Achieving “Gender Party” at Wesleyan University: 
Admitting Women, Maintaining Patriarchy

by

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INTRODUCTION: ARRIVING

“Colleges and universities are historical institutions. They may suffer amnesia or may have selective recall, but ultimately heritage is the lifeblood of our campuses.” (Thelin 2004: xii)

In the fall of 2005 I walked onto Wesleyan’s campus. Actually, I arrived in a massive blue pick-up truck and I was horribly embarrassed. I knew Wesleyan’s hippie reputation, had heard my father joke about my early application and subsequent admittance to a “pinko-commie school.” I was worried I might seem too “mainstream.” I had come to Wesleyan twice before, not as a newly admitted freshman, but as a surveyor of sorts. I had never heard of Wesleyan University before the spring of my junior year in high school, but my best friend already planned on applying early decision. I was making the agonizing decision so many before and after me would make – where should I spend the next four years? I was tired of walking around the same breed of campuses and encountering the faces of my high school classmates I was so excited to escape, only slightly older. At Wesleyan, I thought I had found somewhere new and exhilarating, a place I might in some way belong. Right now I want you to picture Wesleyan as I saw it, filled with radicals, activists, hippies, and young people who looked and acted in ways that elicited such words as “crazy,” “weird,” “out there,” and “scary.” In other words, I felt like I would fit in.

For years I had been labeled “weird” without my consent. No one ever asked me if I wanted to be “weird” – it was simply a reality of my existence. Actually, it seemed that the more I came to understand my existence and role in this world, the
more this label was assigned to me. Some people refer to this process as “coming out,” but to me it was a journey of increased understanding and self-reflection. It started early sophomore year, coming to terms with my queer identity through the word “bisexual,” which rapidly became “gay.” In less than a year, my journey had crossed four identities, ending with two, “trans”\(^1\) and “queer.” Although I finally felt at least partially “settled” in my new identification, it was not a safe place to be. After almost three years of feeling trapped in an identity I had thought to be freeing, I sought a new home where I could live openly. By the time of my second visit in the fall of my senior year, I had learned enough about Wesleyan to be positive here was the environment I sought. I timidly went on the student queer retreat and met four openly trans-identified students, more than I had met since self-identifying as trans two years prior. The experience affirmed the reputation I heard many times, that Wesleyan was the school for trans and queer activism, where “diversity” in students, politics, and academics was celebrated.

YouthResource, a GLBTQ\(^2\) youth website, had featured Wesleyan and Ohio State as “trans-friendly” schools.\(^3\) College Prowler, a company dedicated to grading and reviewing U.S. colleges, awarded Wesleyan a B+ in “Diversity,” one of the school’s highest grades:

\(^1\) I use the term trans to refer to a large spectrum of non-conformative, transgressive gender identities, including transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, genderf*ck, no-gender, and genderfluid. Kate Bornstein describes trans folks as anyone who is “not perfectly gendered” according to socially-constructed gender hierarchies (1998: 74).

\(^2\) GLBTQ is a part of a much longer acronym, commonly referred to as the “endless acronym.” GLBTQ stands for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer.

Wesleyan prides itself on its diversity, hence the nickname “Diversity University.” In actuality, Wesleyan is a primarily white, upper-middle class school that pays particular attention to its minority groups… Where Wesleyan truly shines is in the tight-knit community it creates for people of all kinds. No two Wesleyan students are alike, and though many liberal arts universities tout this claim, at Wesleyan it is a reality.4

This nickname “Diversity University” seemed to be everywhere, but with little explanation. As the College Prowler emphasized, the idea of “diversity” can be interpreted in multiple ways, but has primarily come to mean racial multiplicity and occasionally refers to other identity categories as well, including class, gender, and/or sexuality.5 However, even in acknowledging Wesleyan’s lack in racial and economic variety, somehow Wesleyan was still described as the only school “for people of all kinds.”

I applied early and for the only time in my life, wept in complete and total relief and joy while opening my acceptance letter. Several months later, I filled out my registration form, excitedly checking off the request to receive “Gender-Neutral Housing.” The appeal required an explanation as to why I “deserved” this service. There was no explanation of whom I would be living with and over time I grew increasingly concerned, picturing my future roommate as a 6’ 3” football playing frat “brother.” I would not be so lucky. Instead, I received a message at home from Wesleyan’s Residential Life, requesting I call back to discuss my freshman year housing. I knew better than to risk a phone conversation from my house, knowing my

5 According to many theorists of the concept “diversity” in U.S. society, since the 1978 Bakke v. Board of Regents Supreme Court ruling that allowed race to be used in considering applicants to the University of California, so long as “it served ‘the interest of diversity,’” the term has become “all about race” (Michaels 1998: 3; 4).
anti-queer, anti-trans father might listen in. Unsure how to proceed, I waited a few
days before receiving two simultaneous e-mail notifications from Wesleyan. The first
was an explanation that, upon review of my application, it was determined I did not
“qualify” for “Gender-Neutral Housing,” with no further clarification. The second
was the name of my new roommate, who I soon contacted. My future roommate’s
initial reaction was confusion; she thought I must have made a mistake. After
realizing that I was not misguided, she further investigated my Facebook profile and
told me, “I thought you were a boy!” I was not at Wesleyan yet and things were
already going very wrong.

After arriving at Wesleyan a few weeks later, I immediately – within hours –
sought out the queer and trans “communities” I had longed for. In my first two weeks
as a college student I joined WesRugby (self-described as a trans-inclusive women’s
team), trans/gender group, and the queer task force. By the spring of 2006, I was
completing my second semester and my first course in Feminist, Gender, and
Sexuality Studies (F.G.S.S.), “Gender in a Transnational Perspective.” I regularly
attended meetings with administrators to continue a four-year long debate over the
need for gender-blind housing and helped organize S.W.A.B. (Survey of Wesleyan

Through this process it was revealed to me that although students’ and
administrators had – after years of student organizing – come to an agreement
creating “Gender-Neutral Housing,” the administrator in charge of overseeing the
decision would not accommodate anyone. The previous year (during the spring of
2004) administrators had also accepted “Gender-Neutral Housing” for the upcoming
fall, only to change their minds three weeks before the semester started, switching
assigned roommates to be “same-sex.” This followed the one-year existence of a
“Gender-Neutral Hall,” located in the basement of one of the dormitories, which was
terminated under the agreement by students and administrators that the following year
(i.e. the spring of ’04) gender-blind housing would be available for any student.
I thought that I had found a place where I could comfortably exist in my identities and body in and out of the classroom. After my initial excitement of encountering so many other trans and queer people melted away, the discrepancies continued to appear around me in every area where I thought I had found comfort and freedom. During the fall of my sophomore year, I quit WesRugby, tired of being tokenized by my teammates as the only openly trans-identified member even while simultaneously being referred to as ‘she.’ I found myself catalogued as an interesting commodity, someone people wanted to know to prove their own queerness and/or respect of trans identities and persons. One of the people who thought of herself as my close friend wrote a song about me; the lyrics were, “I’m Dan, and I’m trans” repeated over and over. Each time she completed the sentence she paused, leaving me hoping some new phrase would emerge from her lips. Within a few seconds, she would start over, laughing as she repeated the same words. This was how my peers saw and understood me.

After my initial excitement freshman year, I quickly became morose, disappointed in all of the ways that Wesleyan had let me down. Gender fluidity and varied identities were concepts I could study and discuss in the classroom, but I began to experience what it meant to be the object of study. The only trans-identified person I ever read in an F.G.S.S. class was Kate Bornstein, tokenized in my course syllabi

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7 S.W.A.B. was a campus-wide event in the spring of 2006 where students measured and evaluated bathrooms across Wesleyan to identify where wheelchair accessible and gender-neutral bathrooms were. For more information on bathroom activism, see “Calling all Restroom Revolutionaries!” in Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore’s *That’s Revolting* (2004: 189-205).

8 At the time my pronoun preference was ‘he,’ and is currently ‘yo.’ For more information on the pronoun ‘yo,’ see footnote 16, pg. 30.

9 At the time, I went by Dan, my first name, and have since chosen the name Trent.
repeatedly. Through class discussion, questioning and confronting gender binaries became localized in her trans body (and, resultantly, my own). I found myself noticing similar tendencies in many of my courses with the treatment of feminists and students of color. I became increasingly frustrated with my F.G.S.S. professors and the comments they were making and allowing my peers to make; it felt so radically opposed to my own understandings of gender and social identity. I became angry in my classes and with the F.G.S.S. faculty, who I did not feel were supporting the identities and experiences of my peers and myself. In the fall of my junior year, I took the only officially required course in F.G.S.S., Feminist Theory. My graduated queer friends raved to me about the professor. As the course progressed, however, I became frustrated with the way material was being presented, and what I felt was a complete gap between classroom theory and the dynamics and character of the course. The professor repeatedly referred to “imagining” social gender detached from sexed bodies, as if questioning gender binaries only existed in theory. She told us:

This is actually something really hard to do, which is trying to imagine a human being disconnected from biological sex and social gender. I mean, the crossing of biological sex and social gender then would become a kind of—one could be at any number of different points in relation to gender, in relation to sex.

As usual, the only openly trans theorist we read in the course was Kate Bornstein, but when discussing her work, not only had the professor not read the assigned text, the discussion suddenly – for the first time – shifted from pure theory to Bornstein’s personal identities and experiences. During the course a classmate remarked, “when I participate I participate from the text and I’m personally keeping myself out of it and I guess maybe my education hasn’t prepared me to position myself within the text.” I
did not have that privilege and I was upset that my professor continuously allowed
and encouraged students to act impartial and detached from course theory.

Near the end of the semester, the class exploded. Several students, including
myself, were exasperated with the course’s structure and emphasis on detached
theory, allowing privileged identities to remain unnamed. One student commented on
the professor never having allowed students the opportunity to choose the gendered
pronouns used to describe themselves. After then being given the opportunity to state
our pronoun preferences, the professor turned on some of the students, pointing to a
few of my classmates and myself, “Some of you on this side said you would respond
to gender neutral pronouns. Now, what does that mean?” I expressed my discomfort
with the erasure of non-normative gender identities and the privileging of theory at
the expense of personal experience. After having used the pronoun ‘he’ for me all
semester, the professor questioned my pronoun one day when I chose not to wear a
chest binder. She asked me, “Do you respond to female pronouns?” Several students
and myself eventually organized an in-class silent demonstration. However, our
professor only acknowledged my role in the demonstration, repeatedly referring to
my silence as “disruptive.” She claimed that the classroom had to be centered in
theoretical readings, which she referred to as our “common texts.” According to her,
personalizing the discussions would turn the class into “a support group.” After class
she pulled me aside and told me, “Trent, I’m not transphobic!” For my final paper, I
argued that the course existed within underlying contradictions in feminist classrooms
that failed to apply theoretical readings to class dynamics. I hoped to spark a larger
dialogue within the F.G.S.S. Program over the privileging of theoretical texts,
preventing students and professors from acknowledging their positionality in the classroom. However, my professor wrote off all of my arguments as unfounded. In that moment, I lost all faith in academia and Wesleyan.

The next semester I left Wesleyan for New York, participating in the Urban Education Semester, where I taught kindergarten and took graduate school classes on education. I spent the five months thinking about my role at Wesleyan and the function of academic environments in our society. I wanted to understand what had gone so wrong, why I felt so threatened and unsafe in my Wesleyan classes. Even more so, I wanted to reveal how the F.G.S.S. Program had failed my peers and, in particular, myself. I needed to understand what trajectory had created the Program as it existed in 2008. As my senior year at Wesleyan began, I understood this project as answering those questions, an investigation of the history of F.G.S.S. in order to understand how the theories taught had grown so detached from the courses themselves. Before returning to campus, I spent the summer reading in preparation, thinking that my heroes in the world of theory might guide me. On the floor of my room in New York lay piles of books by such authors as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, Kate Bornstein, Audre Lorde, and Leslie Feinberg.

In the fall, I began examining the history of the F.G.S.S. Program (formerly known as Women’s Studies) at Wesleyan. I uncovered a history of inadequate funding and resources, a Program that had scarcely changed in presentation since 1989. Soon, this history became my whole project, attempting to understand Wesleyan’s role in creating an under-funded Program that was unable to radically change over two decades or adequately respond to students’ needs. Further, I wanted
to contextualize this history within the broader formation of Women’s Studies Programs throughout the United States. I increasingly came to understand my work as archival as I poured through enormous volumes of Wesleyan’s newspaper, the *Argus*, and rifled through files in the Special Collections & Archives section of Olin Library. I began examining the historical treatment of identity-based groups and disciplines at Wesleyan. Resultantly, my subject of interest quickly expanded to include the African American Studies Program and student activism around race, sexuality, gender, and gender identity. Although Wesleyan’s student newspaper, the *Argus*, served as my main source of information, I also read through nearly every copy of the *Hermes*, the alternative student paper generally focused around activism on campus, since 1979.

By the spring my work tightened, recognizing that a more specified analysis could not only be more in-depth, but also used as an example of one identity category on campus. I began privileging socially acknowledged gender identities, primarily focusing on women’s groups and activism, and the formation of the Women’s Studies Program. This history all pointed to the initial admittance of women in 1969, after being admitted and kicked out in 1872 and 1909, respectively. I unearthed years of women’s existence in a patriarchal structure at Wesleyan, in addition to the tolerance of anti-women and anti-feminist sentiments and violence against women.

