to this column shows that *Tipyn*'s readers were attuned to this elision and took steps to help differentiate Bryn Mawr's atmosphere from the "hothouse" climate that critics of women's colleges claimed was ubiquitous. F.E.M., '05, wrote that "If...this mutual affection is between individuals, it concerns neither the classes nor the department of Discussion...such an attitude is so utterly contrary to Bryn Mawr spirit that it ought not to be discussed in the college monthly. It is...an unnatural, unwholesome boarding-school attitude which cannot survive two weeks of healthy, broadening Bryn Mawr life."[81] The imploring suggestion of the writer that Bryn Mawr not even deign to associate itself in print with such a distasteful spirit makes clear the protectiveness which collegiate women felt toward their alma maters; they were largely defensive of its good reputation and—in much the same way that Wellesley protected itself by forbidding photos of its undergraduates in male costume—all too aware that critics of women's colleges would pounce on any evidence that proved that "unwholesome" relationships between women occurred at their institution.

The same issue contained several other responses to "The Length of Enthusiasm;" all of these challenged D.D.'s assertions. "If there exists in college life any phase which

[81] F.E.M., "Points of View." *Tipyn O'Bob*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (February 1904): 32.

is unnatural or harmful, it should be discussed, criticized, and, if possible, done away with," I.A.L. admitted, nonetheless wondering if it was necessary "that we should give up a spirit that has proved helpful...merely because in a few cases it has degenerated from sense to sentiment?...[D]o not let us mistake the whole custom for what in only a few cases it is—silly and artificial. "[82] I.A.L.'s letter insinuated that the custom of intense friendships between Freshmen and Juniors was natural and helpful, and not really worthy of public concern.

A member of the maligned Freshman class stiffly rebutted D.D.'s claims: "[B]e it said by a member of the class of 1907 that the Freshmen's attitude towards their Juniors is one of real respect and friendship, and is not the artificial and hysterical sentimentality of which they have been accused."[83] This student brings the clinical diagnosis of "hysteria" to the discussion; D.D.'s original essay did not contain it. This may illustrate the fact that readers of "The Length of Enthusiasm" had picked up on the faint, but unmistakable traces of psycho-medical knowledge in the piece. "In the summary arraignment of Junior-Freshman relations in the last issue," another student wrote hotly, "there seems to be an insistence on the evil, perhaps because the good we have always with us. Because half a dozen persons of unstable mental equilibrium make a fetich [sic] of a time-honored college tradition, is there sufficient reason for condemning the tradition as 'unnatural and unwholesome?'"[84] This piece of correspondence goes D.D. one better in the use of psychological jargon, claiming that only students of "unstable mental equilibrium"—classifiable, in Krafft-Ebing's and Ellis's books as "deviants"—who

[82] I.A.L.,"Points of View," *Tipyn O'Bob*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (February 1904): 33.
[83] M.H.A., "Points of View," *Tipyn O'Bob*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (February 1904): 34.
[84] A.M.B., "Points of View," *Tipyn O'Bob*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (February 1904): 34.

"fetishized" (another psychological term common in discussions of women's homo-affectionate friendships) each other were cause for concern and that the vast majority of students could engage in this type of relationship without venturing into the realm of the "evil."

The passionate nature of the letters received by the *Tipyn* in response to "The Length of Enthusiasm" demonstrated that the essay had struck a chord with readers. In both vocabulary and tenor, the responses indicated that readers were familiar with the psychological underpinnings of the charges being brought against their college as well as the power these allegations had to sully the reputation of the school and its students. That the social acceptability of women's colleges remained at risk from intimations that they fostered "unwholesome" relationships between their students throughout the first decade of the twentieth century was documented in a curious editorial from the November 19, 1910 issue of the *New York Times*. "There is woe at Wellesley...because the girls have been deprived of the privilege of walking after nightfall in the Hunnewell Gardens," the editorial began, explaining that, though the students had long enjoyed the privilege of strolling on the nearby estate of Mr. Hunnewell, the owner had recently rescinded his permission. It was extremely unfortunate, the *Times* regretted, that

> Mr. Hunnewell, firm friend of Wellesley as he and his long have been, could not have tolerated a little inconvenience when by so doing he could have prolonged a pretty refutation of the gravest charge that is made against girls' colleges—the charge that they turn the minds of their students away from the normal, natural interests of womankind. For the frequentation of his garden, again according to report, was not by solitary maidens or by maidens walking together. With each, if the tale be true, went a youth, usually from convenient Harvard. That was not abnormal, it was not unnatural—it was the Thing that Should Be. Why interfere? Why post up grumpy notices? Why set people to talking about matters of a purely personal and private sort, though of the very highest public importance?[85]

[85] "Topics of the Times," *New York Times*, November 19, 1910, 10, *APS Online*.

