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Dead Before Coed?: Perceptions of Women's Colleges in Male Dominated Society

Zoe Fawcett

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DEAD BEFORE COED?: PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S COLLEGES IN MALE
DOMINATED SOCIETY

by

ZOE ELIZABETH RIDDLE FAWCETT

Under the Direction of Wendy Simonds, PhD.

ABSTRACT

The question of the necessity of women's colleges has been posed by a variety of online news sources. Headlines reading, "Are Women's Colleges Outdated?" and "Why Women's Colleges Are Still Relevant" are sprinkled throughout the webpages of news conglomerates like Forbes, The Huffington Post, and Jezebel. I argue that the belief in a post-sexist society and the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity renders the necessity of women's educational institutions invisible. Through an anti-racist feminist lens with a focus on the hegemonic practices of our patriarchal society, I shed light on how women's colleges are currently positioned in the United States. I conducted a discourse analysis on 40 articles about U.S. women's colleges in the corporate press from 1970 to 2015. Data analysis reveals that women's colleges are depicted in

the media as struggling for survival in our society, regardless of studies that document their strengths. They have faced and continue to face image issues, financial issues, and the reinforcement of heteronormativity throughout their history. These issues play a major role in how the media depicts them.

INDEX WORDS: Women's colleges, Education, Hegemonic Masculinity

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ZOE ELIZABETH RIDDLE FAWCETT

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

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2015

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2015

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ZOE ELIZABETH RIDDLE FAWCETT

Committee Chair: Wendy Simonds

Committee: Adia Harvey Wingfield

Anthony Ryan Hatch

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

December 2015

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Mary Ellen Riddle. You are my shining star.
Thank you for all your love and support.

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Thank you, to my wonderful committee. You made me a better scholar. You inspire me to continue to become a better scholar. I am honored to have had you, Wendy, Tony, and Adia, and your brilliant minds, as a part of my committee. Also thank you to Elroi Windsor, Terry Smith, and Krista McQueeney for your inspiration and support during my undergraduate career. I wouldn't be where I am if it wasn't for you all.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The question of the necessity of women's colleges has been posed by a variety of online news sources recently; headlines like, "Are Women's Colleges Outdated?" and "Why Women's Colleges Are Still Relevant" are sprinkled throughout the webpages of news conglomerates like Forbes, The Huffington Post, and Jezebel (Brown 2009, Matlack 2011, North 2010). This conversation expresses some dissidence over the significance of institutions focusing on the separate education of women. Skeptics say things like, "I assumed they went to women's colleges largely because they couldn't get into the numerous elite coed schools. Why go to Smith if you could go to Amherst?" (Matlack 2011). Women's colleges have experienced persistent financial struggles and their students face stereotypical representations as hippies or lesbians (Matlack 2011, Turner 2014, and Anderson and Svrluga 2015). The scholarly research on women's colleges seems deeply rooted in sexist expectations of women (Spencer 2013, Willson 2012, and Hoffnung 2011). Meanwhile, alumna say they became leaders as a result of the challenging environment at their women's colleges (Brown 2009, North 2010).

In this thesis, I ask how patriarchy shapes the self-representation and media portrayals of women's colleges. According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity is a set of practices that allow the subordination of women to persist (Connell 2005). Through Connell and other applications of the notion of hegemonic masculinity, I examine whether the number and efficacy of women's colleges are declining at the hands of those wishing to keep women subordinate, as well as the role, if any, that women's colleges themselves play in that subordination (2005, Chen 1999, Demetriou 2001). As Florence Howe writes in her book *Myths of Coeducation*:

Our education is chiefly to blame [for our second-class status], but of course after one has said that, one must add at once that education reflects the values of our society and is to a major

extent controlled by those values... The purpose of those responsible for the education of women has been to perpetuate their subordinate status. (1984:19-20.)

Utilizing an anti-racist feminist lens with a focus on hegemonic masculinity, I hope to shed light on how women's colleges are represented and are presenting themselves in the United States through a discourse analysis of 40 recent news articles about women's colleges.

1.1 Research Questions

In my thesis, I consider a variety of questions: (1) How have women's colleges been portrayed by the mass media in the past 40 years? (2) How do women's colleges choose to portray themselves in articles? (3) What do those portrayals say about the representation of women's colleges in society? (4) Do these institutions reinforce our male dominated society, or are they counter-hegemonic?

I have chosen to research the role of the women's college not just because I had the privilege to attend one myself, but because there is a gap in empirical research on the topic. I believe this gap is problematic because it provides us with neither a clear nor well-rounded picture of the nature of the women's college in U.S. society today. It is critical to point out that the number of women's colleges in the United States has declined tremendously in the past 40 years, from 233 in 1960 to 90 in 1986, and to only 44 today. I believe that this decrease illustrates a phenomenon in need of study (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 2006 and Women's College Coalition 2014). In their book on the history of women's colleges, Miller-Bernal and Poulson state, "Women's colleges are an endangered species" (2006). My research will expand upon the limited existing research on women's colleges.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Originally coined by Antonio Gramsci, the concept of hegemony indicates the presence and maintenance of domination by one social group over another. The dominant group is considered the ruling class, with the power to manipulate the culture of society so as to reinforce and perpetuate their ideologies, and thus consolidate their reign (1971). Drawing on this concept, Connell defines *hegemonic masculinity* as a set of practices that promotes the dominant social position of men while also reinforcing the subordinate position of women, as well as some subordinated masculinities as brought forth by Chen and revised by Connell later (1999 and 2005). I hypothesize that the presence of women's colleges is intended to be counter-hegemonic, and thus their struggle to stay relevant, i.e. financially stable and open to women, is a result of dominant society's current wish to keep women subordinate.

Within this theoretical framework, I inquire whether or not women's colleges are presenting themselves in such a way that challenges hegemony and reinforces counterhegemonic ideals, or if they are actually reinforcing hegemonic ideologies, whether by falling short in their challenges or by unintentionally perpetuating patriarchy regardless of their efforts. As Chandra Mohanty states:

The academy has always been the site of feminist struggle. It is that contradictory place where knowledges are colonized but also contested—a place that engenders student mobilizations and progressive movements of various kinds. It is one of the few remaining spaces in a rapidly privatized world that offers some semblance of a public arena for dialogue, engagement, and visioning of democracy and justice. (2006:170.)

Are women's colleges sites of feminist struggle? Do women's colleges offer an arena for envisioning democracy and justice and/or do they enact democracy and justice? Or do they maintain an emphasized femininity, in keeping with hegemonic masculinity, that only pretends to challenge the patriarchy? (Schippers 2007).

1.3 Literature Review

Academia and the media are social institutions that generate and reproduce hegemonic power generally and hegemonic masculinity in particular. In this literature review, I offer a critical survey of the representation of women's colleges in both scholarly and non-scholarly articles. The ways in which these particular educational institutions are studied within academia and depicted in the media begin to give us an idea of the hegemonic ideologies being perpetuated about women's colleges. These existing portrayals illustrate the need for further study of the topic and to question the relevance of women's colleges in the struggle against patriarchy.

1.3.1 Women's Colleges: A Brief Introduction

Today, women's colleges are often represented to the general public as feminist institutions. Although their origins are understood to be a result of a lack of educational opportunities for women, they have not always been the pro-women's empowerment institutions of today. Many women's institutions began as seminaries and/or "finishing schools" in which women were trained to be ladies and good wives. Similarly, outside the United States, many women's colleges in Japan were originally seen as a means to ensure strict family values for women. They were adapted in the 1990s to serve a government initiative to increase women's participation in STEM fields. Once this goal was achieved, though, these Japanese colleges lost public and government support (Kodate 2010).