In attempting to understand my personal experiences in F.G.S.S., I traveled through a complex history of discriminatory and patriarchal structures in place at Wesleyan. I used the work of David Potts (1992) in order to examine the origins of Wesleyan University and its existence through 1910. Potts also describes the moves toward and away from coeducation in the late 1800s and early 1900s, an important
context to understand the subsequent admittance of women in 1969. In the Special Collections & Archives section of Wesleyan’s Olin Library, I read through files on the F.G.S.S. Program (formerly named “Women’s Studies,”) “Afro-American Studies,” “Protests Racism,” “Protests – Sexism,” “Tobias, Sheila,” “Racism/Racial Incidents,” and “Queer – General Subjects.” These files contained old articles, proposals, invitations, memos, letters, pamphlets, and a wide variety of other forms of written media. Specifically, I uncovered faculty memos proposing the formation of a Women’s Studies Program, pamphlets made by students and/or faculty describing the Program, and proposals submitted on behalf of Women’s Studies. With the help of Noreen Baris, the Administrative Assistant for F.G.S.S., I went through the Program houses files, which begin the year Baris was hired, 1972, for specific information on yearly courses, syllabi, Program descriptions, major requirements, and accounts of the 2005 name change from Women’s Studies to F.G.S.S.

respectively. The texts I read branched out to include works from the recent fields of Queer and Trans/Transgender Theory, in addition to the fields of Feminist and Critical Race Theory. I also explored many texts that emphasized action and activism from a variety of vantage points, with limited or no “Theory.”

Originally, I had planned on not only reading archival material, but also conducting interviews with current F.G.S.S. students and faculty and distributing a survey to any student, faculty, or staff member involved in F.G.S.S. I decided not to do this, in part because of time constraints, but also because the histories I was uncovering funneled my work in a new direction. In my research I was confronted with untold histories, forgotten stories and events through which I could better understand Wesleyan’s present. John R. Thelin’s *A History of American Higher Education* helped me understand the historical role of higher education in American society. He writes, “Colleges and universities are historical institutions. They may suffer amnesia or may have selective recall, but ultimately heritage is the lifeblood of our campuses” (2004: xii). Instead of focusing on my present, my moment at Wesleyan, I wanted to situate Wesleyan within a broader historical context, to draw a unique perspective on how the University has formed itself and its image today.

My research and the original plan for my thesis set me on a path to examine multiple social categories through which students have been differentiated at Wesleyan, including through sex, gender identity, race, nationality, sexuality, and class. However, through writing and rewriting sections of this project it became clear that a tighter focus was needed. As a result, I privilege gender as the primary social lens through which I conduct my analysis. This is not to deny the importance of
acknowledging multiplicity and complexity in identity categories, but to construct one story of how Wesleyan has historically treated the category “woman” in order to better understand how the institution has dealt with other social identities. I also draw upon my research of, in particular, the treatment of students of color (particularly Black students) to develop a more complete understanding of “diversity” at Wesleyan.

In my first chapter, “Creating ‘Diversity University,’” I examine Wesleyan’s formation and growth, focusing on initiatives to bring in female students. I show that during the first period of women at Wesleyan from 1872 through 1909 the school remained a patriarchal institution, foregrounding male students over their female peers. I argue that by maintaining a focus on prestige and the creation of a financially beneficial aristocracy Wesleyan administrators denied the need for structural change to successfully integrate women into the school. Resultantly, they privileged the desires of male students – exhibited in the role of fraternities on campus – over the needs of their female peers, systematically discriminating against Wesleyan women. As I show, Wesleyan currently uses this period to represent the school as a “pioneer” in “diversity” and women’s rights. After “commit[ing] itself to a diverse student body” in 1964, the school admitted women again in 1969 and once more neglected the need for structural change (Pantin 2000: 16). I argue that this initiative was part of a larger scheme to improve Wesleyan’s reputation, using statistical “diversity” to increase the school’s prestige and wealth. I demonstrate that the move was primarily a financial strategy from which the school benefited, not an attempt to rectify a discriminatory practice.
In Chapter Two, “On the Ground,” I look beyond the publicized, administrative depictions of coeducation at Wesleyan, examining the impact of these decisions on the experiences and gender dynamics of the student body. First, I reveal how the contemptuous and violent manner in which male students treated their female peers from 1872 through 1909 reflected institutionalized male privileging and female neglect. Next, I show that female students admitted between 1969 and 1989 primarily confronted structural and social patriarchy reactively through specific incidents and groups. I show that by emphasizing statistical “diversity” Wesleyan administrators neglected student experiences and contributed to a hostile environment for women. Administrators’ tolerance and acceptance of violence against women and anti-women incidents contributed to the maintenance of a culture where such incidents occurred. Furthermore, the principal means by which students (primarily women) could respond to the patriarchal culture of Wesleyan arrived in the form of single-issue debates that predominantly dissolved into men verses women. By examining three points of contention on campus – responses to violence against women, the showing of *Deep Throat* in 1979, and anti-women actions by fraternity members – I show that these debates accomplished little, deflected attention from underlying structural issues, and furthered anti-feminist sentiments on campus. I emphasize the 1979-1980 academic year, when at least eleven assaults against female students were reported, screenings of *Deep Throat* led to a campus-wide porn/anti-porn debate, and numerous incidents of anti-women behavior by fraternity members were reported. I argue that all-women and feminist groups on campus became the solution to campus dynamics.
for many students (principally women), but that without institutional support and with a continuously changing student body, these groups remained fractured and unstable.

In Chapter Three, “In the Classroom,” I examine the formation of the Women’s Studies Program (a.k.a. F.G.S.S.), the primary institutionalized attempt to address women’s “needs” and “issues.” During the 1979-1980 school year when feminist and women’s groups and debates popularized across Wesleyan’s campus, a five-year faculty-driven initiative to create a Program in Women’s Studies was passed by Wesleyan’s Educational Policy Committee (EPC). I argue that institutional emphasis on “diversity” as rewarding mandated the Program prove its profitability in order to receive endorsement. Resultantly, the Women’s Studies Program became the new “solution” for many faculty and, later, for many students as well. However, Women’s Studies could barely function as a Program, unable to hire its own faculty or affect tenure decisions. I show that the Program was given an impossible burden, claiming to address gender dynamics at Wesleyan, become a new site of student activism, incorporate student experiences, and be run collectively (Boydston et al. 1980). Without adequate resources, the Program had little room for growth and increasingly shifted from an innovative, student-oriented structure to a theoretically based discipline in 1989, when an official major was created in the subject.

In this work I show how an emphasis on the profitability of statistical “diversity” stifled productive discussion and activism about women and feminism at Wesleyan between 1969 and 1989. Feminist and women’s organizing became the primary location for student reactions to patriarchal practices and anti-women actions.

The Women’s Studies Program began as a faculty response to Wesleyan’s patriarchal
structures, inviting students to join the initiative within a few years. However, the Program lacked adequate resources and was given an insurmountable task. As a result, a school originally constructed to create an elite class of white men managed to make minimal structural and social changes during the 1970s and 1980s.

By admitting women and claiming an emphasis on “diversity” Wesleyan’s reputation and prestige flourished. Students, including myself, still come to Wesleyan seeking its supposedly open environment. A school has been created that claims emphasis on subjugated groups of students, who have historically responded through organizing and shifting disciplinary emphasis from privileged identities. The descriptions of Wesleyan and F.G.S.S. both convinced me of their radical openness to a wide range of student identities and experiences. However, a history of underlying patriarchy and subjugation has remained at the school, preventing F.G.S.S. from fully accomplishing its original goals of connecting theory with experience and practice. And, yet, the reputation of “Diversity University” persists.
CHAPTER 1: CREATING “DIVERSITY UNIVERSITY”

“The Barnacle is at last to be scraped from the keel of the good ship Wesleyan!” – The Literary Monthly’s description of the 1909 ban on female admissions (Potts 1992: 219)

“The return of coeducation heralded a dramatic expansion in the size of the student body, and gender parity was achieved very quickly.” – Description of the 1969 re-admittance of women to Wesleyan on the school’s website

Wes For (White, Male) Success: From Humble to Elite

Wesleyan University has accomplished the American dream. The school proudly describes its modest beginnings in 1831 “with 48 students of varying ages, the president, three professors, and one tutor; tuition was $36 per year.” Today, in 2009, Wesleyan is ranked the 13th best Liberal Arts College in the United States by U.S. News and has an endowment of over $500,000,000.” In the 178 years in between, Wesleyan employed a variety of strategies in order to achieve elite status. One approach, and the one I will discuss in this Chapter, was the admittance of women. Wesleyan utilized this strategy twice, first in 1872 and again in 1969. Enrolling females was as much a move toward prestige as the decision to become a “little university” in 1962 (Potts 1992: xvi). Wesleyan University’s Charter of 1831

outlined the new “corporation,” affiliated with the Methodist Church and with nine members on its board of trustees (234). Through 1870, the combined total of students and faculty rarely surpassed 150 and the school “was a local evangelical enterprise promoted by a town that provided land and buildings and by a few Methodist clergy and laymen who extracted very limited support from a denomination having only a nascent interest in higher education” (Potts 1992: xv).

Universities and colleges in the United States began as inexpensive sites for continued education, creating an elite class who would then enter the American aristocracy (Thelin 2004: 69). The nation’s first college (Harvard University) was also its first corporation, offering four years of education along with athletic, extracurricular, and social options. Since the recognition of Dartmouth College in 1819, colleges were granted full acceptance “as corporations with legal status and beneficial private-enterprise roles in economic and cultural development of the young nation” (Potts 1992: 15). Best of all, once a student graduated, they received a diploma, a writ of approval and acceptance to be carried for the remainder of their lives. According to John Thelin’s *A History of American Education*:

> On the whole, most nineteenth-century colleges were not exclusionist or elite in matters of admission. Entrance requirements were flexible, and tuition charges were low. In fact, even if most small colleges had been able to collect total tuition charges from all their enrolled students, the resulting revenues would have been inadequate for annual operations and faculty salaries. Philanthropy, financial aid, and fund-raising were central to the educational philosophy and strategy. What these colleges did contribute to American life was a reasonably affordable entree into a new, educated elite. They helped to create an elite rather than to confirm one. (2004: 69)

The main stipulation for college admittance and subsequent access to the aristocracy was the ability to afford temporary unemployment, while hidden and blatant systems
of discrimination kept the “collegiate idea… almost wholly restricted to white males” well into the 1900s (169). Students usually attended schools near their homes, bonding with classmates in “civil, religion, or racial pride” (107). Schools came to rely on private high schools as “feeder” institutions, privileging those from wealthier backgrounds and decreasing opportunities for others who could not afford steep boarding school tuitions (172). Through the 1920s, high school diplomas were uncommon and less than one in five adolescents between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two were enrolled in colleges (169).

The average college student was a white man, freshly graduated from an elite boarding school. Only fourteen of the 241 degree-granting colleges existent in 1860 admitted women (41). A “diverse” student body contained (white, male) students from all over the country. Neil L. Rudenstine, former President of Harvard University, reports in Pointing Our Thoughts: Reflections on Harvard and Higher Education, 1991-2001, that “diversity” was an aspect of the collegiate ideal as early as the 1850s. Administrators emphasized bringing students from the North, South, East, and West Coasts of the U.S.A. to “one institution, and they will get to know one another, learn to understand one another, and overcome their prejudices through such contact” (2001: 22). Preconceived notions of one another would slip away during their time at college:

As they mature and become leaders, they will in time create a kind of national network, capable of bridging the great gaps that were so clearly emerging in mid-

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14 I use the markers ‘male’ and ‘female’ not to connote one’s gender identity, but as one’s social gender, constructed from birth based on the assigned sex of ‘male’ or ‘female.’ I use these terms as social tools for categorizing people, not as indicators of personal identity. At Wesleyan University in 2009, a student’s gender is still categorized by their legal sex.
nineteenth-century American society. In short, student "diversity" – the gathering of different sorts of young people coming from different places, with different prejudices and points of view – could be a potentially powerful force in education and the public life of the nation.

School administrators believed that bringing students from across the country would create a school filled with diverse ideas and perspectives. Upon graduating, students could draw upon their collegiate connections for employment and networking, contributing to their personal wealth and the prestige of their alma mater.

One of the main networking devices was campus fraternities. By 1860, Wesleyan already had seven fraternities: Phi Nu Theta, more commonly known as Eclectic (founded 1836), the Mystical Seven (1837), Psi Upsilon (1843), Chi Psi (1844), Phi Beta Kappa (1845), Delta Upsilon (1850), and Alpha Delta Phi (1856) (Potts 1992: 42; 45). According to David Potts’ record Wesleyan University, 1831-1910: Collegiate Enterprise in New England:

Fraternities were a place to prepare for membership in urban men’s clubs. Major national fraternities even sponsored such clubs for their alumni in large cities. Like their metropolitan counterparts, campus fraternities were “islands of untainted masculinity” amid concerns about the perceived feminization of American young men. Fraternities at Wesleyan fostered “the development of true manhood,” as each member learned to know men better, to cultivate the man within himself. (199)

Through fraternal organizing, male students reaffirmed and created an elite “brotherhood” that persisted after graduation, with national and local fraternity organizations commonly assisting men create “successful urban careers.” Each frat emphasized various aspects of academic and social prosperity. Psi Upsilon, for example, “started with literary exercises and later moved toward an emphasis on extemporaneous speaking” (42). Phi Beta Kappa instead “sponsored disputations, conversations, and communications on literary and scientific topics at its meetings in
During the 1860s, two more fraternities were added: the Skull and Serpent Society in 1865, followed by Delta Kappa Epsilon in 1866.

Wesleyan’s fraternities, which were supported institutionally, also filled a primary role in the school’s social environment. Through the turn of the 20th century, “[a]bout 90 percent of Wesleyan’s male undergraduates entered this fraternal world” (200). Frats centered themselves in the middle of campus, across from the most prestigious area of campus, College Row, which contained the President’s House (193). After a shortage of campus housing in the 1890s, the nine fraternities on campus bought most of the area across from College Row on High Street. During the decade, two new fraternities also formed: Beta Theta Pi in 1890 and Phi Rho in 1893 (renamed Delta Tau Delta in 1902) (199). Administrators and fraternity “brothers” worked together, hiring famous architects to construct the finest new buildings on campus, which would serve as homes for fraternity organizations. In 1904, renowned architect Raymond E. Almirall completed the Chi Psi Lodge (194). Henry Bacon constructed the Eclectic House in 1905, after being hand-selected by trustee Stephen Henry Olin (served from 1880-1925), who remained on the fraternity’s building committee (174; 195). Olin also “donated large oil paintings and two classical busts, and his wife, Emeline, contributed furniture for the thirty-five-by-thirty-eight-foot living room.” Previously referred to as “homes,” the new residences were labeled “club houses” and were described as “comfortable and commodious,” containing smoking rooms, libraries, beautiful wooden floors and walls, and incredible art collections, all contributing to the feel of an aristocratic residence (199). The prestige and elevated status of fraternity members transcended the Wesleyan community, with
local authorities commonly granting “sanctions” to fraternities through the early 1900s (200).