This editorial provided confirmation that the average *Times* reader was assumed to know full well what was indicated by the writer's euphemistic "gravest charge." Further, it posed the "problem" of girls' heteronormativity as a matter of "the very highest public importance," which would seem to imply that the topic was already under extensive discussion. Most interesting, though, is that this editorial suggests that heterosexual courtship should be allowed and encouraged, even if it occurred in a dangerously isolated, unsupervised setting. Most, if not all, women's colleges had set strict parameters for their students' social intercourse with the opposite sex; the *Times* countered that, even if Wellesley women were breaking these rules by strolling, unchaperoned, through quiet gardens with men, they ought not be punished because illicit heterosexual activity was certainly preferable to the commission of "abnormal" or "unnatural" sins with their female colleagues.

The furor at Bryn Mawr over insinuations of "abnormal" attractions between its students, and the acknowledgement in the *New York Times* of the association between women's colleges and sexual "deviancy" are but two examples which imply that most Americans were at least superficially familiar with the criticisms which psychology and sexology had directed towards women's intimate friendships. In spite of this, it was still possible to find positive coverage in the popular press of women's college life. The *New York Times* of October 12, 1912 carried a blurb about a ceremony held at Barnard College in which the junior and freshman classes were united in a "mock wedding," during which two representatives were joined "'in the name of their respective classes,

'till graduation shall you part and then some.'"[86] Considering the ire raised at Bryn Mawr, eight years earlier, over a relatively *informal* union of these two classes, the fact that Barnard students evidenced no concern over the possible negative public interpretation over their blatant aping of the heterosexual marriage ceremony indicates that the criticisms in the popular press of college women's intimate friendships had not made much of an impact on their personal behavior.

It was even possible to find, in 1911, advice to college women which posited that women's colleges did not, in fact, encourage gender transgression, therefore refuting the charge that they might foster concomitant sexual transgressions. LeBaron Russell Briggs insisted in *To College Girls and Other Essays* that

> Few things are more pitiable than a woman's deliberate imitation of a sporting man; but the masculine woman is not the college woman. Just so, a slight athletic swagger in a young woman with a basketball halo does not mean that she will be mannish for life. It subsides, like the puffed cheeks of mumps—rather grotesque while it lasts, but not at all prophetic. College life...should fortify...her power of resisting, and her determination to resist, the contagion of the unwomanly. Exaggerated study may lessen womanly charm; but there is nothing loud or masculine about it. Nor should we judge mental training or anything else by scattered cases of abuse.[87]

Briggs' assertion that women's college themselves were not to blame for the creation of the "masculine"—here understood to signify "sexual deviant"—woman was a surprising departure from the common rhetoric of sexologists and psychologists who claimed that an unhealthy environment could easily corrupt a "normal," heterosexual young woman. Briggs did posit that unwomanliness was catching, which would seemingly bode poorly for the women's college, with its so-called "hothouse"

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[86] "Fraternities Are Reactionary, Useless, and Democracy's Enemy, says Miss Kirchwey of Barnard." *New York Times*, October 20, 1912, 10. *APS Online*.
[87] LeBaron Russell Briggs, *To College Girls and Other Essays* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911).

environment, but also suggested that any "grotesque" phase—he directly referred to masculinity, but could have also be alluding to college women's intimate friendships—in college life was "not prophetic," and that only in a few "scattered cases" was it of any real concern. His comments seem to be drawn on the mid-nineteenth century model of women's lives which suggested that the period in which they had intimate friendships was but a passing phase, and would naturally give way to heterosexuality when the time was right, leaving no lasting romantic attraction toward women lingering in its wake. This relatively tolerant view of women's intimate friendships was becoming increasingly uncommon in the wake of growing popular awareness of Freud's theories, and would be replaced, shortly, by much harsher criticisms which made every women's college student, and her alma mater, a suspect.