Because feminine domesticity was espoused by women's colleges in the nineteenth century, many women's rights activists of that time favored the opportunity to attend coeducational institutions. Women's colleges of the time were considered less academically rigorous by most because they did not offer the same education as men's universities (Miller-

Bernal 2006). Women's colleges felt the pressure and tried to improve their images by discarding "finishing" aspects and only offering actual collegiate level academics in the late nineteenth century. They still lost a lot of support when prestigious universities opened their doors to women (Miller-Bernal 2006). In the late nineteenth century a new form of women's education emerged: the coordinate college (Miller-Bernal 2006). These institutions were basically "sister" schools to men's institutions. They allowed for the education of women, under a "separate but equal" ideology. This ideology is still operating today. For example, Salem College in Winston-Salem, NC offers dual enrollment at Wake Forest University and Barnard in New York City also offers enrollment at Columbia University. Barnard began as a coordinate college to Columbia University.

Women's education faced a backlash in the early twentieth century when arguments that educated women would be less likely to get married and have children became more salient in public discourse (Miller-Bernal 2006). As I will illustrate in the next section, this belief persists today. Those with the power to control public discourse allowed for Freud's ideologies to be more visible at this time, resulting in further scrutiny of the relationships between women at women's colleges (Miller-Bernal 2006 and Freud 1905). Again, as I will illustrate later, the media continue to perpetuate the notion that women's colleges foster "lesbianism" (Turner 2014 and Matlack 2011). These views of women's colleges during that time period very much affected their ability to grow and expand due to homonegativity, or negative attitudes or beliefs about LGBTQ individuals, present in dominant society; I think this continues to be the case for them today.

While the enrollment of women in higher education increased throughout the twentieth century, enrollment at women's colleges has declined. Miller-Bernal states that, "Even as early

as 1920, more than four-fifths of women attended coeducational colleges and universities. By the mid-1950s, nine of ten women attending institutions of higher education were enrolled in coeducational institutions” (2006:6-7). In the 60s, during a time of economic hardship, many men’s institutions saw admitting women as an opportunity to help the institutions financially. Today, this has been a major factor in women’s colleges deciding to admit men to their programs. Although more and more women were beginning to attend formerly all men’s institutions, this did not mean those campuses were warm towards women. Hall and Sandler’s well-cited piece, “The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?” illustrates how allowing women to attend these institutions does not indicate that they are treated equally (1982). Many women’s institutions have faced declining enrollment and thus financial hardships, and have had to close; only 3-4% of women today even consider attending a women’s college (Miller-Bernal 2006). In her section on “Women’s Colleges Today,” Miller-Bernal states that neither the Women’s College Coalition, which was established in 1972 to make known the benefits of these institutions, “nor...the articles that appear in the popular press about women students’ attachment to and defense of their women’s colleges” have helped increase enrollment at these institutions (2006:11).

Although research on women’s colleges is sparse, there has been much more written on women’s education in general. In *Myths of Coeducation* (1984), Howe discusses women’s education and the development of women’s studies programs extensively. Howe’s work helps provide some scholarship for comparison. As mentioned previously, the sentiment among many feminists was that there was a preference to attend coeducational institutions once they opened their doors to women (Miller-Bernal 2006). In the late sixties and early seventies women’s studies courses and programs became more prevalent (Howe 1984). Howe states:

The central idea of women's studies is sex bias and the status of women...Implicit or explicit in women's studies courses is a critical vision of the social subordination of women. At the very least, teachers theorize that when women (and men) become conscious of sex bias, they will be motivated to plan means of appropriate social change." (1984:89.)

Her descriptions of women's studies programs and their intended function is comparable to my own perception of the purpose of most of today's women's colleges. It seems as though women's studies filled a void during a period in which many feminists found women's colleges as inadequate forms of education. As Howe states, "schools reflect the society they serve" and these women's studies programs were still subject to the male-centered bureaucracy of the institutions in which they were housed (1984: 67). In an essay originally published in 1974, she writes:

Ten years later, women's colleges are becoming the kinds of institutions I suggested was possible. By 1980, Wheaton had a feminist president, and provost, and was embarked on an ambitious, federally funded three-year project to transform the male centered curriculum into a coeducational one. (1984 [1974]:125.)

This statement indicates a change in the academics and rigor at women's colleges since formerly men-only institutions opened their doors to women. Howe feels that oppressed groups needed, "a piece of 'liberated territory'- and the space and time with which to plan for the future" and that separation can be seen as a "primary step toward social change" (1984:101). In my view, Howe's statement of support for women's studies programs also applies to women's colleges.

1.3.2 Women's Colleges in Academia

Although studies illustrate the numerous positive aspects of women's colleges (Astin 1977 and 1993, Smith 1990, Smith et al 1995, Kim and Alvarez 1997, and Harwarth 1999), most of this research was published between 1990 and 2000. Many women's colleges have closed since these studies were published. Kim and Alvarez discuss a decrease in the number of

women's colleges and a decrease in enrollment in women's colleges (1997). When their work was published in 1997, 84 women's colleges were in operation (Kim and Alvarez 1997). The most recent list of women's colleges available indicates that number has dropped to a staggering 44 (or to 47) depending on the source (Calefati 2009, Young and Hobson 2013, Women's College Coalition 2014). Because so many women-only institutions have closed since much of the research on them has been done, further analysis of their position in society is necessary.

Kinzie, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach, and Kuh (2007) draw on Harwarth (1999) and assert that in the research that does exist on women's colleges, "there was a lack of diversity in the quantitative data available to fairly judge the efficacy of women's colleges and [that Harwarth] called for additional studies that used new databases" (147). They go on to say that many of the prominent studies on women's colleges (Astin 1977 and 1993, Smith 1990, Smith et al 1995, and Kim and Alvarez 1995) all use UCLA's Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey and College Student Survey and that further research generating new data sources is necessary (Kinzie et al 2007). Kinzie et al (2007) use the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) for their research on women's institutions. They use this data set to compare the experiences of women at coeducational schools and women's colleges (Kinzie et al 2007). Although the sample includes 4,676 women at 26 women's colleges (compared to 37,436 women from 264 coeducational institutions), neither of the two existing historically Black colleges serving women in the U.S., Spelman College and Bennett College, were included in the study (Kinzie et al 2007:149). They state that their results are consistent with previous research on women's colleges, such that, "women at women's colleges engage more frequently in effective educational practices at levels that exceed those of their counterparts at coeducational institutions"(Kinzie et al 2007:159). Also consistent with previous research is that women's

colleges are challenging academically; that they affect the lives of women inside and outside the classroom; and that these advantages are affected by a greater number of female mentors at these institutions (Kenzie et al 2007). Although their results support their endorsement of women's colleges, they also purport that, "what it is that women's colleges do that seems to work so well, the programs, policies, and practices that effectively engage women at women's colleges warrant further examination" (Kenzie et al 2007:162). Similarly, Kim and Alvarez (1995) write that future studies on women's colleges should examine "ways of assessing institutional effectiveness by examining whether college mission, administrative structure, curricular emphasis, climate, as well as values of faculty and of students are different at women-only and coeducational institutions" (660). This is a reminder that such studies do not currently exist and that more research on women's colleges is necessary.