Wesleyan’s all-male fraternities were paths to social and financial prestige, which served integral roles in the school’s culture and existence. Administrators worked with fraternities to create an elite atmosphere that even local police respected. The prestige of fraternal membership as a college student – already a privileged role – extended beyond Wesleyan’s walls, contributing to career and financial success following graduation. The existence of these networking institutions directly contributed to a culture of white male superiority. Apart from differences in age, the student body was extremely “homogeneous,” with more than half coming from New England and roughly a third from New York (47). Through 1870, very few students of color attended Wesleyan, including three Puerto Rican men from 1841-'42, a Black male who briefly enrolled in 1832, and three Black men in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Wilbur Fisk Burns, class of 1860, was the first Black student to attend and graduate from Wesleyan. As Potts wrote, “common background” contributed to student bonds, making it difficult for people of color to be admitted or graduate from Wesleyan.

“Sex Prejudice”: Admitting and Banning Women at Wesleyan

Alumni held an integral role in decision-making and planning at Wesleyan after graduating. With so few graduates per year, Wesleyan maintained a small, tight-knit cohort of undergraduates, faculty, and alumni. According to Potts, the decision to admit women in 1872 likely grew out of a proposal by Arthur B. Calef ’51 on the
“Education of Women” (Potts 1992: 99). Calef based his June 1867 report on a lecture given by Oberlin College President James H. Fairchild a week prior. Fairchild spoke positively of the school’s notorious decision to admit women beginning in 1837 and “emphasized the wholesome influence of women students upon their male peers” (97). During and briefly following the Civil War’s end in 1865, female enrollment at Oberlin and other colleges peaked, with women filling the vacancies left by deceased soldiers. Fairchild explained that by 1867 women were returning to their “separate sphere of duties” at home, where they belonged. Although Oberlin had been coed for thirty years, Fairchild and the school understood high female admittance rates as a temporary remedy for the sharp decrease in male enrollments. Now, their numbers were dwindling once more, all for the betterment of the school.

Calef returned to Wesleyan following Fairchild’s speech and presented the Board of Trustees his proposition: “That in consequence of the demand for the higher education of women the course of study in the University shall be open to females as well as males.” (99). The Board passed the proposal, in large part due to the school’s Methodist affiliation. All but four of the two-dozen Methodist schools in the U.S. were coed, following the Methodist belief in “educating young men and women together” (101). Methodism laid claim to more than two times the number of coed schools of any other denomination. Potts refers to the period as Wesleyan’s “most Methodist years,” when turning to coeducation “was a denominationally logical step” (103). During the same period, most schools not associated with Methodism, including Amherst, Brown, Middlebury, and Williams, decided against coeducation.
In 1872, Wesleyan admitted its first four female students, and kept women a small minority on campus over the next twenty years. Of the seventy full-time students in 1891, only seven were women (213). By 1892, only forty-three women had graduated from the school and enrollment rates never surpassed ten percent. Of the forty-three female graduates, twenty-three remained single and pursued their own careers after graduating. The other twenty all married, with seventeen supporting their husbands from home and three maintaining a career while married (104). At the time, most women were forced to choose between a career and a husband. After graduating, women had few professional opportunities and almost two-thirds of those holding jobs worked in education, primarily at the secondary level. Even with a college diploma, women in the late 1800s rarely achieved financial prosperity. As a result, Wesleyan’s male graduates offered more potential financial rewards for the school than their female counterparts.

In 1898, as the student body continued to steadily rise, female student enrollment reached its pinnacle, with the twenty-four women on campus comprising twenty-three percent of the student body. Administrators, along with the Board of Trustees, responded to alumni fears that women might soon comprise a sizable portion of the Wesleyan campus by instituting a thirty percent quota on female enrollment, later reduced to fifteen in March of 1900, and finally increased slightly to twenty percent in the fall (167; 216; 217). After creating the thirty percent quota on female admittance in 1898, in March of 1899, trustees responded to disseminating concerns about coeducation by establishing a committee “on the relation of Wesleyan University to the higher education of women” (167; 215). The only recommendation
the working group received came from the New York Wesleyan young alumni club, outlining their concern that “the masculine character of the college shall be changed to feminine” (216). They recommended Wesleyan follow in the footsteps of Brown University and create a women’s college within the school. The committee presented this proposal to the Board in March of 1900. The Alumni Association’s vote against the proposal in June “formalized a separate sphere of collegiate life for women undergraduates, without founding a new college, and limited their number to 15 percent of the student body.” The board was divided between three opinions, two of which were against coeducation. The earlier claim in the admissions catalogue that “women are admitted to equal privileges in the University with men” was replaced with an explanation of the trustee’s recent decisions regarding coeducation.

The continual increase in overall enrollment since Wesleyan’s inception froze in 1901, with the student body ranging between 290 and 315 through 1908 (167). Wesleyan administrators and alumni grew increasingly concerned, particularly as enrollment at Amherst and Williams Colleges continued to rise through the period, reaching 524 and 454 students, respectively (240). Alumni decided upon two culprits—Methodism and female students. As a result of the school’s Methodist affiliation, potential applicants often settled upon schools not linked to the religion (167). Meanwhile, with the growth of Methodist schools during the 1800s, students seeking such an education were provided with many alternatives to Wesleyan. The additional, “more important” culprit, coeducation, was described as having “an even larger cost-benefit imbalance in admissions than that of Methodist identity.” During this period, out-of-state female admittance dropped, with roughly eighty-four percent
of students coming from Connecticut and almost sixty percent directly from Middletown (many of whom suffered through a climate of overt hostility to circumvent the additional expenses of going elsewhere). In 1907, only eighty-eight new students enrolled, including twelve women, an eleven percent drop from the previous year (219).

At the 1908 annual alumni meeting Charles Scott, Jr., ’86 suggested a ban on female admissions beginning in the fall of 1909, with the goal of establishing a coordinate female college once funds became available. The Board accepted Scott’s motion, urging alumni to take all action to prevent female admission. The school’s newspaper, the Argus, summarized the trustees’ proceedings over the school year in June of 1908 in a brief article:

    Co-education, in its present status, is generally conceded to be detrimental to the growth of the college and the solidarity of college spirit, and it seems quite probable that, aside from any unforeseen legal entanglements, some definite action will soon be taken to remedy the present unsatisfactory condition of affairs… The course of action pursued by the Board of Trustees fully reveals their appreciation of existing condition at the college, and their wisdom, foresight and broad-mindedness in coping with them. Such a plan of procedure, cautious yet progressive, looks forward to a “greater Wesleyan.” (1908: 247)

The article stated that the existence of female students on campus had created an “unsatisfactory condition of affairs,” best remedied by barring women from Wesleyan. Female admissions were to blame for the lack of applicants, they were “detrimental,” hindering “the growth of the college” while splintering the campus, and preventing “the solidarity of college spirit.” Even trustee William North Rice, the leading advocate of female admissions, recognized he had no choice but to “compromise” and began searching for funds to create a separate women’s college (Potts 1992: 219).
On February 26, 1909, the Board voted to officially end female admissions and in the fall of 1909, Wesleyan returned to exclusively accepting male students. The school and its various publications celebrated the end of women at Wesleyan. The Argus declared, “Co-Education Abolished!” (Potts 1992: 219). The school’s yearbook, The Olla Podrida, rejoiced, “Here’s to a Segregated Wesleyan!” The Literary Monthly wrote, “The Barnacle is at last to be scraped from the keel of the good ship Wesleyan!” Even the New York Times celebrated the decision, stating, “Wesleyan authorities have acted wisely.” The only contrary opinion came from the Independent, condemning “the shame of Wesleyan” in surrendering to “sex prejudice.” Coeducation at Wesleyan had not acknowledged or attempted to rectify “sex prejudice.” Administrators and the Board explicitly outlined their plans when admitting women, all of which prioritized the reputation and financial well being of the school. When they decided the move was not serving its original purpose, they abandoned the plan.

Today, Wesleyan’s website describes this series of events in an entirely different manner under “About Wesleyan: A Brief History”:

The earliest Wesleyan students were all male, primarily Methodist, and almost exclusively white. From 1872 to 1912, Wesleyan was a pioneer in the field of coeducation, admitting a limited number of women to study and earn degrees alongside the male students. Coeducation succumbed to the pressure of male alumni, some of whom believed that it diminished Wesleyan’s standing in comparison with its academic peers. In 1911, some of Wesleyan’s alumnae founded the Connecticut College for Women in New London to help fill the void left when Wesleyan closed its doors to women.15

15 “Wesleyan University: A Brief History” (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan U., accessed 20 March 2009); available from http://www.wesleyan.edu/about/uhistory.html; Internet.
Even though the school’s website in 2009 acknowledges Wesleyan’s partial role in “succumb[ing] to the pressure of male alumni” it does not recognize the widespread contempt for coeducation throughout students and administrators. Wesleyan was not “a pioneer”; the school was following in Oberlin’s footsteps of “successful” integration of female students. The “pressure” to bar female admissions did not simply come from “some” alumni; it was the Board of Trustees, administrators, senior faculty, students, and even people not affiliated with the school. According to Potts, the Connecticut College for Women was not founded until 1915, four years after the date given by Wesleyan’s “A Brief History” (219).

The website portrayed the brief period of coeducation at Wesleyan between 1872 and 1909 in a way that benefits the school’s reputation as “diverse.” The school’s official on-line history describes “the pressure of male alumni,” but as I will show further in Chapter Two, the contempt for female students penetrated nearly all elements of Wesleyan’s structural and social existence, perpetuated by students, faculty, administrators, alumni, and the Board of Trustees all agreeing upon the prohibition of women at Wesleyan. Women became the scapegoats for low admissions numbers and the vast majority of Wesleyan community members celebrated the end of coeducation.

**Increased Prestige in an All-Male Environment**

In the fall of 1909 Wesleyan classes resumed after the summer recess with no new female admittances. Under the school’s new leader, President William A. Shanklin, the school’s priorities shifted (Potts 1992: 237). The trustees emphasized
the need to increase Wesleyan’s endowment, while “Shanklin’s background and personality would enable Wesleyan to reap whatever remained of Methodist support while nurturing new connections to the Republican circles of middle-class America” (220; 227). Trustee Stephen Olin foreran the initiative to increase the prestige and reputation of Wesleyan, which had included the ban on female admissions (220). Olin planned Shanklin’s inauguration as a glorious occasion, announcing the school’s “new era—one of growth and glory” (227). The all-male incoming class of 1909 was over fifteen percent larger than any previously admitted (231).

In the first half of the 20th century the U.S. college environment transformed, increasing the size of student bodies and tuition costs. Additionally, the growing popularity of all-women and all-Black colleges encouraged other schools to enlarge their admissions policies to include these populations (Thelin 2004: 226). Between the end of World War I in 1923 and the beginning of WWII in 1937, “the popular imagery of higher education cut across gender lines” to include women (212). Meanwhile, Black students enrolled at rates between fifteen hundred and two thousand annually in the mid-1930s (232). By 1937, fifteen percent of all Americans between eighteen and twenty-two were enrolled in a college or university, a three-fold increase over the previous twenty years (212). Tuitions increased to match the growing demand, particularly in New England where prestigious institutions like Wesleyan charged twice as much as established private Universities in the Midwest (251). As the ‘30s came to a close, the U.S. contained just under 1.5 million undergraduates (261). Wesleyan continued to expand, surpassing six hundred enrolled students in 1928 and seven hundred by 1938 (Potts 1992: 241).
In 1944, at the end of World War II, the federal government passed the GI Bill granting army veterans full government stipends for their undergraduate tuitions (Thelin 2004: 262-263). Female admissions diminished across the country as a result:

The students of the GI Bill tended to reinforce the conservative nature of the American campus. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in gender as a variable in enrollment patterns. Whereas women represented about 40 percent of the undergraduate enrollment in 1939-40, this participation rate dropped to 32 percent in 1950. (267)

After comprising forty percent of 1.5 million college students in 1940, a decade later female undergraduates constituted only thirty-two percent of the 2.7 million enrolled undergraduate students (261; 267). Beginning in the 1940s, Wesleyan began increasing the number of fields of study, striving to further its reputation as a prestigious Liberal Arts school. According to “A Brief History,” “under the leadership of Victor L. Butterfield, who served as president from 1943 to 1967, interdisciplinary studies flourished.” With a larger student body creating more alumni to donate money after graduating, Wesleyan’s finances increased dramatically, particularly after the mid-1950s (Potts 1992: xvi). Going to college no longer meant simply applying to the neighborhood school. Nationwide, the ‘50s finalized a thirty year initiative toward popularizing the college experience and “[b]y about 1958 the overall rush to go to college, any college, had evolved into a rush to go to a prestigious college” (Thelin 2004: 294). In 1959, Wesleyan had 792 students (Potts 1992: 241). Enrollment rates rapidly increased, reaching 1,043 students in 1963.

As funds increased at Wesleyan and the school sought new venues for expansion and improving the school’s reputation, Wesleyan decided to become a “little university” and form its own graduate program in 1962 (xvi). “A Brief History”
highlights the additions of a Center for Advanced Studies, which “brought to campus outstanding scholars and public figures,” and a Graduate Liberal Studies Program, which was “the oldest liberal studies program [in the U.S.], and the first grantor of the MALS (master of liberal studies) and CAS (certificate of advanced studies) degrees.”