1915-1930: The End Times

By 1915, most middle-class Americans with access to the popular press had at least a superficial familiarity with psychology and sexology. Though no other landmark works such as Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* or Freud's *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* appeared, those works, having had enough time to trickle down to the masses, had their key ideas regularly disseminated through reference to them in the popular press. The connections between sexual perversion and crushes and intimate friendships were firmly entrenched, and it was no longer possible for those who wrote about them to claim ignorance of the fact. The flames of panic were fanned by an article published in *Harper's* in 1913 entitled "Your Daughter: What Are Her Friendships?" Penned by a "College Graduate," the piece purported that "one-tenth of the women who [had] crushes [were] 'moral degenerates.'"[88] Therefore, Sherrie Inness aptly concluded, "even the percentage of crushes that were harmless had to be policed because one never knew which composed the 'tainted' one tenth. The concerned mother was warned to scrutinize her daughters' friendships and to watch out for signs of 'crushitis' that could be nipped in the bud if only caught soon enough."[89] The warning echoed the words of sexologists like Havelock Ellis, who suggested that sexual perversion could be spread, like a disease, and leave lasting impressions if not stopped in time.

[88] College Graduate, "Your Daughter: What Are Her Friendships?" *Harper's Bazaar*, October 1913. Quoted in Sherrie Inness, "Mashes, Smashes, Crushes, and Raves: Woman-to-Woman Relationships in Popular Women's College Fiction, 1895-1915." *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring 1994): 63-4.
[89] Ibid., 64.

In 1921, *The North American Review* published a column entitled "Schools and Daughters," in which author Edith Hamilton cautioned parents to examine closely the faculty members at any prospective college for their daughters. "The members of a community made up entirely of women live under artificial conditions. Since this is so, there is additional need of caution to keep the atmosphere wholesome," she advised, adding that "some principals deliberately cater to the sentimentality of girlhood and do not hesitate to retain in their schools women who take advantage of plastic youth to obtain for themselves gifts and attentions that they crave."[90] Hamilton's warning played upon fears of predatory, sexually perverted teachers preying on their virginal, naïve charges; that her piece was addressed explicitly to parents confirms the permeation of Freud's theories on sexuality, in which parents bore the onus of responsibility for protecting their children from anything which might alter their sexual object-choice.

Fictional depictions of college life between 1915 and 1930 were distinctly different from those which had appeared before; intimate friendships between women were referred to dismissively or pejoratively, and several college series which appeared after this date were careful to include, for the benefit of their female protagonists, a set of opposite-sex friends, usually boys who attended a nearby college but were conveniently available for dances and other social functions. Particularly virulent depictions of women's intimate friendships appeared by the end of the 1920s, explicitly connecting them with pathological disorders, but for the most part, the college fiction aimed at young women quietly erased the female homo-affectionate relationship from its formula, replacing it instead with a heterosexual love interest or the drive for a career.

[90] Edith Hamilton, "Schools and Daughters," *The North American Review*, October 1921, 518, *APS Online*.

In *Molly Brown's College Friends*, published in 1921, the main action occurs on the campus of the alma mater of Molly Green (neé Brown), now a faculty wife. Her school chums pay her a visit, and are amazed at the change in collegiate life since their matriculation. Of particular note is their reaction to the notion of same-sex crushes; after observing the strange behavior of Mary Neil, who "had what she termed a mash on Mrs. Green," Molly's best friend Nance suggests that she is jealous of Molly and Nance's friendship. "Absurd! I hate to think of it, Mary!" protests Molly. "It's true all the same. Didn't you know she was crazy about you?" Nance presses. "No, and I don't want to know it. A girl had better be beau-crazy than have these silly cases with other girls. I am going to put a stop to it in some way," Molly says firmly, adding, "We were foolish enough college girls but we were never that foolish. I can't remember anyone in our crowd having these silly mashes."[91]

Molly does not hesitate to draw the comparison between heterosexual and homosexual desire—comparing the "cases with other girls" to beau-craziness—and states unequivocally that excessive sexual desire for men is far preferable to even a non-sexual intimate relationship with another woman. That Molly disavows ever having witnessed these "cases" in her own college days simultaneously posits the "problem" as thoroughly modern, and indicates that the new psychological understanding of "crushes" as inherently sexual renders her unable to compare them to the intimate friendships she surely would have witnessed, if a student at a girls' college in the early twentieth century. It is also likely that popular conception of women's intimate friendships as potentially

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[91] Nell Speed, *Molly Brown's College Friends* (New York: A.L. Burt Co., 1921): 29-30.

sexually aberrant would dissuade former college student from admitting they had had them, lest they cause their present actions to be scrutinized for any lasting taint.