1.3.3 Problematizing research on same sex schools

The topic of single-sex education has been debated more publicly since changes in interpretations of Title IX regulations in 2006. This policy change allows for single-sex education if there is evidence that it leads to better educational outcomes for the students (Halpern et al 2011). Much of the debate concerns single-sex education in secondary school rather than college. The article, "The Pseudoscience of Single-Sex Schooling," denounces single-sex secondary schooling and argues that, "Novelty-based enthusiasm, sample bias, and anecdotes account for much of the glowing characterization of SS education in the media" (Halpern et al 2011:1706). Halpern argues that the research being used as evidence in favor of separate schooling for boys and girls is problematic in that it focuses on brain differences between boys and girls that supposedly affect their learning styles. Halpern explains that such evidence is decidedly "pseudoscience" by arguing that evidence from brain research on how boys and girls

learn has been misconstrued: the differences that neuroscientists have found between male and female brains have nothing to do with how they learn. They further argue that separating boys and girls in an attempt to combat sexism actually reinforces it by leading students to believe that their separation implies they are different and therefore unequal (Halpern et al 2011). Another study on single-sex schooling found similar results: by separating boys and girls, gender stereotypes were only further reinforced among the children (Goodkind et al 2013). Goodkind, Schelbe, Joseph, Beers, and Pinsky aim to discover whether or not single-sex secondary education was a plausible means of improving educational experiences of low-income students of color, as advocates of single-sex education assert (2013, Hubbard and Datnow 2005, and Klein 2012). They posit that the main rationales put forth by advocates are: to remove harassment and distraction from the other sex[sic]; to address the supposed different learning styles of boys and girls; and to account for educational inequalities experienced due to the low-income status of these students and schools (Goodkind et al 2013).

Research like this is deeply problematic because it perpetuates stereotypical notions of hypersexuality attributed to people of color. Goodkind states that advocates of single-sex education like Hubbard and Datnow (2005) and Klein (2012) saw it as a specific tactic to help low-income students of color because they felt that the students were more focused on socializing with the “opposite sex.” Viewing single-sex education as a means to improve the educational outcomes of students of color implies that students of color have a greater lack of control over their sexual behavior than white students. It also implies that the sexuality of students of color needs to be controlled more than that of white students. That ideology conflates any “failure” of single-sex education with a lack of financial stability that would be necessary for positive educational outcomes (Goodkind et al 2013).

These types of studies do not provide positive evidence of single-sex schooling in secondary school. These particular instances of single-sex secondary schooling should not be determining factors in how women's *colleges* are viewed. Those promoting single-sex secondary schooling argue that their goal is to combat sexism. I feel their methods are flawed. They do not seem to be trying to combat sexism further after the students have been separated. In other words, once the students are in separate classrooms, gender stereotypes are instead being reinforced because teachers do not appear to be teaching a critical understanding of gender and sex-based power dynamics in society in tandem. They seem to be expecting the mere separation of boys and girls to solve the problem. By providing evidence that single-sex secondary education perpetuates gender stereotypes rather than combating them (whether or not this is true), researchers make it more difficult for supporters of women's colleges, because who's to say that single-sex higher education is not doing the same thing?

Based on my own experience and my examination of the data, I bring this analysis into the discussion because it illustrates a difference in praxis between the above approach to single-sex secondary schooling and the approach that women's colleges generally take when it comes to the education of girls and women. In the above instances of single-sex secondary schooling the separation of boys and girls is seen as the solution. At women's colleges, fostering an environment where women can be empowered and encouraged through education is generally the mission. It is not merely the separation from boys or men but the creation of a space for women to be educated in a way that is critical of our sexist society. I think single-sex secondary education in those cases could be more successful at combatting sexism. I think the debates about single-sex secondary schooling are necessary to the discussion of women's colleges, but

that the institutions should not be conflated because women's colleges generally do not perpetuate sexism like single-sex secondary education reportedly did in the above cases.

As Halpern et al (2011) alludes, public opinion does not necessarily reflect the evidence that exists from academic research. I believe Halpern's research illustrates the divide between academic discourse and lay discourse and that this divide contributes to differing opinions on women's colleges among some scholarly and non-scholarly works. One example that may serve to combat that divide is research by Hardwick-Day, a "higher education enrollment management consulting firm" (Hardwick-Day 2014) enlisted to perform research by the Women's College Coalition that aims to, "collect, interpret, and disseminate – on an ongoing basis –relevant and irrefutable data to make the case for the distinctive characteristics and effectiveness of a women's college education" (2008:1). This study is based on previous scholarly research on women's colleges and delineates positive aspects of women's colleges in a way that is arguably easier to understand for those outside academia. The research of the Women's College Coalition is currently ongoing. Outlined findings from this research are available on the Women's College Coalition website and indicate:

Frequent, extensive formal and informal interaction between faculty and students, a strong community and peer interactions both inside and outside the classroom, a challenging, active classroom environment, participation in such intensive learning experiences as international study, internships, faculty-directed research and independent study, [and] involvement and leadership in extracurricular activities. (Hardwick-Day 2008:1.)

In research specific to women's colleges, a variety of themes within the research reinforce stereotypical gender roles for women or seem to attempt to undermine the significance of women's colleges. The following three articles exemplify these themes: "Social, behavioral, and sleep characteristics associated with depression symptoms among undergraduate students at a women's college: a cross-sectional depression survey, 2012" (Wilson et al 2014), "Career and

Family Outcomes for Women Graduates of Single-Sex Versus Coed Colleges” (Hoffnung 2011), and “Only Girls Who Want Fat Legs Take the Elevator’: Body Image in Single-Sex and Mixed-Sex Colleges” (Spencer et al 2013).

Wilson et al. discusses depression in students at a women’s college (2014). They state that the point of their research is to compare the prevalence of depression at women’s colleges with coeducational institutions (Wilson et al. 2014). They cite research that asserts that women attending women’s colleges have been found to have greater academic involvement and higher satisfaction with college experience, but lower satisfaction regarding social life than women attending coeducational schools (Wilson et al. 2014). This in turn compelled these researchers to try and discern whether or not this impacted depression rates. In conclusion, they state that depression rates of women at coeducational institutions and women’s institutions did not differ (Wilson et al 2014).

In the article regarding marriage and family outcomes, Hoffnung concludes that finding no significant difference reflects positive developments. They argued this was a result of prestigious U.S. institutions becoming coed (2011). Hoffnung argues that many of these institutions have women’s studies programs with few to no men and that this is equivalent to women having a single-sex college experience (2011). The author lauds coed schools for supposedly doing what so many women’s colleges actually make it their mission to do.

In the article on body image, the researchers hypothesize that women at single-sex colleges would be more likely to endorse "thinner body ideals" and more "self-objectification" than female students at mixed-sex colleges because of constantly being surrounded by other women with whom to compare themselves (Spencer et al 2013: 469). They cite various hallway conversations among students at a women's college overheard by the first author, revealing an

apparent fixation on body weight and image (Spencer et al 2013). In turn, they posit that such conversations may demonstrate that women at women's colleges are more likely to have greater issues with body image. They state, "Although similar conversations may be taking place at various colleges and universities, we propose that there is something distinct about the environment of a women's college that may leave young female students particularly vulnerable to body concerns" (Spencer et al 2013:469). The researchers find this is not the case at all and that they were completely wrong in their initial assumptions. They find that women at coeducational institutions were more likely to endorse thinner ideals and that women at women's colleges were more likely to endorse larger body ideals (Spencer et al 2013). More research on the topic of single-sex education needs to continue to take place, I simply find the assumptions going into the research problematic. They reinforce the notion that spaces highly populated by only women are full of drama, cattiness and self-deprecation.

The position of the researchers represented by these articles is affected by the structures in place that reinforce hegemonic masculinity in our society. Even though they find either no difference between women's colleges and coed schools, or they unexpectedly find evidence of positive aspects of women's colleges, it is the preconceived notions going into it that I take issue with. It seems the authors assume, when designing their research, that because these institutions are all women, that students must be more depressed or more self-objectifying than "typical" women students at coeducational institutions, or that the institutions threaten the institutions of marriage and family. I do not think studying differences between depression rates, body image, or career and family outcomes is inherently bad, but such research reinforces hegemonic ideas about women.