Three new fields of study were also created: the College of Letters, the College of Social Studies, and the College of Quantitative Studies. More faculty were hired, “includ[ing] many important scholars” and doctoral degrees were also added in some science sections, as well as in ethnomusicology (Potts 1992: xvi). As part of the decision to become a “little university,” Wesleyan began “recruit[ing] a highly diverse student body” (xvi). Potts marks 1962 as one of three major turning points in Wesleyan history, with the other two being 1870 and 1910, each signaling new initiatives for expansion and increased prestige through the admission of new bodies.

As college attendance increased over the first half of the 20th century, schools sought new methodologies for luring students to apply for enrollment in their elite institutions. With the expansion of admittance rates and student interest, corporate colleges fought increasingly for potential clients (i.e. students), attempting to make their schools seem the most appealing. As Walter Benn Michaels describes the change in “The Trouble With Diversity,” “Here’s another name for rich people’s malls—universities” (2006: 80). Colleges had become the ultimate investment.

Schools had to advertise and promote themselves effectively, creating images and reputations that would appeal to students. Many schools sought “diversity” as a new strategy to lure students. “Diversity” had come to mean something entirely different over the past one hundred years, shifting from where in the U.S. someone was born to
A Commitment to “Diversity”

By 1964, Wesleyan had officially “committed itself to a diverse student body… thanks to an increasing pressure from an organization of junior faculty led by professors well-known for their involvement in the civil rights movement” (Pantin 2000: 16). Wesleyan describes the decision in “A Brief History” as the school “beg[inning] actively to recruit students of color.” Wesleyan wanted more students of color, decided they would benefit the school’s reputation and prestige. The school began targeting, specifically, Black men, with moves for instituting “a ‘pluralistic’ admissions policy, which includes Puerto Ricans and natural Americans” beginning in 1969 (Jacobsen 1969: 2). The move would ultimately result in the readmission of women, after an initial “experiment for implementing a large black presence at Wesleyan” (Pantin 2000: 16). The admissions office accepted twenty-five Black applicants for the fall of 1965 and thirteen became a part of the freshman class. Of the 346 freshman entering in ‘65, the admitted twenty-five Black students would have

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16 ‘Yo’ originated as a pronoun that does not connote a specific gender (i.e. a gender-neutral pronoun) by youth in Baltimore, MD in or before 2004. Although other gender-neutral pronouns (primarily ‘ze’ and ‘hir’) are more commonly used in academic language, ‘yo’ is the first gender-free pronoun that “has not been planted and was a grass-roots phenomenon.” More information can be found through BIGNEWSDAY, “‘Yo’ Being Used As ‘Gender-Neutral Pronoun,’” 3 January 2008; available from http://www.bignewsday.com/story.asp?code=BZ345203T&news=yo_being_used_as_gender-neutral_pronoun; Internet; accessed 10 January 2009.
formed a small minority of 7.2 percent (Potts 1992: 242). The thirteen Black men enrolling for the year constituted an even tinier 3.8 percent of the student body.

The Board of Trustees expanded the “Diversity Plan” to include the readmittance of female students in 1969, beginning with the addition of the “first women and black trustees,” both of whom were “non-alumni” (“Six Added to Trustees” 1969: 1). Simultaneously, Wesleyan admitted “Ninety Women Transfers,” with a plan to admit one hundred more the following year (“Ninety Women Transfers” 1969: 2). The Admissions Office told students they would “try to maintain diversity in entering classes” and, specifically, a “healthy diversity in women candidates.” According to an October 17 *Argus* article, approximately one thousand women applied for the one hundred spots and the Admissions Office was disappointed at the low numbers of Black women applying (Jacobsen 1969: 2). “A Brief History” tells the story in a different light:

During the 1960s, Wesleyan began actively to recruit students of color. Many Wesleyan faculty, students, and staff were active in the civil rights movement, and the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. visited campus several times. By 1968, women were again admitted as transfer students. In 1970, the first female students were admitted to Wesleyan to the freshmen class since 1909. The return of coeducation heralded a dramatic expansion in the size of the student body, and gender parity was achieved very quickly.

The readmission of women beginning in 1969 (not 1968) is described in heroic fashion, “herald[ing] a dramatic expansion in the size of the student body.” Wesleyan describes itself as a part of the Black Civil Rights Movement, exemplified by King’s multiple visits to the school. The school is presented as a fully open, active environment, where “gender parity was achieved very quickly” following the return to female admittance. The description does not explain what this “parity” looked like,
how the school had managed to achieve it, or how Wesleyan had successfully overcome gender discrimination “very quickly” when in the new millennium, gender remains “a multilayered phenomenon that digs deep down into our guts, shaping our lives in a profound way” (Scott-Dixon 2006: 17). As Emi Koyama explains in her 2000 essay, “I Hated Being a Girl (or, How I became a Transfeminist),” as a woman in U.S. society:

I now know how it makes me feel to be whistled or harassed on the street, for example. I know how overly self-conscious I feel when I walk down a street, especially if it is dark or if I am walking with my girlfriend. There are things I still hate about being a woman. (3)

In the present world of 2009, gender remains a central social category, leading to a constructed binary of separate, unequal, and wholly opposed worlds for men and women. With gendered prejudice a reality in the new millennium, it seems that the reference to “gender parity” can only imply a statistical equality in the enrollment of men and women. However, even numerical equality was not a reality; at the time, the 314 faculty members included only eleven women on the tenured track and one tenured woman.17

The primary action Wesleyan took to achieve “parity” was the creation of a staff position to directly address the new needs brought with coeducation. Over the summer of 1970, the current President Edward D. Etherington interviewed candidates to serve as “an associate provost with particular responsibility for coeducation and for women’s affairs” with the incoming female students (Tobias 1975: 19). Etherington

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17 Educational Policy Committee, “Sub-committee formed to review WSM Proposal from Ralph Baierlein, Holly Milton ’91, Ellen Widmer, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl.” (Middletown, CT: Special Collections and Archives Vertical Files “3C Depts – Programs: Women’s Studies,” January 30 1989); Appendix #1, 5.
hired Sheila Tobias, a founding member of the National Organization for Women (N.O.W.), who would play a central role in the transition from a male institution to a school with female students (Boydston et al 1980: 1). The rhetoric of “diversity” had opened up spots for female and Black students, but Tobias would now – after the fact – have to teach the school how to be a coeducational institution. It was Wesleyan’s chance to prove they wanted to actually transform the school, rather than simply bringing female and Black students into a white, male institution. Reflecting on the academic push for “diversity,” feminist theorist and professor bell hooks’ asks:

Everyone seems to be clamoring for “difference,” only too few seem to want any difference that is about changing policy or that supports active engagement and struggle... Too often, it seems, the point is to promote the appearance of difference within intellectual discourse, a “celebration” that fails to ask who is sponsoring the party and who is extending the invitations. For who is controlling this new discourse? Who is getting hired to teach it, and where? Who is getting paid to write about it? (1990: 54)

Although Tobias was hired to serve a primary role with regard to the new female students, she was still chosen by President Etherington as part of a broader campaign to improve Wesleyan’s reputation.

Tobias worked closely with administrators and students during her time at Wesleyan, with her role spanning the social, political, and academic elements of incorporating women into the school’s environment. The quite substantial folder labeled “Tobias, Sheila” in Wesleyan’s Special Collections & Archives reveals the enormous and essential role she played while at the school. In addition to organizing and teaching Women’s Studies courses, assisting female students transition into a male environment, bringing speakers in women’s studies, helping President Etherington and other administrators conceptualize what the move to coeducation
necessitated, and attending conferences on various identity groups around the country, Tobias headed Wesleyan’s affirmative action team along with the President and his assistant (Tobias 1975: 19.) The informal committee focused on “recruiting” women and “minority people,” and also examined the “structures” keeping “these groups out” of Wesleyan. The instituting of Affirmative Action programs served as the earliest official acknowledgement of systemic discrimination at Wesleyan and at numerous other schools across the country.

In the broader United States, Affirmative Action emerged from the work and rhetoric of the 1960s Black Civil Rights Movement, not from the walls of academia (Aguirre and Martinez 2003: 140). In the work of Adalberto Aguirre, Jr. and Rubén Martinez, entitled “The Diversity Rationale in Higher Education,” they elaborate upon preliminary conceptions of the new initiative:

Broadly conceived, _affirmative action_ is a term that refers to measures or practices that seek to terminate discriminatory practices by permitting the consideration of race, ethnicity, sex, or national origin in the availability of opportunity for a class of qualified individuals that have been the victims of historical, actual, or recurring discrimination. (138)

Affirmative action plans at Wesleyan and elsewhere emerged from the same “diversity” rhetoric used to open admissions’ policies and centered on the number of students of color and women admitted. Michaels describes the shift affirmative action and “diversity” initiatives marked: “[B]efore American universities tried to keep the wrong races out. Today, however, we’re trying to get all the races in, and this shift makes sense only in a society that, as we have seen, understands itself not as racist but as antiracist” (2006: 82). After all, in discussing the period in “A Brief History,” Wesleyan refers to its ability to create “gender parity… very quickly.” In other words,
Wesleyan’s administrators and Board of Trustees understood the decision to admit women as anti-sexist, just as the decision to admit students of color – primarily focused on Black students – was understood as anti-racist.

Alongside the affirmative action move that focused around admittance policies for students of color and women, Tobias wanted to create and ensure at least some element of structural change. A few other female faculty members joined Tobias in forming a “self-appointed” committee to show President Etherington the structural changes that were needed alongside female admissions, “not just in the accommodation of women but in the radical restructuring of Wesleyan itself” (Tobias 1990: 8). This ad-hoc committee recognized the university’s underlying structures as patriarchal, not acknowledged in admittance policies and affirmative action plans. Instead, Tobias and her female peers sought institutional intervention. Wesleyan was rooted in a male-dominated structure, where fraternities emphasizing masculinity and white male bonding worked hand-in-hand with administrators to create an elite, patriarchal environment. By not acknowledging this institutionalized prejudice, Wesleyan was able to maintain its elite status and continue improving its reputation as a high-ranking Liberal Arts University dedicated to student “diversity.”

The commitment did not imply or necessitate any further dedication aside from statistical successes in supposedly achieving “gender parity.” However, nothing was reported on the ad-hoc group in the Argus, and no structural changes were publicized.

The face of diversity and a changing school continued to be represented through the admission of individual students of color and women. In describing the incoming freshman class of 1970, the Argus categorized them by race and gender:
“55 black (32 men, 23 women),” “9 Latinos,” and “2-3 American Indians (one American Indian acceptance is not yet final)” (“Largest Class” 1970: 2). Female enrollment continued to steadily rise, reaching just over forty-eight percent of the freshman class of 1974, with 265 women and sixty-six “minority” students out of a class of 550 (Lowery 1974: 1). Wesleyan also hired its first female Dean of Admissions, Jane Morrison, who immediately affirmed the school’s ongoing devotion to “diversity” (Lukitsh 1974: 1). The Argus reported Dean Morrison as stating that there “would be ‘no retreat’ from the University’s commitment to students from diverse geographic, social, racial and religious backgrounds.” According to Morrison, “As more colleges follow Wesleyan’s lead in admitting qualified minority students, the applicant pool for these students is decreasing.” Wesleyan understood itself as a pioneer in diversifying its student body and a role model for other colleges, and they were not the only ones holding such an opinion. This success was discussed in terms of Wesleyan’s racial and gender demographics. By “recruiting” more women and students of color than other schools Wesleyan was, effectively, the “best” at diversity, eventually earning the school the nickname “Diversity University.”

18 Wesleyan acquired the nickname of “Diversity University” in the 1980s. However, despite the school’s ongoing “commitment” to diversity, in January of 1988 Wesleyan’s President Colin Campbell and the Board of Trustees pushed for a different nickname—“The Independent Ivy” (“A History of Activism at Wesleyan” 2000: 18). Many students, parents, and alumni were not very receptive to the proposition. Students formed a “Poison Ivy” campaign, distributing pamphlets opposed to “The Independent Ivy” at the Admissions Office. After surveying parents and alumni, they presented the administrators with the results, showing that eighty-five percent voted against labeling the school an “Independent Ivy.” The administration eventually conceded. Even though Wesleyan had received praise and economic benefits from its “diverse” student body, the school did not want to be defined by this ideal. The most prestigious universities in the United States have always been the schools designated “Ivy Leagues.” Wesleyan administrators and
On October fourth of 1974, Amherst College revealed to the Wesleyan campus the results of their “extensive investigation of coeducation at several schools,” praising Wesleyan’s “commitment to diversity” (“Amherst Coed Study” 1974: 3). Amherst staff and students were investigating the effects of admitting women at several schools throughout the country, including Wesleyan. They hoped to show Amherst administrators the benefits in going coed. To put it subtly, if the study had been a competition, Wesleyan would have won, not in a photo finish, not even in a close race, but by destroying the other contenders. The evaluators asked, “How can one do justice to Wesleyan’s distinctive style, to its flair, to its genuine commitment to diversity and innovation, to the nature of its creative confusion?” The study focused on the benefits of coeducation, particularly in terms of Wesleyan’s prestige and endowment, while briefly citing the number of available Women’s Studies courses, an increase in female staff, and a student-run “Women’s Weekend” the year before. They concluded their study:

Our students were charmed with Wesleyan. Our faculty members came away admiring its “daring and style.”… Wesleyan has more fully and more successfully become a college for men and women than any other institution we visited and women are now contributing an indispensable share to the stimulus, the ferment, the diversity, and the humanity that make up the Wesleyan style. Wesleyan, deemed the most successfully coeducational school, had left quite an impression on its visitors. Admitting women had been the right decision, “contributing” to Wesleyan in unforeseeable ways as part of a “fifteen-year interval of change and ferment.” Unlike the first Wesleyan women of the 19th century, the trustees wanted to bank off this identity, taking its status as a “little university” to an even higher degree, a “little ivy.” They wanted a definition based on elitism and prestige, not “diversity.”
second round of “first” women had proved financially and socially beneficial. Wesleyan now envisioned a future student body of 2,200 that would be fifty percent female. Wesleyan had every reason to actively seek out a “diverse” student body; admittance had become more competitive, decreasing acceptance rates from one out of six applicants to one out of seven. As a result, Wesleyan’s endowment had risen “15fold.” No longer was “the cost-benefit imbalance” in Wesmen’s¹⁹ favor; women were a valuable commodity at “Diversity University.” (Potts 1992: 167). In 1988, Dean of Admissions Karl Furstenberg described Wesleyan with this concept in mind: “The atmosphere is more supportive… Diversity is a clear priority of the institution. Success breeds success” (Delegard and Khlem 1988: 7). Absent from every mention of Wesleyan’s triumphs with “diversity,” however, are the voices of those students so frequently accounted for in statistics and school praises, as well as the social context of student life.