Even in cases where college crushes weren't disavowed completely, they were treated dismissively, as mere insignificant trifles, in stark contrast to the power with which they were imbued in earlier college fiction. One novel, published in the waning days of girls' college fiction, exemplifies this change. In *Beverly Gray, Senior*, two members of the graduating class observe the deference with which they are treated by the freshmen, causing one of them to reminisce:

> "When one has a crush one is in seventh heaven. They are to be envied. I remember, when I was a freshman, I had the most terrible crush on a senior. Oh, I thought everything she did was the personification of grace, goodness, and all the heavenly virtues. I got over it, though, when she completely ignored me. She didn't even know I was in the same world with her, so I finally became conscious that worshiping an idol from afar isn't at all satisfying and same down to earth with a bang."
> "It wasn't very nice of her to completely ignore you," Beverly smiled.
> "It was rather disappointing at times," Leonora admitted indifferently. "Several times I was heartbroken over the injustice of fate, as I called it then. Then she graduated, and I discovered that she really wasn't so great after all."[92]

This desultory summation of the "crush" experience bears little resemblance to the highly-charged relationships pictured in girls' college stories from earlier in the century. Leonora is "indifferent," indicating that any emotional investment she had was simply the result of her immaturity, and thereby ending any further discussion of what lasting effect her devotion to another classmate might have left behind on her psyche.

More damning were the portrayals offered in popular fiction toward the end of the 1920s. *We Sing Diana*, published in 1928, pulled out all the stops in its condemnation both of college women's intimate friendships and the unhealthy environment of the

[92] Clair Blank, *Beverly Gray, Senior* (New York: A.L. Burt Co., 1934).

institutions in which they grew. When Nora encounters two of her classmates, Minna and Gwendolyn, exchanging "[t]he words of lovers—exchanges of devotion, undying devotion" and sees them embracing, she feels ill. More powerful than her physical disgust is her realization that

> [t]hey had been intimate friends since their freshman year, a little too exclusively interested in each other, perhaps, but among the cleverest girls Nora knew. And all the time possibly, this poison. Nora had a sick memory of the fungi she had studied in botany, the rank growths, forms of life springing up in unhealthy places, feeding on rot—slime molds found in damp earth and decaying vegetable manner. Creation wasn't all clean and pure. Nor human relationships.[93]

Nora had herself been in danger of falling into an intimate friendship with her first year roommate, whose intense admiration almost won her over, but "instinct, like the swift revulsion of a young animal sniffing at a poisonous weed, had held her back."[94] Nora insists to herself that, "It wasn't their fault. They hungered for affection….They wanted something which college had not given them…But what—what else?...Would she finally, like Minna and Gwendolyn—in her desperate need to be loved—No, never. But what was she going to do?"[95]

Same-sex intimacy was posited in this passage as a kind of "last resort" for overeducated young women. Later in the novel, Helen, a graduate of Nora's alma mater, emphatically states that women's colleges are "the soil where Sapphism flourishes" because of all the women "bottled up there—brooding for four years—overstimulated mentally—all that feminine atmosphere."[96] Nora denies ever having seen any evidence of that during her time at college, but then recants:

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[93] Wanda Fraiken Neff, *We Sing Diana* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1928): 63.
[94] Ibid., 65.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 148.

"Well—maybe two cases," she admitted.
"You were too innocent to suspect."
"So you question all friendships between women. It's a dangerous point of view."
"I didn't say all. But too often."
Helen was looking for mental sickness everywhere. It was the way of psycho-analysts. Freud—exaggerating one theory. Nora had read enough of him to know.[97]

In addition to this casual acknowledgement of Freud's influence on the common consciousness, another passage underscored the fact that psychological theories had fully permeated American vernacular. It also indicated that students at women's colleges were uncomfortably aware that their intimate friendships were now being viewed with intense suspicion. Returning to college to visit, Nora observes that "[i]n the exchange of undergraduate ideas speech was full of psychological tags...A freshman was greeted her first day with a charge of the Oedipus complex, against which she must defend herself. Intimacies between two girls were watched with keen, distrustful eyes. Among one's classmates, one looked for the bisexual type, the masculine girl searching for a feminine counterpart, and one ridiculed their devotions."[98] This fictional representation of an undergraduate body obsessed with sexology had strong roots in the real world; the 1920s saw a sudden explosion of interest in studying Latin at many colleges, which was directly linked to the popularity of sexological and psychological literature. As one member of Smith College's class of 1924 explained, "'We took Latin so that we could read and translate the best parts of Havelock Ellis.'"[99]