1.3.4 Financial Viability and Stereotypes Associated With Women's Colleges

In *Challenged by Coeducation*, Miller-Bernal outlines four major ways that women's colleges have typically responded to the rise in coeducation. The four "options" for struggling women's colleges were/are to: (1) admit men, (2) develop relationships with nearby coeducational schools, (3) develop other programs to compensate for insufficient revenues, i.e. part-time or evening classes, and (4) to close or merge with another institution (Miller-Bernal 2006:11). In *Women's Colleges in the United States: History, Issues, and Challenges*, Harwarth, DeBra, and Maline assert that after many previously all-male institutions began allowing women to enroll, many women's colleges either also went coeducational or were forced to close due to financial difficulties (1997). They go on to state that other women's institutions instead, "reaffirmed their mission, believing that it was important to continue to offer an all-female educational environment for women" (Harwarth, DeBra, and Maline 1997:2). One specific example of an institution changing its mission would be Peace College's 2011 decision to become William Peace University and to admit men. Peace College administrators articulated that it was not financially viable to remain a women-only institution, and that in order to maintain the school they must make it attractive to men as well. Almost immediately after Peace's announcement, an email from nearby women's institution, Salem College, went out to students and alumna reiterating that it would not be going down that path. I believe this was a measure taken by administrators at Salem in hopes of preventing possible unrest among its students as well (Fawcett 2011).

An episode from Boston's NPR news station, *Here & Now With Robin Young and Jeremy Hobson* entitled, "What's Happening to Women's Colleges?" discusses the 2013 decision of Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania to become a coeducational institution. Similar to

the circumstances at Peace College, Wilson College's enrollment was declining and the board of trustees decided that admitting men to the undergraduate program would help the college financially (Young and Hobson 2013). The president of Wilson College, Barbara Mistick, says, "Young women today are finding a more open landscape, so they are looking to replicate that when they are looking at colleges....So if we want to continue to respond to the women's market and to continue to really help women find themselves in an institution, perhaps being co-educational will help us do that" (Young and Hobson 2013). Mistick attempts to spin the change in a way that sounds beneficial to women. The broadcast also indicates that according to education consultant David Strauss, if a women's college does not have a large endowment and is unable to draw in enough students who pay full tuition, they are going to have a more difficult time being competitive with other women's colleges, as well as with other schools (Young and Hobson 2013). As these institutions are primarily private, they depend on donors and endowments as well as the tuition paid by students who can afford it. Not only does this make it difficult for many of these institutions to stay afloat, but it also makes these institutions harder for some young women to access in the long run. Prestigious women's colleges like Wellesley and Barnard are well endowed, but also highly selective. This selectivity could continue to become more common if women continue to apply to these institutions at the same rate despite more and more women's colleges closing or going co-ed.

In Brown's article "Why Women's Colleges Are Still Relevant," she states that, "Susan Lennon of the Women's College Coalition (WCC)...acknowledges these schools have image work to do" (Brown 2009:1). If we examine Hardwick-Day, the firm conducting the research, we find that their purpose, although varied, is to work with private colleges and universities and associations and to provide them with, "customized services in the areas of enrollment

management, financial aid optimization, research, net price calculators, executive search, interim leadership and training, and other special services" (Hardwick-Day 2014). It appears that the Women's College Coalition hired this firm to assist in the impression management of women's colleges today. These findings support the notion that despite scholarly research indicating the importance of women's colleges, their reason for existence is still being challenged.

Women's colleges are ever-evolving and adapting to try to fit the needs of possible consumers, like any other institution in a changing (and capitalist) society. Despite this fact and despite solid evidence that these institutions can provide a positive experience for women, women's colleges continue to struggle to gain legitimacy and/or stability and many have had to close or go coed as a result. These existing portrayals of women's colleges in scholarly and non-scholarly literature illustrate a need for further study and set the stage for my analysis.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I performed this research from an antiracist, feminist standpoint. According to Harding, "Research is considered 'feminist' when it is grounded in the set of theoretical traditions that privilege women's issues, voices, and lived experiences" (1987:3). I specify my feminist standpoint as antiracist because mainstream feminism has very often rendered the voices of women of color invisible. I do not want my research to do the same. Not only that, but identities intersect in a multitude of ways and recognizing the interconnectivity of identities and the role they play is critical to sound research.

In order to investigate my research questions, I performed a critical discourse analysis (CDA). Critical discourse analysis is a theoretical and methodological approach to the study of language that recognizes the role of power and dominance in language and how that affects the construction of meaning. CDA analyzes meaning in what is seen or said and what is unseen or

not said, as power relationships silence certain voices (Van Dijk 1993). Because I wanted to investigate the role that our patriarchal society plays in the positionality of women's colleges, I believe a method that examines how discourses are used in the production of and resistance to relations of domination (Van Dijk 1993:249). According to Adele Clarke, there are three critical pieces to address in discourse analysis: the social position of the author of the discourse, the social production of the discourse, and the historical and political context of the production of the discourse (Clarke 2005). I analyze these aspects of the discourses within the theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity and how they do or do not perpetuate the subordination of women.

I analyzed the discourse of a sample of 40 articles about women's colleges spanning from the 1970s to 2015. I analyzed the messages of these articles on the basis of their main argument and code for the presence or absence of various discursive statements. These arguments and key words were coded thematically. I created a coding worksheet to allow for a systematic representation of what each data source provides. (See "Appendix A" for a copy of this rubric). Although I anticipated using this rubric consistently in my analysis, I found that this process shifted a bit as themes emerged within and across the documents. I found it more conducive to my analysis to notate discourses on different colored notecards, using a different color for each piece of discourse that fell under one of the emergent themes. The themes that arose were that many women's colleges face the following: financial issues, image issues, and decisions to go coed or coordinate with a nearby coed or men's school.

2.1 Data

I examine both how the media portray these institutions and how they portray themselves in the articles. Initially, I had hoped to examine ten (10) from each decade. My search only

yielded four articles from the 1970's period. I examined all nine (9) that I found for the 80's period. For the 90's I accumulated seventeen (17) articles and analyzed ten (10). The 2000 to 2015 period yielded the most articles. Not including articles received by google alert after mid-March, I accumulated twenty eight (28) news articles and chose to analyze seventeen (17) of them, as they represented the largest group of articles. In total, I analyzed forty (40) articles. The amount of articles about women's colleges has steadily increased from decade to decade. For the decades prior to the year 2000 I focus more on print media. For the time period after 2000, I focus on online media. According to an article in the *Huffington Post* in 2013, the top ten U.S. newspapers by average weekday circulation were, from highest to lowest: *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Daily News of New York*, *New York Post*, *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Sun Times*, *The Denver Post*, and *the Chicago Tribune* (AP, *Huffington Post* 2013). I found that the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and *The Washington Post* offered the most data for me to work with. In an effort to be representative I also included relevant articles from lesser, or more regional, sources.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 *From the 1970's to Present*

The articles that I analyzed from the 1970's to present day illustrate a paradoxical lack of support for women's colleges and a growing support for women's colleges, depending on the time period. Journalists in the 1970's were writing during a time in which women were able to attend formerly all male higher education institutions for the first time. As a result, enrollment at women's colleges declined. Women's colleges began to face pressures to adjust their position in

order to remain relevant. In the 1980's, women's colleges grew stronger, despite a decrease in the overall number of them that remained open after universities opened their doors to women. The public increasingly recognized the strengths of women's colleges and enrollments increased by 4% in 1981 (Hechinger 1981). The majority of articles on women's colleges focus on some aspect of survival, whether or not they are or are not surviving at the time of publication. It does not seem as if there is any point in which their necessity or their relevance is not called into question by article writers, even in their periods of strength and vitality.