¹⁹ Beginning in the 1800s and through the 1970s, the Argus used the term “Wesmen” to refer to male students. The term “Weswomen” was never used.
CHAPTER 2: ON THE GROUND
INSTITUTIONAL PATRIARCHY AND SOCIAL LIFE AT WESLEYAN

“Though with us, they are not of us.” (Potts 1992: 104)

“As is often the case in revolutionary movements for social justice we are often better at naming the problem than we are at envisioning the solution” (hooks 2000a: 70)

1872-1909: Administrative Decisions Direct Student Animosity

Four women walked onto Wesleyan’s campus in 1872. Jennie Larned, Phebe Almeda Stone, Angie Villette Warren, and Hannah Ada Tayler would become the school’s first female graduates (Potts 1992: 102-103). But first they had to find housing. No female residences had been opened on campus, forcing the four women to search for rooms in Middletown. After a long and laborious pursuit, they managed to secure an apartment. The following day the women returned to finalize the arrangements and were told by the landlady that she “couldn’t take lady student boarders” (103). After a shaky start, the new students managed to get settled, find housing elsewhere, and enroll in their first college courses. The Wesleyan administrators and Board of Trustees not only failed to provide housing for the new students, they denied them any accommodations. These new female “recruits” were enrolled students with no voice, ignored by their administration and objectified by their male peers. In examining Wesleyan’s first attempt to admit a new student demographic, I uncovered a history of social and structural patriarchy that privileged white men as Wesleyan’s real students. During the period, male students’ treatment of their female peers shifted based on administrative decisions and accounts of
coeducation. The link between administrative judgments and student behavior from 1872 through 1909 appeared again during the 1970s and ‘80s.

Women’s admittance in the 1800s was never expected to be permanent. According to Potts, women’s acceptance was generally viewed as an experiment:

Male observers in the student body, faculty, and alumni saw Wesleyan as engaged in “a trial” to test the system of coeducation in an eastern environment. Given “a fair field and a generous competition,” the “Wesleyan ladies” must prove themselves worthy. (103)

The women became instruments in administrative and student debates over coeducation. Perkins later recalled, “We realized we must be dignified.” To their administrators and peers, they represented all white women in the United States. According to Perkins, “All New England was watching us.” Their successes became proof of women’s competence in higher education, while their failures affirmed assumptions that women belonged in the private sphere. For example, when Larned excelled in an oratory competition, her success was described as “a new argument to the friends of coeducation.” These women had to prove to Wesleyan and the nation that they belonged at the school and were valuable commodities, a difficult task in an environment hostile to women. Nonetheless, all four excelled academically and graduated Phi Beta Kappa (104).

There were few social opportunities open to female students, especially when taking into account the school-wide harassment they received from their peers and tolerated by administrators. Socially, women were regularly “excluded from all school activities, threatened with graffiti and arson, and in general regarded as temporary sub-standard students at best” (Gentry 2002: 14). Women were regularly referred to and treated as sexual targets; “[m]ale students labeled their female peers
“quails,” a term widely used before coeducation to describe unmarried, desirable young women who were ‘legitimate prey’” (Potts 1992: 104). Women were objects of desire, not fellow comrades and academics. Female students were generally treated “[w]ith grudging tolerance” as temporary additions to the Wesleyan atmosphere.

Male students controlled the school’s yearbook, *The Olla Podrida*, and traditionally excluded women from class pictures (214). In 1897, yearbook staff members announced “a crusade against the Quails” (214-215). Female students protested, refusing to pay the class tax to fund the book unless they or a third party could proofread it before publication (215). The yearbook staff allowed women not to pay the tax, but would not let them review the book. As a result, women’s names and groups were excluded from the book beginning that year. According to Potts, most men on campus generally described female students by the phrase, “Though with us, they are not of us.” Women’s position at Wesleyan barely extended beyond enrolling, attending courses, and graduating.

Wesleyan’s fraternities, one of the primary locations for student socialization, remained male-only throughout the co-education experiment (Potts 1992: 104). Denied access to these elite associations, female students formed several women’s Greek organizations: Sigma Rho (existed 1875 through, roughly, 1876), Sigma Pi (founded 1875, became Kappa Alpha Theta in 1883, ended 1887), and Delta Delta Delta (begun 1895). The women’s fraternities met in Web Hall, as did two women’s literary societies—Phi Sigma (founded 1893) and Alpa Kappa Upsilon (begun in 1893, became the women’s fraternity Zeta Epsilon in 1895) (104; 214). Female students also used the Hall more generally as “a center for women’s activities” after
the building’s renovation in 1892 and male students responded by routinely joking about torching it (214). The gymnasium also remained male-only, and Potts describes the “possible” formation of a women’s baseball team in the 1890s (104). Even the newspaper postings for the annual Boston alumni club dinners in the early 1880s specified, “Ladies are not invited.”

The main support women received came from specific individuals, particularly Wesleyan’s Presidents during the 1870s and ‘80s, who openly supported the idea of equal pay for equal work and the women’s rights movement in general (104). Potts states that Presidents Cummings (1857-1875), Foss (1875-1880), and Beach (1880-1887) all “gave assistance to the advancement of women” (237; 104). President Beach not only “testified to the benefits of coeducation,” he attempted to rectify at least one of the sites of structural neglect. In 1883, Beach moved to a new off-campus home and offered the house provided to him by Wesleyan as the first female dormitory, eleven years after women’s initial admittance. Prior to Beach’s proposal, no on-campus or residential housing was available to women in the Middletown area and school officials – other than Beach – took no measures to provide any (103). The only support female students received, aside from each other, came at the hands of individuals in support of coeducation.

After Beach’s departure in 1898 and the installation of quotas on female enrollment, student hostilities toward women increased. Beginning in 1900, women were separated in Wesleyan publications, public events, and honors elections, while the school “maintain[ed] standards of admission, educational methods, curriculum, and community life primarily adapted to men” (216). During commencement, women
were kept “off to one side from other seniors and receive[d] degrees after the men” (217). Male students began following an unofficial campus-wide practice of ignoring women. However, the attention paid to female students was usually unwanted, including “shouting offensive language outside Webb Hall in the early morning hours.” The following year male students graffitied the building with threatening messages and presented new students with notices mocking female students. After 1902 women were also no longer invited to the opening reception for new students sponsored by the local YMCA. At the 1903 event, the undergraduate speaker, Paul Nixon revealed the prevalent sentiment of male students “that two facts are incontestable: First we as a college fail yearly to enroll men because we have coeducation. Secondly, the discreditable parody of coeducation practiced at Wesleyan… makes Wesleyan notorious.” As administrators increased their animosity toward coeducation at the turn of the 20th century, male students understood that the experiment was ending, allowing Nixon to publicly decry the admission of female students. Whereas previously women had been treated “[w]ith grudging tolerance” (214), they were now completely rejected.

In 1907, senior faculty presented a resolution to the trustees that “the early establishment of a Separate Women’s College is the wisest solution of the problem of the coeducation of women at Wesleyan” (219). Even the few remaining supporters of coeducation began searching for funds to create “a coordinate women’s college” (218). Beach’s replacement, President Bradford Raymond, “a steady advocate of coeducation and larger opportunities for women,” left in 1908 in failing health. However, Wesleyan’s hostile representation and reaction to coeducation left him
concluding, “[T]he whole movement for women’s emancipation has had a definite setback in the Methodist Episcopal Church, if not in the whole country.” Everyone at Wesleyan seemed to agree that it was time for women to leave. Within one year, women were no longer admitted to Wesleyan.

Admitting women had been a scheme, a failed plan for “the wholesome influence of women students upon their male peers” (98). The Wesleyan community had been created and continued to exist for its male peers; no institutional changes were made to accommodate the new female students. Although the academic accomplishments of individual women were occasionally acknowledged and applauded, the college environment existed to reaffirm the superiority, intelligence, and dominance of white men. Women at Wesleyan constituted a small, sexualized minority, allowing the school to exist as a coeducational facility and a male institution simultaneously. Men were understood to be more academically, socially, and financially beneficial to Wesleyan’s campus. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, many female graduates followed their socially constructed “destinies” of marrying and become housewives. As a result, every female on campus was viewed as having taken the spot of an absent male student who would have been more likely to financially support Wesleyan in the future. If female students were not seen as positively contributing to Wesleyan’s social environment, Wesleyan’s supposedly charitable decision to bring in a small percentage of female students was only conceptualized as harmful to the school’s growth, wealth, and prestige.

In ending coeducation, Wesleyan reaffirmed men’s proper place in higher education. Women had failed their test through the anti-women behavior of their male
peers. The belief that college admittance and success emerged from “individual
effort, and should be the principal basis for the system of rewards in American
society” confirmed that white men had earned their place in society and at schools
like Wesleyan (Aguirre and Martinez 2003: 139). In “The Diversity Rationale in
Higher Education,” Adalberto Aguirre, Jr. and Rubén Martinez describe how societal
privilege works in conjunction with conceptions of “individual merit” to reaffirm
white male superiority in the college setting (2003: 139). More specifically:

The notion of individual merit has coexisted with racial privilege in the United
States since the country’s inception. That notion holds that achievement should be
recognized and rewarded as the outcome of individual effort, and should be the
principal basis for the system of rewards in American society… The [white male]
majority employed a system of privilege, rooted in preference, to establish itself
as the exemplar and just recipient of merit in society. (139-140)

Banning women was not recognized as a discriminatory practice on the part of
Wesleyan’s administration and Board of Trustees, and instead served as proof of
women’s inferior status.

The students for whom Wesleyan had been established (i.e. white men) could
not view women as equal peers when every system in place confirmed their own
inherent superiority. The concern was not that women had no housing or social
venues, that they were poorly treated and harassed, or that they were second-class
students. Women at Wesleyan had been accepted, treated, and discriminated against
as women. That is to say, their female status determined the way they would be
accepted and allowed to exist at Wesleyan, leading to social and structural
ostracization. Their attendance was viewed as an act of altruism on Wesleyan’s part,
an undeserved gift that could be taken away at any time. Women’s admittance had
been an experiment. When the administration and Board of Trustees decided female
students were not beneficial, they ended coeducation. And the students agreed, with
the overwhelming majority of male undergraduates having “voted against
coeducation when polled on this topic” (Potts 1992: 104).

Sixty years later, ninety women walked onto Wesleyan’s campus. This time,
their arrival was no experiment, recognized by all as a permanent change in
Wesleyan’s enrollment policies that necessitated lasting structural and social changes,
accommodations Wesleyan did not make. By examining three sites of contestation –
vviolence against women, pornography, and fraternities – I show that administrators
provided minimal, adaptive responses to the needs of women. Resultantly, the main
source of support women received came from organizing around their needs as
members of a gendered identity category, through the formation of largely informal
women’s and feminist groups. However, with a substantial lack in institutional
support for female students and, subsequently, women’s initiatives, male students
were able to react negatively and violently toward their female peers.

Debating Who Should “Protect” Wesleyan’s Women

One of the first Argus articles accounting for the new female students
appeared on April 21, 1970. Its title was “Two Wesleyan Coeds Molested on
Campus.” Sporadic reports of assaults against female students continued over the next
nine years. During the 1979 to 1980 academic year eleven assaults were reported. By
examining reactions to violence against women and sexual assault during this
particular school year, I show that the dominant majority of Wesleyan’s campus
understood these attacks as inevitable. Furthermore, it was commonly believed that
the threat was coming from outside of the Wesleyan community. By helping women
protect themselves, administrators responded as though they were providing an
unnecessary, charitable service. Preventative and responsive measures remained
minimal, and extremely inadequate throughout the year, while the reporting of
assaults tended to blame the “victim.” In response to one incident of assault,
Gadomski told the *Argus*:

> Although we are quite aware that no woman who is assaulted is at fault, we do
recognize that women who walk alone at night unescorted leav[e] themselves
open to potential danger… We know that there are problems with the escort
service and until they can be resolved students should account for possible delays.
(Bodnar 1980b: 1, 7)

Gadomski, Landau, and other staff focused on the need for students to utilize
available services, describing “women who walk alone at night unescorted [as]
leaving themselves open to potential danger” (7). Eventually, several students
(primarily women) took it upon themselves to speak out against assault and protect
one another. However, the campus-wide acceptance of women’s sexualization,
combined with a history of male bonding through the objectification of women
hindered these student initiatives.

Wesleyan staff and administrators general portrayed violence against women
as an inevitable reality, which could only be partially prevented by women taking
strides to avoid being assaulted. Additionally, violence against women was generally
assumed to be sexual in nature. In describing one incident, Steven Gadomski, the

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20 The term “victim” creates the image of a passive person. A more proper term is
“survivor,” expressing instead the action of overcoming a past assault. As Nikki Vilna
Feist ’89 wrote in her 1988 *Argus* article entitled “‘Victim’ is More a Survivor,”
“Any woman who is sexually assaulted and lives to tell Public Safety about it should
be praised as a survivor not labeled a victim” (1988c: 2).
Assistant Director of Security, told the *Argus*, “it is unclear from the evidence whether the attempted assault was sexual in nature” (Bodnar 1980a: 1). In the U.S. cultural mindset, as Peggy Sanday explains in *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus*, sexual assault and rape have been constructed as inevitable phenomena. On January 29, 1980, Demie Stathoplos, the spokeswoman for the Middletown sexual assault response group SAFE, told the *Argus*:

I don’t think most Wes students realize that this isn’t an unusual event on college campuses. It is easy to react to a crisis and forget about it afterward—but the more important thing is to not forget and remember that this could happen to any of us at any time. (Bodnar 1980: 7)

The understanding of violence against women as a common element of the college environment allowed Wesleyan’s staff to sit comfortably with the knowledge that women would be attacked in the future. Violence against women was accepted as an inevitable part of Wesleyan’s environment, with the perpetrators coming from outside of the university.