1930's *Dance on the Tortoise* painted a similarly gloomy portrait of an intimate friendship between two young women. The plot revolved around Lydia, a teacher at a

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[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid., 199.
[99] Elaine Kendall, *"Peculiar Institutions": An Informal History of the Seven Sisters Colleges* (New York: Putnam, 1976).

women's college, and her intimate relationship with Helene, a French teacher. Helene and Lydia share a deep bond, which is ruptured first by Helene's romance with a man, and her subsequent death from a botched attempt at terminating the accidental pregnancy which ensued. Lydia fights throughout the book against settling down with her childhood beau, Jimmy, but the all-female environment of the school and the unwanted attentions of Miss Endriham, the school's headmistress, push her into his arms by the book's end. Lydia is simultaneously aware of the perversity of her attraction to Helene—there's nothing to explain why they should be so deeply bonded to one another—and also disdainful, if not wholly contemptuous, of the other unmarried female faculty and many of the (potentially perverted) students. The author could not have made the story's religious parallel much more clear; it is obvious that Helene's "martyrdom" serves to free Lydia to pursue heteronormative happiness.

In spite of the attitude of fiction writers towards college women's intimate friendships after 1910—non-committal and dismissive at best, excoriating at worst—college women themselves still had, and enjoyed, intimate friendships and crushes on each other, and showed no signs that they felt any shame or guilt over them. Nathalie Clothilde Gookin, a member of Bryn Mawr's class of 1920, wrote letters to her parents every day, and in many of them mentioned her developing crush on another student. The very fact that Gookin felt that the topic was appropriate to discuss with her mother and father indicates that she was largely dismissive, if not entirely unaware, of the concern with which crushes were being regarded in the popular press.

On October 30, 1916, Gookin rhapsodized over seeing the hall captain—H.H.—in her dormitory. "I never before in my life had a crush on a girl, but I think I have one on

her. It's queer, for she's not the type of girl one is apt to be wild over. She's very tall and strong, not at all beautiful, though not exactly bad looking. I suppose one is most likely to be crazy about someone who isn't likely ever to take any notice of one. Anyhow, she fascinates me."[100] It is interesting that Gookin referred to a "type of girl" which one would be likely to have a crush on, and suggests that perhaps Gookin was unconsciously questioning why her taste in women did not fall in line with the standards of beauty by which men judged women.

Four days later, she poked fun at her enthusiasm for H.H., admitting, "I think it's very silly to have a crush this way, but it rather amuses me to do so. If I only could really know her some day!"[101] In a letter to her aunt, written two days later, Gookin gushed, "I can't tell you how much I enjoy having this crush. She is fascinating, just because she's not likely ever to notice me. She's very tall, and dark, walks about a mile a minute, with a sort of stride, and is quite unlike any one else. I'm wild to know her. By the way, Miss L. has a violent crush on her too."[102] By mentioning that another student had a crush on the same girl, Gookin subtly reassured her aunt that her feelings weren't unusual; that she felt the need to offer this reassurance indicates that she was at least marginally aware of psychological criticisms being directed at the crush.

"A moment of supreme joy" was how Gookin described receiving a "heavenly smile" and a friendly "Hello" from H.H. "Her smiles are divine, and make her really beautiful," Gookin wrote to her mother, admitting that though "[i]t really would seem as

[100] Nathalie Gookin to Marie Gookin, October 30, 1916, Nathalie Gookin Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.
[101] Nathalie Gookin to Marie Gookin, November 3, 1916, Nathalie Gookin Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.
[102] Nathalie Gookin to Nathalie Kennedy, November 5, 1916, Nathalie Gookin Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

if my acquaintance were progressing…it probably isn't."[103] Gookin's overwhelming enthusiasm for H.H. may have caused some concern to her parents, who were likely well aware of the scrutiny that college women were under. They may even have mentioned this concern to her, because, in a letter to her father she felt it necessary to add, "By the way, it's quite a general thing to have a crush on her. It's not at all unusual." Having reassured her father that all was well, she returned to the topic at hand: "Tell Mother she doesn't know what she's talking about if she thinks it wouldn't be hard to get to know my divinity. I wish to goodness it weren't. I'd do absolutely anything, no matter what, to know her, talk to her, etc."[104]