As described, the early 70's illustrated a decline in women's colleges and support for women's colleges. One article cites a study in which it is stated that, "Women's colleges approach the mid 1970's with sharply reduced ranks and a compelling need to rediscover the clarity of purpose which characterized their origin" (Maeroff 1973). At this time, one survey found that the second most important factor in choosing a college in the early 70's was that it was coeducational. Meanwhile, educators continue to defend women's colleges, even though they seemed to be losing public support. Dr. Pauline Tompkins, then president of Cedar Crest College stated, "the women's college is not dead...It is living on the threshold of its greatest opportunity" (1970). She indicated that current assumptions of equality in coeducation were problematic and that our society is not yet in a place in which the difference in how men and women are being educated is "meaningless" and that "the college for women needs to redress the balance" (1970).

Just eight years later, in the late 70's and also in the early 80's, we begin to see women's colleges regain some public support. One author writes that the enrollment at Goucher College (a women's college that is no longer open) is so high that an overflow of students had to sleep in their infirmary, when just two years before they had been "diagnosed by some authorities as

suffering from a terminal case of inability to attract students” (Maeroff 1978). The same article states that the public sees the strengths of women’s colleges and that more and more women are choosing to attend them. Maeroff states,

The impact of the women’s movement and the opening of opportunities in fields traditionally dominated by men appear to have caused some young women to take a fresh look at single-sex education. Although there is still resistance to attending schools with isolated campuses, those women’s colleges situated near other institutions are seen as offering the best of both worlds—an active social life and a more supportive academic environment than some women think they can find at coeducational colleges.(1978.)

A fear, misunderstanding, or distrust of feminism, a perceived threat for women’s colleges to have to change to survive, as well as an assumption that women at women’s colleges lack a social life, colors much of the discourse from the 1980’s and early 1990’s. This is a time period during which the nation’s pool of high school students is decreasing, which also played a role in the economic pressure being faced by all colleges, not just women’s colleges (Gruson 1986). Many articles put forth the sentiment that the women who wouldn’t choose a women’s college are either high schoolers who do not care about feminism or do not want to be around feminists. Nicole Reindorf, Associate Director of the Women’s College Coalition at the time, stated in an article, “There are two contradictory notions: that we’re wilting hothouse flowers and that we’re militant feminists” (1987). As a result of these supposed (mis)conceptions about women’s colleges, “such as that they are a haven for feminist ideology or a throwback to a more genteel era,” the articles discuss needs for and attempts to change their images with the help of marketing firms in order to attract more women (Hechinger 1987). The colleges focus on their ability to prepare young women for good careers as professors, lawyers, doctors, and businesswomen. In fact, one article mentions that many colleges have added career programs because, “Students of the 1980’s are more interested in jobs than in feminist ideology” (Hechinger 1987). The fact that they had to *add* career programs is a bit puzzling; what were

they expecting of their graduates before they had these programs? According to Muscatine the answer would be that, “for most of this century women were being prepared [at women’s colleges] to be nurturers or transmitters of culture to children, to be the nation’s mothers” (1985).

Adding and subtracting various features to and from women’s colleges was also apparent in articles that discuss the process of going coed and attracting male students. On one hand, these women’s colleges are presented in articles as great places for women to come and get preparation for a professional career, particularly in male-dominated fields like math and science, yet the administration at women’s colleges that have been “forced” to open their doors to men speak of adding sports and science programs in order to attract strong male candidates. The necessity to buffer various programs seems to illustrate a gendered hierarchy of what is considered a good math and/or science program. Are these programs that supposedly prepare women at women’s colleges for careers in male-dominated fields only good enough for women, yet they must be improved for men to attend the institution?

It is not until 1994 and 1996 that any articles focus on any black women’s colleges. These few articles do not discuss the implications of race or the intersecting impact of race and gender on education. The heritage and HBCU status of these women’s colleges is mentioned in passing, but is not the main focus of the articles. The articles discuss the growth of women’s colleges in Georgia, that minorities and adults are increasing in enrollment at women’s colleges, and that “separatism is in, except for white men” (Martin 1994, McGuire 1994, and Allen 1996). As we enter the 2000’s, no mention of LGBTQ individuals has yet to take place.

The absence of women of color and LGBTQ individuals in the discourse is no accident. The lack of representation of these groups in the discourse, although they are most certainly also a part of women’s college communities, indicates the desire of dominant society to keep them

unheard and unseen. This has major implications, especially when, as McGuire illuminates, women of color are a growing population on the campuses of women's colleges (1994). As any population grows, there are implications and the needs of those populations should be met accordingly. Journalists portraying these women of color that choose to attend a women's college as a "growing population" and nothing else is problematic in that it is framing these women as a means to make money for these institutions rather than as human beings wishing to obtain an education like anyone else. This is a reminder that women's colleges are not outside our capitalist system and that they too, despite being considered feminist, are institutions that strive to make a profit.

The article discussing separatism in higher education poses the question, "Why are men's colleges out, while women's and black schools are in?" (Allen 1996). Posing this question in such a widely dispersed news source as *the New York Times* reinforces the notion that these schools may no longer serve a distinct purpose. This notion reinforces the logic that if men's colleges are no longer a thing, why do we need separate schools for other groups? This continues to place men in the default category of what is logical and right. A Sweet Briar student quoted in the article brings to light the power differentials at play, stating, "Why does a white male need help?" (Allen 1996). This student is mentioned by the author as scoffing when asked why we need separate schools for other groups. This statement is critical, as it is not typical in the discourse. Her position as a student rather than administrator possibly gives her some leeway in what she says, but I argue this question is not being asked enough. The power differentials amongst people of various genders and races are extreme and fail to be understood or dispersed by the media when talking about women's colleges. I also argue that if administrators and those in power at these women's colleges were asking the same question as that student, publicly, it

could have an impact on the discourse. So many people fail to understand that the typical white male does not, in fact, need help navigating the structures and systems built with them in mind.

The articles of the 2000's begin to characterize the feminist aspects of women's colleges more favorably. From the late 80's to the 2000's the notion that women's colleges could be both empowering and feminist was beginning to emerge more frequently, although the articles of the late 80's and early 90's still focused on the selling point that women could have great careers more so than a nurturing and empowering, feminist, environment. A distinction between the two was clearly made in the discourse; the authors of the articles did not see having a great career and a feminist environment as coinciding or in the nature of the women's college. The arguments for women's colleges become increasingly more feminist focused as time goes on; apparently being associated with the women's movement "was no longer an embarrassment" (Hechinger 1981). For example, Muscatine quotes former president of Mary Baldwin college, Virginia Lester: "We are not here to take a young woman from Texas for a few years just to send her back home...to marry a Texan...we are preparing women for careers" (1985).

Previously, many who argued for women's colleges would state that these institutions are intended to provide a high caliber education for women, yet would refrain from classifying the institutions as feminist, as it was seen as a negative attribute. In the more recent articles on women's colleges, those arguing that women's colleges are feminist sites that empower women to change the world are less likely to argue that attending a women's college is just about ending up with a successful career, which is what many of the articles in the previous time periods focused on to bolster the enrollments of women's colleges. Instead the authors argue that, "Women's colleges as a whole have been powerful catalysts for positive change among women for more than 150 years" (Eldred and Sebrechts 2002). One student at Spelman College speaks

highly of her experience at a women's college, stating that she is "learning about what it means to be a black female...I'm learning about my history and what I will encounter after college. That prepares me more for life than if I went to a state school where I wouldn't learn about my background," countering the critics that say that attending a women's college fails to prepare women for the real world (Diamond 2009).