When the person assaulted was male, the *Argus* treated the incident differently than attacks against women. On November 22, 1979 a man accompanied by two women was attacked. According to James Boylan ‘80, the incident began with a man harassing the two women, whose arms were linked, “accus[ing] the women of being ‘lesbians’” (1979: 1). He then asked the male student if he was a friend of the women; the student replied affirmatively. Boylan explained, “According to the report filed by the victim he was grabbed by his hair and had his head pounded into the sidewalk.” He went straight to the police, describing the Student Judiciary Board (S.J.B.) as “ineffective.” Unlike assaults against female students, the attack was not immediately
publicized. The Argus only addressed the incident in the context of the student filing charges. In fact, Argus reporters only referred to students filing charges in one other incident. Accounts of violence against women on campus during the school year fell under the titles: “Rape on Lawn Ave” (Fraser 1980: 1), “Woman Assaulted” (Bodnar 1980: 1), “Three Women Assaulted” (Bodnar 1980: 1), “Wesleyan Woman Molested” (1979: 1), and “Woman is Assaulted” (Peers 1979: 1). However, the Argus relayed the November 22, 1979 attack (over two weeks later), in which the “victim” was a man, under the title “Student Files Assault Charges.” The male student was depicted as empowered, immediately deciding to go the police instead of the S.J.B., and filing charges against his assailant. The focus shifted from a supposedly passive (female) victim with an action occurring to her to a (male) survivor taking action and seeking justice.

The trend in treating women as helpless “victims” began with the first report of violence against women, back in 1970. Women were expected to depend on Wesleyan men and staff for support and protection. According to the detailed Argus report, on April 17, 1970 one woman left her room momentarily unlocked and, upon returning, “a young white male” who had entered in her absence assaulted her (“Two Wesleyan Coeds” 1970: 1). Later in the evening, a second woman was “molested while walking near Olin Library.” The school responded by posting a guard in the area at night to watch over the women’s dormitories. The assumption was that Wesleyan was protecting its students from outside intruders, not acknowledging the possibility that the assailant had access to the dormitory or was a student himself. Wesleyan saw itself as a school “committed to diversity,” praised for its treatment of
women, and protecting them from *external* threats. Assailants were unanimously described as intruders and when incidents occurred that contradicted this notion, such as a female student “harassed” by a Public Safety Officer, they were downplayed.

When the accused person was a known affiliate of Wesleyan – even better, a known Public Safety Officer – the *Argus* focused neither on the incident nor on the charges filed. Instead, they titled the article, “Guard Transferred After Student Charge” (Fraser 1980: 1). Late in the night of April 8, 1980, a Public Safety Officer found a sleeping student in Olin Library after it had closed (Fraser 1980: 1). He woke her, the two chatted, and the student revealed it was her birthday. The Officer asked if she wanted a birthday kiss and the student consented, attempted to kiss him on the cheek, and the officer “allegedly… took advantage of the situation,” holding her head and forcing her to kiss him on the mouth. Naturally, the student did not immediately call Public Safety – the office where the man worked – to report his crime. When she did call, the Officer who responded asked, “[Y]ou’ve waited four days already, why not wait another couple of days?” While all other *Argus* reports of assaults assumed guilt, with titles including the words “Raped,” “Molested,” or “Assaulted,” this article referred to the less serious accusation of “alleged” “harass[ment].” After the first reported assault of 1979, during freshmen orientation, near the Butterfield Dormitories on September 11, the *Argus* began using these events to encourage women to use the school’s Escort Service, a single car that transported women around campus nightly (Peers 1979a: 1, 2). The article referred to the incident as a “reminder” to take advantage of the Escort Service and directly below appeared “Use Escort,” not so much a request as an order: “We can’t stress enough that despite
the beautiful weather and calming memo from the administration, women must travel in groups or use the escort service… Please don’t hesitate, it exists to serve you [emphasis mine].” In other words, similar to the understanding of female admittance at the turn of the 20th century, the Escort Service was seen as a charitable, voluntary initiative. The incident involving the Public Safety Officer and the earlier attack on November 22, 1979 disrupted suggestions that using the Escort Service and/or having one or more companions would keep female students safe. Additionally, on October 23, an assault was reported at the hands of three men (“Wesleyan Woman Molested” 1979: 1).

Immediately before students broke for winter recess, on December 20, 1979, there were two more incidents of assault, both inside student dormitories (Bodnar 1980a: 1). The first woman was grabbed while showering, while the second had a hand placed over her mouth upon entering her bathroom. According to the report: “One of the victims discussed a procedure problem revolving around how assault cases are handled by the security department. She objected to being questioned by a middle aged man in the hallway, and subjected to the curiosity of her hallmates.” Several other students cited inadequacies in the schools’ procedures for preventing and responding to violence against female students, including “a claim by an anonymous security guard that in an effort to save money a guard was not on duty for the Butterfield/Science Tower route [where the woman had been assaulted] during the orientation week assault” (7). Steven Gadomski, the Assistant Director of Security, denied the allegation. The coordinator of the Escort Service, Leslie Landau, admitted:

> There is no real, viable protocol for dealing with assaults in the department. Most guards have had no training for dealing with this type of crime. There are trained
people on this campus who are aware of the medical, legal and psychological precautions that need to be taken. The fact that these volunteered services are not utilized is inexcusable. (1,7)

The “volunteered services” Landau referred to was SAFE, “a nonprofit organization of Middletown men and women designed to educate and counsel members of the community” on issues of sexual assault (7). According to Landau, female students should not have been relying on Wesleyan’s Security and Safety personnel “for dealing with assaults” and should have instead turned to SAFE for assistance.

Following this article, students began regularly commenting on the inadequate responsive and preventative services available for dealing with assault at Wesleyan, with few references to SAFE.

Students and staff principally debated the only institutionalized measure to combat assault — the Escort Service. On February 8, 1980, senior Karen Belanoff advised her female peers to use the service “only when we feel it is really necessary,” as the single Escort car was usually overcrowded (Belanoff 1980: 2) Within two weeks the Argus reported another assault. A man wielding a knife chased a female student and repeatedly threatened to kill her as she screamed for help. Gadomski reported that “several people later admitted to hearing the screams but at the moment nobody reacted to the danger promptly” (Bodnar 1980b: 1). He went on, stating, “Although we are quite aware that no woman who is assaulted is at fault, we do recognize that women who walk alone at night unescorted leav[e] themselves open to potential dangers” (1, 7). Wesleyan administrators and staff only responded to individual assaults, not discussing the broader issue of violence against women at Wesleyan, suggesting that each incident could have been prevented if only the
attacked woman had used the Escort Service. The continuing pattern of assault was not addressed. Simultaneously, staff (and students) encouraged women to utilize other means of safely navigating the campus. Escort driver Belinda Davis told female students, “Before you call, search around. Find out if other people are heading in the same direction” (Davis 1980: 2). The greatest concern cited by staff members was how to avoid congestion in the Escort Service. Davis stated, “We cannot give rides to men, nor can we give lifts to three women coming from and heading toward the same destination… We may have to ask that even two women walk if there is a long back-up of single women waiting.” These requests attempted to mask inadequate services, but did not acknowledge the woman assaulted by three men on October 29, 1979 or the man with two women attacked on November 22, 1979 (“Wesleyan Woman Molested” 1979: 1; Boylan 1979: 1).

The central conflict between students and staff revolved around who would be held accountable for preventative and responsive services for assaults on campus. While Landau was delegating responsibility to SAFE, students were turning to administrators – particularly Landau and Gadomski – for support and satisfactory services. Gadomski regularly left slots in the guard schedule open and at least two workers anonymously confirmed rumors that if an open slot had been filled the night of the September 11 assault, it could have likely been prevented (Bodnar 1980: 7). According to an article by David Luberoff ’82 in April of 1980, Gadomski had an unofficial policy of not calling in subs, “In an interview two weeks ago Gadomski said the old system had too many guards on duty, especially in the early morning hours” (1980b: 1). Luberoff also explained that the Office of Public Safety “has not
yet developed rape crisis training for its officers” (6). Students throughout Wesleyan’s campus criticized Gadomski and the Director of Public Safety, Jim Kuptas, for their “relative insensitivity to women’s issues charging that the Office has been slow to respond to requests for another escort vehicle.” Students had been requesting an additional vehicle to meet the increasing demands of over one thousand women on campus since January of 1980 (Luberoff 1980a: 1, 6). According to student Lise Olson, “the cars given to the drivers of the Escort Service are vehicles in poor condition which other security guards have refused to drive” (Olson 1980: 3). Jennifer Curtis ‘82 listed numerous problems with vehicles, as well as a much-needed “specific protocol for dealing with assaults” that people on campus were trained in (Curtis 1980a 2).

The Office of Public Safety had promised that, beginning February 1, 1980, “Roving Escorts” would be stationed around campus to accompany walking female students. Olson’s report on April 25 stated that no steps had yet been taken to install Roving Escorts, while Laura Fraser ’82 reported in the same month that the “escort vehicle has become hopelessly backlogged” (Fraser 1980b: 3). Administrators and staff viewed the problem as external, allowing them to divert responsibility onto the Middletown group SAFE and the “victims” themselves. The only major structural move on the part of Wesleyan’s administration to respond to the frightening situation for female students on campus – the Escort Service – was severely lacking. In mid-May, 1980 the Student Affairs Committee (a sub-section of Wesleyan’s student government) voted to expand funding for “safety services,” add an additional Escort vehicle, and implement the “Roving Escort” Service (Fraser 1980e: 1). Two months
into the next academic year, the same reporter announced that the “changes in handling women’s safety issues had been ‘cosmetic’” (Fraser 1980i: 1). A person who withheld yo name reported that instead of one unsafe car, the Escort Service now had two (“Faculty Cars” 1980: 2). Additionally, Public Safety officials did not even record incidents of sexual assault and harassment on campus until 1988 (“Wesleyan Activism” 1998: 17).

Women had been at Wesleyan for over ten years and services for addressing and preventing assault were still almost entirely absent from the campus save for the failing Escort Service. The people in charge of providing these services were unanimously blaming the “victims,” rather than acknowledging the need for improvements to the Escort Service, as well as additional preventative and responsive resources. Jennifer Curtis ’82 described the school as using an “[a]daptive response” instead of actually trying to prevent violence in the first place (Curtis 1980a: 2).

Measures to keep assaults from happening only came after the fact and laid the full responsibility on the students (in particular, those “at risk” of getting assaulted.) Curtis spoke out against the administration’s inadequate response:

I protest, however, that it is the responsibility of the Wesleyan Community to modify their habits to ADAPT and, in doing only that, to endure passively a social evil… it is our collective responsibility to tackle the source of the problem of sexual assault with all its social ramifications.

The burden was being placed almost exclusively on the potential “victims,” instead of acknowledging institutional problems and inadequacies. Curtis also cited a general lack of “community support” for students working on these issues. By blaming the “victims,” staff, administrators, and many students displayed a widespread understanding of sexual assault as women’s problem. In other words, it was the
responsibility of female students to keep themselves safe and seek out services, even if there were “possible delays” (Bodnar 1980b: 2). As Landau stated, Wesleyan administrators did not feel they should be the ones providing these services (Bodnar 1980a: 1).

By April of 1980, the newly formed student group STOP Assault had given up on waiting for Public Safety to meet the requirements they, along with other students, were demanding. On April fourth they made their first advertisement for the new “WALKING ESCORT” service, telling students, “Find other people to walk home with OR use sign-up sheet” (“For Your Information” 1980s: 7). STOP Assault advertised the service in the Argus for the remainder of the year, in addition to hosting a “RALLY” on April eighth (“For Your Information” 1980t: 7). Beginning on April twentieth, fifteen volunteers walked along established paths at night “wearing wide-brimmed safari hats and ringing bells of eveningtide” (Olson 1980c: 3). With all of the articles appearing weekly regarding women’s safety, students who had spent the past year or more fighting administrative officials for Roving Escorts, in addition to numerous other badly needed resources, had no choice but to take over what should have been an administrative responsibility. The negligence in not prioritizing the safety of female students by Wesleyan administrators and staff demonstrated a school still committed to its male students. In other words, in 1980 Wesleyan University was still institutionally patriarchal, accepting women’s status as sexual prey as natural and treating women as passive “victims,” while the only male attacked was presented as an empowered survivor.
A month later STOP Assault hosted the first annual Take Back the Night! A group of eighty women marched through Middletown, along with ten men who formed a separate support march (Fraser 1980: 1). Walking up High Street, the president’s office barely one hundred yards to their left, the marchers passed a large, brown building and encountered several individuals. These men, these frat “brothers,” did not passively watch the marchers pass. They changed Take Back the Night! from a demand to a question, to which they firmly replied, “NO.” To be precise, they began shouting at the women, calling them “whores” and demanding “more rape.”

After the rally ended, the supportive male march went to the frat (Psi U) to talk to the “brothers.” Wesleyan’s patriarchal structure, treating sexual assault and violence against women as inevitable, allowed male bonding through the sexual objectification of women to take place. Understandings of sexual assault and the role of women at Wesleyan created an environment where fraternity men could yell violent, sexually explicit comments at women.

Fraternities that had existed at Wesleyan since the early 1800s, positioned on High Street across from College Row – containing the President’s Office and most major administrative buildings – were institutionally recognized and accepted at the school. Wesleyan had historically privileged the desires of male fraternity members over the needs of female students. Although the pro-frat administrative bias was less blatant and extreme in the 1970s and ‘80s, fraternity organizations remained a central element of Wesleyan’s existence, the structural and social embodiment of male bonding through patriarchy. After all, an all-male fraternity inevitably centers its existence on the idea that female involvement will hinder the bonds of “brotherhood.”
As a result, fraternity “brothers” often behaved in manners proving their right to exist without women, labeling female students the sexual “other.”