Possibly to put an end to her daughter's unrequited passion for H.H., Gookin's mother insinuated to another Bryn Mawr student that her daughter would like to meet her "divinity." Gookin was hysterical upon finding out about her mother's intervention, demanding, in a letter to her aunt, "But tell me, tell me, WHAT did Mother write to K.B.? How could she hint that I want to know H.H. obscurely enough not to say too much, & broadly enough to have any effect? What, oh! what did she say? What did Mother write? I'll pray that it may be effective, for of all things I most desire that." Then, stopping to temper her enthusiasm, Gookin coolly reminded her aunt, "As I said, it is not unusual for girls to be crazy about her. I wonder why it struck me, for I've never had such a crush before, never. Anyway, we're not sloppy & mushy about it. I honestly & truly

[103] Nathalie Gookin to Marie Gookin, November 19, 1916. Nathalie Gookin Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.
[104] Nathalie Gookin to Frederick Gookin, November 18, 1916. Nathalie Gookin Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

admire her, & that's why I want to know her."[105] Gookin distanced herself from the "sloppy & mushy" type of crush which she apparently felt deserved the scorn with which it was treated by outside observers, and again offered reassurance to her family that her behavior was not at all abnormal.

Perhaps wary of any further unrequested intervention from her family, Gookin's letters home after this date only infrequently mentioned her crushes. Instead, her diary became her outlet for musings about her crush. On the seventeenth of November, having been the lucky recipient of another friendly acknowledgement from her idol, Gookin wrote, "After that smile I dreamed lovely dreams about H.M.H. all night."[106] The next day, she recounted how she and her friends planned their routes around campus to maximize their encounters with H.H.: "We do everything…simply to see her. How I adore her! I know I could love her![107] And, finally, just before winter recess, and without any parental interference, Gookin came face-to-face, or, rather, cheek-to-cheek, with her "divinity." She exuberantly recounted how H.H. was present at a school dance, "[a]nd I danced with her! When I saw 'H.H. '17' written on my program I nearly died for joy. I'm too happy now to say a rational word, so I shall stop writing. It was glorious to touch her, talk to her, oh! she is nice."[108] Her uncharacteristically short entry about such a cataclysmic event signals that Gookin was literally "struck dumb" by emotion after

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[105] Nathalie Gookin to Nathalie Kennedy, November 21, 1916, Nathalie Gookin Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.
[106] Diary of Nathalie Gookin, November 17, 1916, Nathalie Gookin Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.
[107] Diary of Nathalie Gookin, November 18, 1916, Nathalie Gookin Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.
[108] Diary of Nathalie Gookin, December 15, 1916, Nathalie Gookin Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

having been granted access to the girl she adored. This passionate reaction does not tally with the dismissive fictional treatments crushes received during and after this time.

After the winter break, Gookin's diary entries mention H.H. infrequently, and on May fifth of her freshman year, she writes, "I think it's proper to make little confessions in my diary, so I'll do it. This one is that my crush on H.H. has faded (some time ago), & I'm no longer thrilled about her, though I like her very much indeed. But (here's the real confession) I'm now crazy about V.K. It has been growing on me ever since I saw her as Beau Brummel in the Junior play...she's not pretty, but very sweet looking."[109] Gookin's decision to phrase this admission as a "confession" may indicate that she felt slightly guilty about her disloyalty to her first object of affection, or possibly that she was slightly troubled by her propensity to develop crushes on other students; in any event, Gookin's crush on V.K. received little coverage in the diaries written during her remaining years at Bryn Mawr, and, similarly, virtually no mention in letters home. Whether her homo-affectionate relationships were supplanted by heterosexual ones is unclear, but Gookin never did marry. It is likely that critics of women's colleges in the 1920s and 1930s would have blamed this "failure" on her attendance at Bryn Mawr and its willingness to allow its students to revel in infatuations and intimacy with other women.

While Gookin was candid with her parents and friends about her crushes, other college women from the same era were well aware that their crushes might be read as psychologically suspect. A member of Bryn Mawr College's class of 1919 received a note from L.T., an incoming freshman, introducing herself and insinuating that she was ready to pledge devotion to her. "Please don't think that I have a crush on you because I

[109] Diary of Nathalie Gookin, May 5, 1917. Nathalie Gookin Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

detest the darn things, I have had them but not for a year or two. You don't mind if I am rather fond of you do you?" Later in the letter, L.T. emphatically instructed Thurman not to show the note to anyone.[110] L.T.'s construction of the crush as a recurring disease which had struck her before, coupled with her pathetic protestations that she didn't have a crush, and was only "rather fond" of the letter's recipient, demonstrates both that L.T. was familiar with medicalized interpretations of women's homo-affectionate relationships and that she sought to ensure that her feelings of "fondness" were not understood to have any sexual connotation.