Could this rise in feminist ideology be linked to another decrease in support for women's colleges in this time period? By 2005, the number of women's colleges still in existence was down from nearly 300 in the mid 60's to only approximately 60. There were approximately 90 in 1990, a 30 college decrease in 15 years (Diamond 2009 and Hughes 1990). Today there are only approximately 40, a 20 college decrease in 10 years (Women's College Coalition 2015). Despite a rise in this feminist ideology, critics remain. Rebecca Bigler, the executive director of the American Council for CoEducational Schooling believes that same-sex schools discriminate on the basis of gender and "she suggests women's colleges move toward the model of historically black colleges and universities, which accept applicants of all races while celebrating their history and achievements" (Ash and Boyd 2012).

This time period is not without more closings, as Sweet Briar College decided to close after 114 years, citing "insurmountable financial challenges," despite its \$84 million dollar endowment (Jaschik 2015 and Anderson and Svrlga 2015). Sweet Briar's enrollment had been dropping steadily. Anderson and Svrlga illustrate that this is not the case for all women's colleges. Patricia McGuire, president of Trinity Washington University argues that the key to her school's thriving campus is their policy to admit men to graduate programs and increasing recruitment in urban areas. Marilyn Hammond, the president of the Women's College Coalition, would agree that this is not an issue for all women's colleges, stating, "There are a lot of

women's colleges that are doing fine... To say it's a sector issue would not be correct" (Anderson and Svrlga).

During this time period more journalists begin to challenge heteronormativity and the gender binary through the discourse of women's colleges. Until this time period, LGBTQ individuals were absent from the discourse of women's colleges, despite some considering women's colleges a safer space for LGBTQ individuals (Padawar 2014). In 2014 the Princeton Review named two women's colleges on their list of the 20 most LGBT friendly colleges. Not surprisingly, no women's colleges were listed on their list of the 20 most LGBT unfriendly colleges. One of the only two remaining men's colleges, Hampden-Sydney College, was. Could Hampden-Sydney's presence on the list of most LGBT unfriendly colleges imply that such a male-dominated space perpetuates homophobia and homonegativity? The absence of LGBTQ individuals in the discourse until now is not surprising, in that our society has been very slow to relax the strict heteronormative ideologies of the dominant group. LGBTQ activism, although not new, has become more salient in the media and in the discourse during this time period. At this time, the legalization of same-sex marriage is spreading across the country, with 37 states now providing marriage certificates to same-sex couples (HRC 2015).

The articles in this period illustrate that women's colleges now face an additional challenge: whether or not to admit transgender individuals to their institutions. A variety of articles frame the debate about trans activism and the decision whether or not to admit trans students (Misner 2014 Padawar 2014, Krantz 2015, and Ensler 2015). This transvisibiliy is a huge shift in the discourse. Multiple colleges have decided to change their policy to include the admission of trans students recently, including Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, Simmons, Bryn Mawr, and Mills College. Smith College is currently considering changing its policy from not

admitting to admitting trans students (Ferguson 2015). This shift has been applauded by many and could play a role in increased enrollments if these spaces are seen as more welcoming to trans students than coeducational institutions.

This shift has not been without major controversy. There is contention not just among students and administration, but also between students. Before Wellesley made its decision to admit trans students, the article, “When Women Become Men at Wellesley,” articulated the various arguments among students on Wellesley’s campus. One student that was against admitting trans students discussed how one trans student wanted to be on the student council. She stated: “I thought he’d do a perfectly fine job, but it just felt inappropriate to have a white man there. It’s not just about that position either. Having men in elected leadership positions undermines the idea of this being a place where women are the leaders” (Padawer 2014). Her argument is complex, in that while wanting to foster an empowering place for women to be leaders, she renders a trans student’s identity invisible. Timothy, the trans student spoken about stated that he was conflicted about having the leadership spot, as “the patriarchy is alive and well” and that he didn’t want to perpetuate it” (Padawer 2014). Timothy’s statement indicates an understanding about the power differentials among, in this case, men and women. Is there an assumption by students opposed to the admittance of trans students that trans students, particularly trans men, will reinforce the patriarchy on campus? One student argued in the article that he had lived as a woman and therefore understands the oppression of women and just wants a safe space to go to college (Padawer 2014).

Wellesley’s policy is restricted to considering an applicant who “lives as a woman and consistently identifies as a woman;” applicants who identify as men will not be considered for application (Krantz 2015). As a result, many argue this policy doesn’t go far enough and that

both trans men and women should be admitted. Sarah Wall-Randell, an assistant professor at Wellesley stated: “The change is meant to reaffirm that Wellesley is a school for women” (Krantz 2015). This distinction, despite Wellesley’s president stating: “We will support all the students who are at Wellesley and all of their kinds of finding themselves in all the ways that we can,” reinforces the gender binary and doesn’t imply that Wellesley is welcoming of all trans individuals, only the ones that fit in a very specific box. I wonder if these institutions changing their policies to attract more students to their supposedly safe and empowering campus, or are they just a means to financial security?

The articles, from the 1970’s to 2015, illustrate ebbs and flows in the discourse surrounding the women’s college. The representations of women’s colleges vary throughout time and at any given point were and are depicted as thriving or diminishing into irrelevance, depending on the source. As mentioned previously, at no point were these institutions written about in such a way that automatically assumes there is a place for these institutions in our society. Those writing about women’s colleges seem incapable of going beyond a discourse that boils down to a question of whether or not women’s colleges should exist or whether or not they are surviving in our society. That this debate has been going on for decades and still persists illustrates the power of the media to cast doubt in the minds of consumers. Instead of reinforcing a stance that women’s colleges are simply another institution that plays a role in our society, their necessity continues to be called into question, time after time. The inability to put such a debate at rest keeps women’s colleges from having full agency in our society. This is discussed further in the following sections.

3.1.2 Rendering the Oppression of Women Invisible

Many articles argue that women's colleges are doomed and that it is only a matter of time until they are extinct. If we compare that argument to those of either advocates or employees of women's colleges at this time period, we see a difference of opinion. Proponents of women's colleges state that enrollments are growing and that they are not, in fact, doomed at all. Schmidt stated, "As long as we have a need for an educational system that produces these results [disparities], the future of women's colleges is assured" (1987). This difference of opinion on the status of women's colleges illustrates a divide among the women's colleges themselves and the general media. While advocates and employees state that their enrollments are growing and are not in fear of closing, the media reinforce a doom and gloom discourse. This discourse hurts the image of women's colleges -- because who wants to attend a school that is doomed to close? It also creates an assumption for the public to consume that indicates we live in a post sexist society and that these institutions are no longer needed because more women happen to be choosing coeducational institutions. Additionally, many journalists fail to account for the sheer numbers; obviously more women are attending coeducational institutions as coed schools vastly outnumber the number of women's colleges in this country. As the media put forth the notion that people "have concluded that women's colleges will eventually become extinct [and that these are] causalities of a changing coeducational environment" the oppression of women is being rendered invisible (Lyll 1987).

Considering the decline of women's colleges to be a result of a changing coeducational environment problematizes and complicates understandings about the actual status of women in society. That argument implies no actor or actors has or have played a role in the decline, but rather, that it is a natural progression of a changing society. While that may be true in part, it

doesn't account for structural inequality or hegemony. The argument implies that because women have the opportunity to attend school with men that there is no longer a problem, but rather, just a "change." In turn, this implication makes it difficult to argue that women's colleges do still serve a purpose or that women aren't getting the same quality of education as men. As Bishop stated, "most schools are not really coeducational because they are male dominated" (1990). If we look at the leadership in formerly all women institutions after they go coed, we find that it tends to be taken over by men, whereas before, the leadership at women's colleges was previously a majority women. At Skidmore College in New York, women faculty and tenured women faculty and women deans or administrators all vastly declined when they went coed. This change in leadership indicates a shift in power. The institution may be made up of approximately half men students and half women students, but with a majority of men in power, the institution is no longer representative of its student body and continues to perpetuate a chilly climate for women.