**The Brothers of Wesleyan: Granting Fraternities a Privileged Status**

Seven fraternities existed on Wesleyan’s campus during the 1979-1980 school year: Delta Tau Delta (DTD), Delta Kappa Epsilon (DKE), Chi Psi, Alpha Delta Phi (Alpha Delt), Eclectic, Beta, and Psi Upsilon (Psi U). Of the seven, Alpha Delt was the only to admit women. Although DTD had opened its applicant pool to include women in 1970, no women applied to the fraternity that year and it is not clear that any women ever did (“Delta Tau Delta” 1970: 5). In 1970, DTD’s president, Hank Shelton, explained that “the advantages of a fraternity are not such that they are limited exclusively to men; nor are all one’s friends necessarily men.” However, by 1980, the fraternity had either abandoned the initiative or returned to barring female admissions. Wesleyan’s fraternities – aside from Alpha Delt – did not accept women into their “brotherhoods” and remained male-only organizations, remnants of Wesleyan’s history as a white, male institution. Although their members no longer comprised ninety percent of the student body as they had at the turn of the 20th century, fraternity organizations and members remained central to the financial and structural elements of Wesleyan. In arguing against all-male fraternities at Wesleyan, in 1980 student Robert Bailey-Mignott explained that “a large majority of the Alumni Association is made up of ex-fraternity brothers” (Silverstein and Bailey-Mignott 1980: 5).
Members of Wesleyan fraternities regularly disrespected and harassed female students and their actions were routinely ignored and/or written off by administrators, staff, and many students. When a student reported that two fraternity “brothers” had sexually assaulted her on April 4, 1980 the incident was described as “harass[ment]” (Dray 1980: 1). As had been the case with the “accusation” of a Public Safety Officer, the focus was on the “accused” men, under the title “Two Face Penalty For Harassment.” Jim Dray reported, “The victim complained that she was grabbed, kissed and physically coerced despite her pleas for the men to stop” while at a party at their frathouse. The language describing the incidents involving the fraternity “brothers” and the Public Safe officer was passive and hypothetical, describing “alleged” attacks and a student having “complained.” These two articles, along with the report of the male “victim,” were also the only that did not include reminders for (female) students to modify their behavior. Both articles began with the aftermath for those accused; the Public Safety Officer was merely transferred to another department of Wesleyan after a period of paid leave, while the frat brothers were suspended.

Throughout the 1979-1980 school year students regularly reported incidents involving fraternities and routinely nothing was done. In October of 1979, Susan M. Read reported fraternity “brothers” chanting about “want[ing] some fuckin’ sex” and “twats” in front of the library and after reporting their disruptive behavior to Public Safety nothing happened (1979: 2). In responding to the incident, she described Wesleyan’s campus as one where “[w]omen are still viewed as sources of sexual pleasure for hungry men.” The acceptance of women’s sexualized status, exhibited through reactions to anti-women violence, was particularly prevalent in settings of
all-male bonding and “brotherhood” (i.e. fraternities). Also during October, several
Chi Psi “brothers” beat up two Middletown men unprovoked, according to student
Bradley Whitford (1979: 3). Public Safety did not respond to the incident, despite
having been contacted three times during the night. Whitford told the Argus, “I’m
tired of this school sanctioning the violent stupidity of some of the fraternities.”
Walter Calhoun, a Chi Psi “brother,” countered by expressing his anger with the
“lies” being told about his frat, as well as “the polarization of groups within the
university” (Calhoun 1979: 3). Mark R. Zitter criticized the Argus for having an
“anti-frat bias” (1979: 2). In reality, fraternity members had little reason to worry
about the Argus as a potential enemy; they had much stronger allies.

Even if Zitter’s observations about the Argus’ stance on fraternities were
correct, the Wesleyan administration had a clear bias privileging the schools’
fraternities. The two fraternity “brothers” accused of harassment in April of 1980
appealed their suspensions to Wesleyan’s current President, Collin Campbell, who
decided their punishment was unfair (“Assault Debate Carries Over” 1980: 1). The
S.J.B. had suspended one, a junior, for a semester and the other, a senior with a prior
conviction, for a year. Campbell waited until the day prior to the last day of exams to
present his final decision. A Wesleyan president had never overturned an S.J.B.
verdict before, but Campbell decided the men “did not have the advantage of prior
notice and therefore could not have been expected to anticipate such severe penalties
as a consequence of their actions.” The accused junior was placed on disciplinary
probation for the remainder of his time at Wesleyan, while the senior was assigned to
complete a project with the Dean of students, Edward Shanahan, “to increase his
sensitivity to the impact of sexist behavior on the rights and feelings of others and in a community such as Wesleyan.”

Campbell told students that “the Code of Non-Academic Conduct did not specifically prohibit sexual abuse or assault.” Although non-sexual violence was openly banned on Wesleyan’s campus, Campbell was not sure if sexual violence was explicitly forbidden. Violence against women was far more likely to be sexual in nature, while violence against men was far more likely to be non-sexual. As a result, men’s safety was unequivocally protected, while their female peers could be sexually assaulted without the school’s clear disapproval. As a result, Wesleyan was able to provide minimal, unsatisfactory services to prevent and respond to violence against women. Sanday describes the absence of punishment for violent actions against women as an element of most colleges in the United States:

The college environment is usually a total world of living learning. This means that colleges have more control over individual behavior than do high schools. Colleges also have the opportunity to educate students and the right to punish students who engage in rape-prone behavior. Unfortunately, few colleges choose to exercise either the opportunity to educate or the right to punish. (2007: 54)

The decisions of Wesleyan administrators played a central role in the campus climate, enabling the continuation of violence against female students and the privileging of fraternity members. “Sexual abuse” was added to the Code of Non-Academic Conduct only after Campbell severely reduced the fraternity members’ sentences (Dinges 1980: 3). Wesleyan has historically prioritized fraternity “brothers” and white men in general.

Early in October of 1980, several fraternity members exhibited their prejudices against students of color and, once more, administrators failed to respond.
Following an open house at the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity, twelve students (four of whom were DKE members) ran around naked and “made obscene gestures to passing cars,” leading to a verbal altercation with Middletown residents (“Students Alleged” 1980: 1). Illegal behavior – public nudity, disturbing the peace – was ignored and allowed to escalate during the night. The students barked “obscenities” and “racial slurs” at residents of the area that was commonly known as Traverse Square. Following the event, one student, Alvin Peters, tried to address the issue with Dean of the College Edgar Beckham. According to Peters, “Rather than listening and responding rationally Beckham resorted to emotional attack, shouting open insults and finally the demand that I leave his office” (Peters 1980: 2). In the hearing of the case the following month, the S.J.B. referred to the event as “an unfortunate and thoughtless prank without malicious intent” (Clawson, et al. 1980: 3). Even the students’ judicial system acknowledged the special status of fraternity members.

Thirteen Wesleyan professors submitted an article expressing their outrage with the S.J.B.’s dealing of the case, stating, “This was no prank.” Similar letters poured in. Cornelius Foote, Jr., a student representative of Ujamaa – the Black student union on campus – described the lasting effects of the frivolous response by Dean Beckham and the S.J.B. Referring to a hateful, anti-Black letter sent to Malcolm X House, an all-Black residence on campus, Foote stated, “I don’t think that this incident grew out of [the] Traverse Square [incident] but that racism has always existed and people feel they have a license to do what they want to do now” (1980b: 1). When students and even faculty members tried to take action against the privileging of white and/or male bodies on campus (embodied through responses to
the Traverse Square incident) they quickly discovered how little power they had to sway administrative decisions. Campbell’s May veto on the fraternity members’ sentences had “set off a round of student protests which lasted into early summer.” The reversal had come so late in the year that it was not in the Argus until the following 1980-‘81 academic year, at which time the school remained in an uproar over the issue. Jennifer Curtis told the school, “That there is no section of our handbook which deals with sexual assault under such a heading should not have confused our president” (Curtis 1980b: 2). She concluded, “This incident was an assault, period.” However, after the first Argus edition of the year, nothing further was mentioned on the episode. Ultimately, (primarily female) students had no power to affect Campbell’s decision or the privileged status of fraternity members.

Less than three weeks later, six members of the Delta Tau Delta fraternity hung a blow-up sex doll from a noose in front of the Feminist House (a student residence on campus) (Meyer 1980: 1). According to Feminist House members, “Eat me” and “Frats Rule” were written near the doll’s oral opening (Elliot et al. 1980: 2). A target was drawn around the vaginal opening and the back had a note: “Dear Girls, We will be dropping by sometime for an LBQ brunch to straighten you folks out.—Frat Men. P.S. Love XXX.” The Feminist House had opened in 1975 as a central residence for feminist-identified students and feminist action on campus, hosting a wide variety of events, discussions, and meetings (“Wesleyan Activism” 1998: 17). The note left by DTD members referenced the weekly potluck brunches hosted by the
Lesbian, Bisexual, and Questioning Women’s Group (a.k.a. LBQ or LBQW) at Feminist House (Schwartz 1980a: 9).  

An investigation into the incident immediately began and the following day the guilty DTD members left an anonymous apology note the residents never found (Elliot et al. 1980: 2). Soon after, two of the men involved came with DTD’s president to apologize to the Feminist House members in person. They also left a copy of their apology letter with the Argus, which stated, “But whatever you do – please try to realize that what was done was done out of ignorance and drunkenness, not out of meanness.” The Feminist House members responded with an Argus submission, entitled “Sign of a deeper sickness,” telling the campus, “The existence of anti-feminist sentiments on the Wesleyan campus cannot be denied.” Feminist and women’s organizing were seen as threats to all-male bonding and prevalent patriarchy at Wesleyan. LBQ women and Feminist House members represented constituencies who demonstrated their power by supporting each other as women, bonding without men, in a type of “sisterhood” counter to the “brotherhood” of fraternities.

Several DTD members not involved in the incident submitted an article three days later, taking responsibility for how anti-feminist sentiments within their

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21 The Feminist House had been closely tied to the activism and concerns of LBQ women since its formation and, following the DTD incident, Feminist House members affirmed the House as a “supporter of LBQ and gay rights in general” (Elliot et al. 1980: 2). Prior to LBQ’s formation in 1979, most LBQ women spent their time in feminist circles rather than with gay men and Wesleyan’s feminist groups and activism had a clear link with LBQ identities during this period (Gentry 2000:18). Although a “Wesleyan Gay Group” began in March of 1975 by Bill Koplon ’75 and David Leisner’ 76 – later renamed “The Gay Alliance” or G.A. – it remained a male-dominated space throughout its existence (Schwartz 1980a: 9). Female members criticized their lack of voice in the group, but were largely ignored and eventually created LBQ.
fraternity had contributed to these types of incidents (Nicholas et al. 1980: 2). They told the school, “We came to realize that the problem of anti-feminist feelings lies as much with ourselves as with the pledges directly concerned.” However, administrators were not required to acknowledge how their granting of privileged status to fraternity members contributed to their ability to continuously behave in derogatory, prejudicial manners. Feminist House hosted a “Feminist Conversation Hour” the following week, but no one publicly proposed methods to stop the anti-feminist, anti-women, anti-LBQ\textsuperscript{22} sentiments that had suggested the need for the event itself. The targets of the incident were now the ones taking on the burden of responding. A tentative plan for the responsible DTD members to meet with Feminist House members was proposed, but no follow up appeared stating whether the meeting took place (Meyer 1980: 1).

Fraternities were institutionally accepted and supported structures and social venues at Wesleyan. In 1980, seven fraternities existed on campus, and no sororities. Students reacted to the sex doll and Traverse Square incidents by debating the existence and benefits of fraternities on Wesleyan’s campus. The president of Alpha Delt, Clara Silverstein, submitted a “PRO” fraternity article, citing the social benefits of frats while acknowledging “some built-in problems with fraternities, especially the tendency towards sexism in all-male houses” (Silverstein 1980: 5). Robert Bailey-Mignott presented the “CON” side:

\textsuperscript{22} LBQ (lesbian, bisexual, and questioning) is part of a larger abbreviation, referred to as the endless acronym, referring to the wide variety of non-conformative gender and sexual identity categories. I use LBQ as these are the more common terms during the 1970s and ‘80s, with more sexual and gender identity labels arising later.
Fraternities continue to be a negative aspect of our college campus. Fraternity members are free to engage in obscene and barbarous activities without fear of punishment from Wesleyan’s administration or retaliation by the Wesleyan/Middletown community… As a black person I am particularly suspicious of fraternities and the warped Anglo values and white-male supremacist ideals they covertly represent. (Bailey-Mignott 1980: 5)

According to him, Wesleyan fraternities “[r]efer to dances which attract women from other prestigious Northeastern colleges as ‘cattle drivers’… As of now fraternities have no set guidelines by the administration as to how they should conduct themselves in the Wesleyan community.” Fraternities were allowed to exist as predominantly white male structural and social systems that often treated women as prey – “quails,” “cattle.” They were structures for white male socializing and bonding, where graduates would have lasting financial, social, and structural ties to their fraternal “brotherhood” and Wesleyan. Their houses existed as reminders of the ongoing dedication of Wesleyan’s administrators to campus fraternities, continuing from administrators’ sponsorship and assistance in building the houses themselves in the early 1900s (Potts 1992: 194-195). They remained some of the superior buildings on campus.