It is interesting, in light of the suspicion of the atmosphere of women's colleges most of the major institutions had no rule in their handbooks explicitly forbidding same-sex crushes or intimate friendships—all of them did, however, have rules regulating interactions with men. There are two likely reasons for this omission: first, peer censure was likely thought to be sufficiently powerful to quell any unseemly displays of affection between classmates; second, to inscribe in one's rulebook an edict against crushes would be to acknowledge their presence and their power—something the beleaguered women's colleges would have had little interest in doing. The strongest administrative statement uncovered in research for this project came from the 1931-32 edition of the student handbook at New Jersey College for Women (now Douglass College, part of Rutgers University), which contained the stern reminder that "[c]ollege is the opportunity to find yourself. If you develop a crush, it will probably be the only thing you develop."[111] However, an 1931 graduate of the New Jersey College for Women remembered, in an

[110] L.T. to Mary Thurman, undated. Mary Thurman Papers, Special Collections, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.
[111] *Red Book*. New Brunswick: New Jersey College for Women, 1931. Special Collections, Rutgers University.

oral interview given in 1997, that "[w]e had Halloween dances often just with the girls, to tell you the truth. I hadn't realized how strange that was until, you know, more recently." The interviewer asked, "So you did dance with one another? It wasn't dancing with men?" "Yes," the alumna responded, "now you wouldn't think of it, would you?"[112] That the alumna was not aware that any homosexual connotation would be put on all-girl dances until much later in life indicates that college women of the late 1920s and early 1930s were able to disregard the warnings of sexologists and psychologists, and carried on the tacit traditions of women's colleges—developing crushes, devoting themselves to intimate friendships—in spite of the storm swirling around them.

And the storm did continue to swirl. An issue of *Forum* magazine from 1929 carried the fatuously-titled essay, "Why Educate WOMEN?" by W. Beran Wolfe. Although his argument ended up being supportive of women's education, it was acceptable to him only within the parameters of a coeducational college. He reserved his harshest criticism for homosocial institutions, alleging that "[o]nly the very well-adjusted girl can go through the women's college unscathed by the unnatural segregation of work and interests. The maladjusted girl becomes more discouraged, more helpless, more neurotic."[113] Wolfe proceeded to claim that women's colleges produced three distinct types of graduate: the sexless spinster, who usually ended up as a teacher or social worker, "project[ing] her social discouragement to the next generation;" the man-hungry hussy, who overcompensated for the "abnormal conditions of segregation" of her schooldays; and the weak, unstable woman who, having missed the chance to learn

[112] Edna Newby, Interview with Kurt Pichler and Barbara Tomblin, February 21, 1997, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II. Special Collections, Rutgers University.
[113] W. Beran Wolfe, "Why Educate WOMEN?" *Forum*, March 1929, 165. *APS Online*.

"social and sexual adjustment during the most significant years of [her] development," ended up "swell[ing] the growing number of neurotic women who fill the divorce courts and mental sanitaria." Wolfe alluded to a fourth type, but apologetically declined to provide much detail, explaining that "[i]n a magazine intended for the general reader it would not be fitting to discuss some of the more serious and shocking types of maladjustment which the women's colleges tend to foster...[E]ducators generally seem to be unaware of them, or...regard them as special cases. I only wish this were true, but I am convinced...they spell out a terrific indictment of women's colleges."[114] More than half a century after J.G. Holland prudishly declined to discuss the specific dangers of women's colleges, fearing that they would "fill the public mind with horror if they were publicly known," W. Beran Wolfe invoked the same nameless terrors to cast aspersions on the same target.