An understanding of gender and power is not what is always being relayed by the media, as we can see by one letter to the editor that states: "While you can argue that 'women educated in single-sex colleges go on to better jobs than their coeducated counterparts,' this does not justify excluding men. If an institution provides a good educational setting and opportunities it should provide them to all applicants; to do otherwise is reverse sexual discrimination" (Alterman 1990). Alterman claims to be the "son of a rabid feminist" and therefore able to "give this opinion with a clear understanding of the issues" (1990). Alterman's words present multiple issues: he fails to recognize and understand the fallacy that is reverse sexism, perpetuating the belief that women can, in fact, be reverse-sexist, and that educating women separately is an example of that. And by saying that if an institution offers a good educational setting and

opportunities it should be open to all -- which in this case means men -- he implies that bad or not good educational settings and opportunities are sufficient for women. His argument goes along with the theme that women's colleges that go coed are having to bolster their academics to make them worthy of male applicants because they were only previously good enough for women. This discourse brings to light the assumption that educating women is not as important a priority as educating men. Additionally, in this discourse, Alterman utilizes his male privilege to discount feminism, as he has this opinion despite his "rabid" feminist mother.

3.1.3 Emergent Themes

Despite women's colleges stating very clearly that they are growing stronger and are not doomed, the media discourse fails to represent that reality. The media hold immense power to shape meaning and the fact that they constantly call women's colleges into question and counter what those at women's colleges argue, keeps these institutions weak. Those writing these articles refuse to relay the discourse belonging to advocates and alumna and employees, despite the research they have to back it up. Regardless of studies that show they are beneficial to women and the backing of an enormous network of alumna, the media does not reproduce a representation that indicates women's colleges are strong institutions. Instead women's colleges are consistently called into question and the discourse becomes one of having to prove their worth, rather than just accepting that they work for some women and therefore they should exist. I argue this way of positioning women's colleges in the media illustrates a disbelief or distrust among the media of the advocates and proponents of women's colleges. Could this distrust be reminiscent of our misogynistic society's refusal to trust women? Is the belief that women are weak and less worthy of education than men coloring the beliefs about women's colleges themselves?

If we look at the status of women in society and compare it to the status of women's colleges in society, we see that many of the struggles women's colleges face are also struggles that individual women face as a result of our patriarchal society and the resulting gender inequality. Women's colleges were/are facing financial issues, image issues, and many of them either went coed or felt the need to coordinate with a nearby coed or men's school. I argue these challenges are similar to challenges faced by women in our society. Women face economic inequality disproportionate to men. Women's bodies, or "images," are constantly policed. Women are socialized to aspire to heterosexual marriage and family life. Not only that, but both women's colleges and women are struggling to survive in our society. This theme is omnipresent in the articles I analyzed. These struggles faced by women are a result of hegemonic masculinity and dominant society's desire to keep women subordinate. As a result, it would make sense that women's colleges, institutions intended to counter that imbalance, institutions made by women for women, would be facing analogous issues. It is these three comparable themes that I will discuss further, as they permeate the articles in my sample.

3.1.4 Financial stability

In the articles that discuss the transition from educating only women to becoming coeducational, marketing strategies and men are seen as the solutions to financial instability. Multiple articles discuss marketing campaigns that were created to help the images of many women's colleges. For example, President of Hood College, Martha Church, stated, "We have never considered going coed... We feel we are in a strong market position" as a result of reaching out to older and nonresident students (Hechinger 1987). Other institutions spend money on additions to the school so that they will be good enough for men to attend; why not make these additions so the schools are even better for women? Why are men seen as the solution to these

schools' financial struggles? One possible answer revolves around another assumption that appears in the articles about women's colleges: that women at women's colleges have no social life and that the presence of men is important to women in college; therefore, women are less likely to attend a women's college unless they are solely focused on education as a key to their career success. Regardless, money is seen as the solution to the survival of these institutions. In one article, the president of Columbia College in South Carolina stated, "There's nothing wrong with Columbia College that can't be solved with money" (Smith 2004).

At Russell Sage College in New York, men were not seen as the solution, and according to the article, their decision to remain an all women's college has hardly been noticed (Hechinger 1987). Russell Sage examined five other women's colleges that chose to go coed and after seeing that they were navigating problems and having to invest a great deal of money into the process, they decided that it was not the decision for them. The indication in the article that this decision was not given much attention illustrates an absence in the discourse; the media choose instead to focus on struggling institutions rather than those that have been able to survive.

Not all women's institutions face the same amount of financial struggle. Schemo states,

The top institutions that do not admit men—Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Barnard, Mount Holyoke and Smith—say they are doing fine. But behind them small liberal arts colleges for women, like Randolph-Macon, increasingly struggling against financial pressures to win applicants in an era of unbounded choice (2006).

Those top institutions mentioned have endowments that smaller liberal arts colleges for women do not; they have a huge network of wealthy and successful alumna that can donate millions to their alma maters. A lot of the financial stability of women's colleges comes from alumnae and other donations, and while alumnae of women's colleges have been found to donate more to their alma maters than alumnae of coeducational institutions, Bishop found that because of an increase in lower-income students and in financial aid support, net tuition income is still

low at the average women's college (1980 and AP 1988). Throughout the articles I analyzed, institutions like Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Barnard, Mount Holyoke, and Smith are rarely called into question by mass media. Do their financial strength and prestige play a role in that? Our society favors economic dominance and it appears that the economic dominance of said institutions outweighs that of male dominance in those cases.

3.1.5 Changing their image

The theme of rebranding and the need to alter one's image is one of the most salient in the articles, from the 70's to 2015. Women who attend women's colleges may be seen as an "aspiring drill sergeant[s]," or women's colleges themselves may be seen as "full of man hating lesbians," or "a throwback to a more genteel era" (Ashby 1990, Hechinger 1987, Matlack 2011). In his article, "Are Women's Colleges Outdated?" Tom Matlack discusses how he assumed these women's colleges "harbored a lesbian cult" and that the women who went there "were living in some bygone gender-segregated era where such a place had a purpose" (2011).

These beliefs about women's colleges are seen by administration and public relations officials at women's colleges as problematic to enrollment and many of the articles illustrate attempts to correct them (Schmalz 1984, Muscatine 1985, Hechinger 1987, and Bishop 1990). One extreme example comes from Smith College in 1999: In hopes of closing the gap among men and women in the field of engineering, and "to change its lingering white-glove image," Smith became the first women's college to open an engineering department (Bronner 1999). The tactics taken to correct the images of these schools and the fierce recruitment strategies that have been taken up by many have become a means of survival for women's colleges. Many articles indicate that once women's colleges get the women on campus the women choose to stay and subsequently don't regret attending a women's college. Despite that fact, the media holds

immense power at framing a negative discourse that keeps women from considering a women's college in the first place. Imagine if the media circulated all the negative attributes about coeducational colleges and universities -- i.e. their rates of sexual assault and rape, the disparities in the classroom, and the pressures of women to be constantly aware of their appearance -- to the same extent that they do for women's colleges. Instead, coeducational institutions are seen as a place for men and women to interact and to party, while getting an "equal" education and preparing for a successful career and heteronormative family life after college.

There is another pattern among the articles discussing the image of women's colleges: most of the articles that argue for the strengths of women's colleges are situated in letters to the editor or opinion columns. I argue this helps perpetuate the debate about whether women's colleges need to exist, rather than simply acknowledging their existence and moving on. Although paid staff members mention the strengths as well, they consistently situate them as opinion, rather than statements supported by scholarly work. Although one could argue these articles are meant to be a value-free dispersal of news, this still illustrates a refusal to acknowledge the scholarly work that has been done about women's colleges as fact. Instead, they continue to frame it as opinion.

3.1.6 To be coed or to be alone

The notion that these campuses may prevent one from having a social life is apparent throughout all the time periods. It appears that there is an assumption that the definition of "social life" for women involves men. This assumption illustrates how, despite a supposed mission to educate and empower women, there is still a belief that woman should be meeting men as well. In an article from 1979, the author discusses challenges women face in feeling the need to choose between a family and a career and proposes bringing graduates back in to discuss

their lives as alumna, but administration doesn't just want to bring graduates back. The author states, "By drawing graduates and their husbands back to their alma maters for discussions, the American presidents felt that they could help to change societal attitudes about sex roles" (1979). Not only does this proposal illustrate an assumption of heteronormativity, but also an assumption that all graduates, or at least the ones administration wants feedback from, get married. As we can see in the literature, this belief, or the possibility that women aren't getting married, is still a concern today.

Further, Rosemary Ashby, former president of former women's college Pine Manor states,

Women don't have to forgo men, embrace feminist doctrine, [and] isolate themselves from the real world to gain self-confidence, raise their aspirations and expand their options in the world beyond college. On the contrary, women's colleges prove to be good places to meet men—our alumnae bulletins are full of pictures of weddings and children, along with news of careers (1990).

Ashby's statement reinforces a lot of what is wrong with the discourse surrounding women's colleges. She condemns the assumption that women have to forgo being with men, become feminists, and live alone in order to succeed. While a plausible argument, her statement exudes negativity towards those who may want those things while creating the perception that women need not worry, because they can find men even if they attend a woman's college. She attempts to appeal to women who may not otherwise choose women's colleges by denouncing the feminist image that the women's colleges have developed.

Hechinger reiterates the notion that women's colleges are lonely places for women and no longer necessary in the following question: "Why would young women today, in the wake of the sexual as well as feminist revolution, choose any longer to spend their undergraduate years in all-female isolation?" (1981). Perhaps if the sexual and feminist revolutions had eradicated patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity, women's colleges would no longer serve a purpose. But

as this is not the case, as male domination and hegemony continue to shape our every moment, women's colleges survive.

3.2 Discussion

I approached this thesis with the following questions: (1) How have women's colleges been portrayed by the mass media in the past 40 years? (2) How do women's colleges choose to portray themselves in articles? (3) What do those portrayals say about the representation of women's colleges in society? (4) Do these institutions reinforce our male dominated society, or are they counter-hegemonic?

As illustrated, women's colleges have been portrayed in a variety of ways in the past 40 years: simultaneously as struggling for survival and stronger than ever, while also characterized as havens from gender inequality or breeding grounds for feminist nonsense. The discourse illustrates dissenting views on the role and efficacy of women's colleges. Mass media depict women's colleges as falling victim to a changing, post-sexist, society and having to fight for survival, whereas those in support of women's colleges advocate for their strengths and tend to deny such weakness. As media are controlled by a few powerful elite, the discourse is framed in a way that will support hegemonic masculinity and a male-dominated society. Those in support of women's colleges stand for a society that does not subordinate women, but rather, one that empowers and supports them.

I have argued that the status of women's colleges mirrors that of the status of women in our society. They face economic hardship, scrutiny and distrust, and constant reinforcement of gender and sexual hegemonic practices. Despite the gender hegemony at play, these institutions are fighting to survive. In my attempt to answer whether or not these institutions are counter-hegemonic, a new question has come to light: Are these institutions able to be counter-

hegemonic when they are constantly fighting for survival? Drawing from all of the positive things that alumnae have said about these institutions changing their lives, I would argue that the students and alumnae are the driving force behind counter hegemonic practices, whereas the administration is not. Mills College serves as an example. Mills had voted to go coeducational and the students organized a sit-in and protested this decision extensively. The students stood together and made it very clear they did not want their institution to admit men because it would take away from the mission to empower women. Eventually Mills rescinded its decision to go coed and remains a women's college today. The students won and sparked protests of this kind at other struggling institutions across the country. Similarly, the decisions of many schools to admit transgender individuals would not have been achieved if not for student organization and activism.

While it would be nice to think that the administrators in power care about the empowerment of women, in a capitalist society money is the driving force behind everything. Financial issues have played a role in almost every closing of women's colleges. It is important to keep in mind that while they may be working at struggling institutions, administrators hold immense power. I argue they could use that power to better navigate our patriarchal society if they deemed it necessary, rather than focusing on profits. Focusing on creating a counter-hegemonic space that empowers women despite societal pressures does not seem to be the case at all women's institutions today, or historically.

4 CONCLUSIONS

One of the central ideas of coeducation provides a central myth: that if women are admitted to men's education and treated exactly as men are, then all problems of sexual equity will be solved. The myth assumes that the major problem for women is 'access' to what men have, and it continues to ignore the *content* and *quality* of what it is women may gain access to. (Howe 1984: x).

We live in a society that is constructed to serve white, cis-gender, heterosexual, men.

These dominant identities hold immense power in which those that have them, or appear to have them, have the ability to mold the lives of women and minorities in multi-faceted, systematic ways. Women may be the majority in colleges and universities today, but the negative effects our patriarchal society has on women's lives is still prevalent. Women still face discrimination in countless ways. In the late 60's, many college and academic women were not taken seriously and the assumption that women were obtaining college degrees to be better wives to their husbands was common (Howe 1984). I have argued that this is still the case today. I faced similar assumptions about my own reasons for obtaining an education while I was in college. I heard jokes suggesting that I was only at college to obtain an "MRS. Degree": that I was only there to meet a wealthy man at a nearby institution to ultimately wed and bear his children. These beliefs are harmful and they continue to perpetuate the oppression of women in a variety of intersecting ways. Research and other advocacy has provided extensive evidence that women's colleges provide the opportunity to counter these negative beliefs and the oppression of women but the mass media refuses to acknowledge that. Instead, the media perpetuate skepticism about women's colleges. If women's colleges are meant to empower women, and our society does not wish for these institutions to survive, what does that say about the status of women in society? I have argued this is a result of hegemonic masculinity and the fact that our society wishes to keep all women, be they women of color, transgender, or LGBQ women, subordinate. The media plays a major role in this by disseminating to millions the belief that women's colleges only

deserve to exist if they can compete financially or are willing to change their image to serve dominant society.

This research shows that women's colleges are not seen as equal to other institutions of higher education. Their value is seen by some but not disseminated and reinforced in the same way that it is for coeducational institutions. At this point, it seems as though the power to make change lies with the students and alumna of women's colleges. They have and will continue to be the driving force behind countering our society's gender hegemony. They create their own "site of feminist struggle" within a society that colonizes them and their knowledges (Mohanty 2006:170).

Regardless of whether or not one wants to attend or send one's daughter (or transgender son or gender-queer child) to a women's college, regardless of whether they are necessary or whether they do in fact educate women better than coeducational schools, these institutions exist and they have a right to exist in peace. This research shows that that existence continues to be challenged by our society and that women's colleges and their students and alumna must continue to fight for their right to exist as a part of society. I argue this research is extremely relevant, as our society is still struggling to navigate the gender hegemony that we are all subject to. Further research would be beneficial in analyzing and discussing how these sites of feminist struggle are transformed as more and more of them create policies to accept transgender students. I argue this change could have major implications on the necessity and survival of women's colleges.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Coding Rubric: General Article

What is the topic of the article?

How is it being framed?

Is it being discussed in a positive, negative, or neutral way?

Who is writing the article/what is their possible positioning?

Historical context to when the article was written/how does that play a role?

How are women's colleges being presented?

Important Quotes:

Appendix B

Articles Analyzed By Decade

1970-1979

1970. "Educator Defends Women's Colleges On Teaching View." *The New York Times*.

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1990-1999

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