Henry R. Carey also referred to the "maladjustments" encouraged by women's colleges in his 1929 article "Career or Maternity?: The Dilemma of the College Girl." Carey, approaching the matter from a eugenic standpoint, expounded on the problematic birth- and marriage rates of women's college graduates, suggesting that it was the result of the "philosophical and pedagogical climate in which impressionable girls, just entering upon the romantic and marriageable age, suddenly find themselves." Carey railed against the "gospel of personal achievement based on the male model" with which, he claimed, women's colleges indoctrinated their students. He bemoaned the fact that college women were being encouraged to achieve, rather than to be content with helping their husbands and families do so, and was dumbfounded by the new, more demanding, academic rules

[114] Ibid.

at Radcliffe which "[made] it even more impossible for a girl to keep up her more romantic social life!" [115]

Carey drew much of his support from an article published in a 1927 issue of *The Outlook*, entitled "The Harm My Education Did Me." Allegedly written by a graduate of a nameless women's college, the piece roundly condemned the "sex-antagonism" with which the college atmosphere was permeated and laid the blame for declining birth rates in the U.S squarely at their feet. "Here is a devastating picture of the effect that is possible when college women remain isolated and celibate too long, forgetting at their peril that the sexes are complementary." "Abnormal love life" and "warped nature[s]" could all-too-easily result, claimed one source cited in Carey's article, a woman who blamed her own aversion to marriage on the "ardent feminist attitude of the older unmarried woman who influenced me during my college life."[116] Carey's essay concurred with the recommendations made eight years earlier by Edith Hamilton, who warned parents to stave off any untoward influences by scrutinizing the characters of the faculty and staff at their daughters' colleges, and hearkened to the Freudian notion that the pressures of a homosocial environment in young adulthood could result in warped sexual object-choice in later life.

The scare tactics employed in both Carey's and Wolfe's essays were not new inventions, created in a knee-jerk reaction to the unparalleled freedom enjoyed by young women in the 1920s; they had been used by authors as early as 1873 to combat the growing independence of women during that time. The latter-day practitioners of this

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[115] Henry R. Carey, "Career or Maternity? The Dilemma of the College Girl," *The North American Review*, December 1929, 737. *APS Online*.
[116] Ibid.

specious reasoning, however, had a powerful ally in the psychological and sexological establishment, which lent their insinuations more credence and more power to terrify. The combined forces were able, by the end of the 1930s, to effectively squelch any positive representation of women's intimate friendships in the popular press, and, although some college women continued to pursue these relationships, they faced the disapproval of a public besotted with psychology and armed with the ammunition to label them "abnormal"—and therefore threatening to true womanhood and the future of the country.

CONCLUSION

The charges brought against women's colleges—that they encouraged women to turn against men, that they fostered unnatural relationships between their students, and that they would ultimately have to bear the weight of responsibility for an eventual "race suicide"—increased significantly in their vitriol during the first decades of the twentieth century. This occurred from the confluence of two sociological phenomena: the assimilation of Freudian and sexological views by the American public, and a widespread backlash against women's increasing power and independence. Having received the vote in 1920, American women were also experiencing a heretofore unknown period of freedom in choosing their lives' paths; the "bachelor girl" was not an uncommon member of society, and young women, even those of means, commonly took jobs and lived in a self-supporting manner during this time. Conservative insecurities about the perpetuation of the Anglo-Saxon race were projected onto these newly "liberated" women, and the institutions that critics said produced them.

While the rhetorical device of conflating women's independence with sexual "abnormality" was not invented in the 1920s, the burgeoning of sexology and psychology lent this ploy a new power. That students would choose to attend a women's college, after the boom in co-educational institutions which took place in the late 1910s, already made them suspect in the eyes of the psychological fields and they were scrutinized for signs that the homosocial environment had negatively affected their sexual "object-choice." Women's intimate friendships, a fixture of most of these schools, were just the most visible manifestation of the "morbid attraction" that critics said the institutions

fostered, and while college women did continue to engage in them after Freud's and Ellis' thoughts had been diffused in the public press, there are few primary sources from the 1920s which bear mention of them. This indicates that the new emphasis on a fully heterosexualized collegiate culture may have put a damper on relationships between college women, or perhaps that the students had finally heeded the warnings of the "experts," and, rather than risk being suspected as "abnormal," gave them up. Whichever their motive, the students at women's colleges in the 1920s experienced the closing of a chapter of history which had been positive, productive, and profitable for many of them; their hand had been forced by an American culture increasingly voluble and curious about sex and sexual aberrations. By the end of the 1920s, the vituperative triumvirate of eugenicists, psychologists, and alarmists had triumphed in a battle which had begun decades earlier, vanquishing, through insinuations and innuendo, one of its final foes: the intimate friendships of young women.

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