Fraternity pledging and hazing rituals were accepted and ignored by Wesleyan’s administrators and Public Safety. In 1984, Beckham told the Wesleyan community that fraternity activities were “their own business… As long as pledges consent to the activity and are not harassed or abused, fraternities can do with their pledges what they wish” (Kates 1984: 3). Beckham was responding to a recent Delta Kappa Epsilon “initiation” ritual, whereby DKE members threatened students standing nearby, forcing them to move from the shuttle (the new name for the Escort Service) pickup spot. The article quoted Psi U brother Evan Ackman ’85 as
describing the importance of “initiations,” “The pledges learn to protect each other’s rocks.” Male students were learning, through fraternal organizing, to look out for each other, reaffirming their solidarity and superiority. Beckham’s statement privileged the social desires of male fraternity members over the safety of their female peers. In April of 1980, an Argus editorial entitled, “Don’t support sexist frats” acknowledged the “invaluable” contribution fraternities made to Wesleyan’s social environment, adding:

[F]raternities by their very nature are set up as exclusive bastions of male dominance. Females are not allowed to be members of the community. (Although women do live in some of the fraternities, they are still not national members). 
(1985: 2)

In response, “Some Delta Tau Brothers” wrote, “There is certainly nothing sexist in wanting to spend some time with a group of male friends” (1985: 3). Peter Stine ’84, the former Vice-President of DTD disagreed, asking his former “brothers,” “Why is there a need to be with male friends rather than just friends? Is sex really the overriding trait in one’s personality?” (Stine 1985: 2).


Student hostility toward fraternities builds after a woman alone in her dorm room is frightened by a rowdy mob of men stomping, shouting, and banging on windows and doors throughout her dormitory. When she calls Public Safety for help the dispatcher tells her: “That's only a fraternity round-up, just stay in your room.” (“Wesleyan Activism” 1998: 19)
The incident had occurred during the spring of 1986, a year before the move for fraternal “co-education” was implemented. However, in November of 1989, the three-year plan ran out and “nothing ha[d] been done” (21). Several students responded by forming a Free High Street (the street where Wesleyan’s fraternities were located) group and hosting protests during Homecoming weekend of 1990.

Between 1980 and 1990, the series of events involving anti-women sentiments and treatment on the part of fraternity members revealed underlying elements of Wesleyan’s administration and student body. During the time period, various administrative members sanctioned the behavior of fraternity members at Wesleyan. First, in the spring of 1980 President Campbell became the only President to veto an S.J.B. decision, finding it unfair that fraternity members convicted of harassing a female student “did not have the advantage of prior notice and therefore could not have been expected to anticipate such severe penalties as a consequence of their actions” (“Assault Debate” 1980: 1). Campbell prioritized the requests of the male fraternity members over the safety and comfort of the woman who had been harassed. Fraternities were important social, structural, financial, and historical elements of Wesleyan and Campbell confirmed their privileged status through his management of the incident. Furthermore, he treated sexual assault against female students as an ambiguous issue, one Wesleyan was not yet sure it forbade.

Then, in the fall of 1980 Dean Beckham refused to discuss the Traverse Square incident and the S.J.B. – the judicial arm of Wesleyan’s student government – referred to the incident as a “prank” (Peters 1980: 2; Clawson, et al. 1980: 3). The responses of Beckham and the S.J.B. depicted a general desire on the part of
Wesleyan’s administration and student government to ignore often violent and anti-women fraternity actions, described as “pranks,” implying humorous, harmless incidents. In 1984, Beckham explicitly sanctioned the right of fraternities to conduct themselves as they wanted (Kates 1984: 3). Again the desires of fraternity members were privileged over the needs of female students who were waiting for the shuttle to pick them up, a historical precedence dating back to the late 1800s. Next, when DTD brothers hung a sex-doll and made threatening, sexually explicit comments in the fall of 1980, the only public responses came from students. Finally, when it was decided by Wesleyan’s student government that fraternities needed to start admitting women within three years in 1987, the administration took no measures to do so. Fraternal structures that socially privileged men and often treated women as sexual objects were a central part of the financial, social, and structural elements of Wesleyan.

The primary reactions to fraternity incidents came from students and centered in debating the existence of male-only fraternities at Wesleyan. By discussing the usefulness of fraternities, the focus was moved from the underlying structures that contributed to an environment of male bonding, often at the expense of female students. Instead, the emphasis was on particular students’ actions, localizing the problem in a student designated “sexist,” “racist,” or “homophobic.” Fraternity members often defended themselves by claiming “ignorance and drunkenness” or that there is “nothing sexist in wanting to spend some time with a group of male friends” (Elliot et al 1980: 2; Some Delta Tau Delta Brothers 1985: 3). People were described as either “mean” (i.e. sexist, racist, homophobic, etc.) or making mistakes, but still generally in favor of a “diverse” student body; there was no acknowledgement of
underlying institutions of privilege and prejudice. Although students acknowledged complexity, they divided themselves as either for or against fraternities, a split that largely pitted men against women.

**Debating Deep Throat**

The dispute over fraternities simplified a complex issue of gender relations on campus into a binary discussion. When students questioned the gender roles and prejudices exhibited in pornography a similar split occurred, this time pitting pro-porn students (almost all men) against their anti-porn peers (almost all women.) The debate initially began over the decision of students in the Butterfields Dormitory, Rooms C. 332-340 to host four screenings of the arguably most profitable film ever made, *Deep Throat*, at the end of October 1979 (Van Biema 1979: 1). Several members of the Women’s Coalition – a broad campus group that was formed in the late 1970s – were less than happy that *Deep Throat* was being brought to their campus. During a Sunday brunch in October of 1979, Coalition members discussed the upcoming screening and, sometime during chewing and chatting, decided to take action. Through analyzing the ensuing public discussions, I argue that the actions of these students remained trapped by a campus privileging male students and stifling feminist and women’s activism and organizing.

Women’s Coalition members formed an ad-hoc group called “Wesleyan Students Against Pornography” (a.k.a. W.S.A.P.) for the sole purpose of protesting the four *Deep Throat* screenings and the group vanished soon after. According to W.S.A.P., the viewing of pornographic material was a theoretical manifestation of
sexual fantasies to rape women that provoked real rape: “PORNOGRAPHY IS THE THEORY, RAPE THE PRACTICE” (Wesleyan Students Against Pornography 1979: 2). In a meeting with the Butterfield residents before the screenings, members of W.S.A.P. proposed substituting the film with the anti-pornography movie Rape Culture (Van Biema 1979: 1). The hosts declined, but allowed the protestors to give a brief speech before the first showing. After W.S.A.P.’s speech at the first viewing, only three of the seventy students in attendance walked out. A total of 650 students attended the screenings, with the hosts amassing $375 in proceeds at $1.50 a ticket (Fixx 1979: 2). School officials allowed the showings to occur, renting out the Science Center Auditorium and profiting through the process (Van Biema 1979: 1). However, their indirect participation was not addressed and conversations remained between and about student motivations and actions. The residents of Butterfields C. 332-340 were profiting, as was Wesleyan itself. The lucrative venture was understood by many as purely financial in nature and purpose. Peggy Sanday described the showing of pornographic films on college campuses as a common occurrence throughout the United States “in response to student demand, which nets a profit for the student organization responsible for arranging campus entertainment” (2007: 61-62).

Despite their decision to show Deep Throat, the hosts refused to discuss the “politics” around pornography and the film. They explained to W.S.A.P. their decision “not to address the issue of pornography” and their engagement in “a profit-making venture.” Similarly, the hall’s Resident Advisor (a paid student position through the Office of Residential Life) told the Argus, “We feel we are divorced from
the issue of pornography” (“The High Price” 1979: 2). According to the article’s reporter, who was clearly taking the side of anti-pornography students, “There is no such thing as a purely financial venture.” The residents of Butterfields C 332-340 responded to the debates by explaining that because they had thought “there wouldn’t be any reaction to this… We therefore feel that no useful purpose can be served by further public bickering, and hope that various debates may drop to the level of personal discussion” (1979: 3). Through their dominant, male position, they were able to avoid conversation and claim detachment from the issue of pornography.

Many Wesleyan students referred to the protestors as “blowing things all out of proportion” and/or serving “no useful purpose” but “public bickering” (Vann and Washko 1979: 3; Butt C 332-340 1979: 3). Student John D. Fixx wrote:

Wesleyan has a reputation as a radical school but it’s a shame when a handful of students, eager to preserve this reputation and fight for a cause (any cause), overlook the more important fact that Wesleyan exists to educate. The showing of a movie, a form of entertainment, was turned into a ludicrous issue by a feminist group that got itself in a little too deep. (Fixx 1979: 2)

Wesleyan’s standing as a “radical” school – a reputation directly rooted in its supposedly “diverse” student body – became the means by which many students argued against the predominance of prejudices on the campus. Students wanted to participate in fun “form[s] of entertainment” rather than be confronted with “a ludicrous issue by a feminist group,” Fixx claimed. He valued Wesleyan as an educational institution, acknowledging the need for “entertainment” but not the implications of the social dynamics around such entertainment. The reactions against the “feminist group” (W.S.A.P.) delegitimized and infantilized the predominantly female-identified students’ arguments as irrational and excessively emotional.
Students David Vann and Greg Washko, who explained that since they thought *Rape Culture* to be “a racist film,” described those showing it as “racist” if those showing *Deep Throat* were “sexist” (Vann and Washko 1979: 3). Their conclusion: “Wes might on the other hand stop blowing things all out of proportion and realize that the people who showed Rape Culture are not racist and the people who showed Deep Throat are not pornographers.” According to the pro-porn students, who chose “de-politicization,” Wesleyan students were too committed to fighting for “any cause.” This argument became an attack on particular students taking up activist stances, labeling their actions minoritarian and unnecessary. By labeling particular people and movies “sexist” or “racist,” pro-porn students were able to avoid dialogues about these issues and claim their own “de-politicization.”

To the many student supporters, the act of watching *Deep Throat*, as well as the movie’s content, were only political once the protestors brought their feminist politics into the matter. The hosts explained that the viewing was “a novelty to many members of the student body, rather than as a social statement of sincere value” (Butt C. 332-340 1979: 3). W.S.A.P.’s argument that “[t]he characters in this film are not people, but penises and a mouth” were inherently understood as political because they went against mainstream understandings of gendered representations and violence (W.S.A.P. 1979: 2). At Wesleyan, gender dynamics were only discussed officially around specific incidents and individuals, such as the hosts’ motivations in showing the film, an individual case of assault, or a fraternity member playing a “prank” (Clawson, et al. 1980: 3). For instance, whether or not women were objectified as
tools for male pleasure was not being discussed. Instead, students were either accepting that pornography objectified women or that it did not.

With the U.S. feminist movement leading the way in most anti-porn arguments, students coming out of a feminist background would have likely already participated in these conversations. For instance, the radical feminist group Cell 16 made the same argument that pornography is “violence against women” during its existence from 1968 through 1973 (Echols 1989: 165; 159; 166). Wesleyan’s W.S.A.P. organizers spoke from a rhetoric directly tied to the radical feminist “movement” that lasted from 1967 through 1975, in particular their emphasis on the need for the complete ban on pornography. ²³ One of the primary foci of radical feminism through 1971 was “violence of the mind,” perpetuated through the objectification and subjugation of women through such venues as pornography, heterosexuality, and marriage (201). As with feminist and women’s organizing at Wesleyan, they addressed the broader problem of female oppression through seeking the abolishment of certain elements of society. Beginning in 1971, many sects of radical feminism shifted their attention to physical violence against women, starting rape crisis centers, like SAFE, beginning in 1973.

During the *Deep Throat* debate at Wesleyan, one student, Mark Sirota, who described the protestors’ opinions as “untenable,” presented an example of students not fully comprehending the link between “violence of the mind” and physical

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²³ For more information on U.S. “radical feminism” from 1967 to 1975 refer to Alice Echols’ *Daring to Be BAD: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*. According to Echols, “radical feminism” criticized liberal forms of feminism “for pursuing ‘formal equality within a racist, class-stratified system’” and used women-only spaces “as a kind of culture of active resistance” (1989: 3; 21).
violence (Sirota 1979: 2). Sirota outlined two brands of rape, describing the first type of rape as a “purely aggressive, destructive act” that includes raping a small girl and “cannot be attributed to pornography.” Other rapes, he argued, “can be seen as ‘more sexual,’ as opposed to merely violent (e.g. a man who is allowed some physical interaction with a woman, wants more than she is ready for, and rapes her.)”

According to his interpretation, if a woman permitted any level of physical contact before being raped, the act of raping her was inherently less violent. Sirota wrote his personal understandings of rape in a general framework, not implying that he was referring to incidents at Wesleyan. Instead, he was evaluating other students’ claims that the viewing of pornography directly contributed to rape. According to him, in addressing the second, “more sexual” form of rape, one could potentially blame pornography, but might as easily fault the church, parents, or countless other societal influences. According to him, the real perpetrator is the “prevalent attitude of the guy wants it; a good girl says no.”

Sirota received one response, from Lisa Kaufman ’80, emphasizing: “There are no partial rapes… Pornography is not a passive outcome of a deeply-rooted sexism; it is one of many embodiments of sexism and one of many vehicles for the continuation of sexism” (Kaufman 1979: 3). Kaufman and Sirota were both acknowledging the multiplicity and complexity of gender discrimination in U.S. society. However, while Sirota’s uncertainty over what group or people were at fault brought him to the conclusion that no one could be blamed, Kaufman called upon the radical feminist rhetoric of single-issue campaigns, “Pornography alone may not be to blame for the oppression and objectification of women, but I am willing to lop off
branches until I can uproot the tree.” Whether or not it was Kaufman’s intention, she succinctly described the nature of feminism and activism around women’s issues at Wesleyan. However, she did not recognize how cutting “off branches” had made the branches (i.e. pornography, women walking alone at night) the problem, rather than acknowledging the existence of “the tree” (i.e. systemic discrimination against women at Wesleyan.)

Opinions were simplified to “pro” or “anti” porn, with no opportunities to examine the gender stereotyping and sexual exploitation of women at Wesleyan. Without a basic understanding of the institutionalization of gendered oppression, students attacked for being in favor of pornography claimed “de-politicization” from the issue and the debate entirely. While many women’s and/or feminists groups on campus employed older radical feminist techniques in seeking the total eradication of particular elements of Wesleyan’s campus (i.e. pornography, fraternities) those arguing in favor of these institutions used social and monetary rhetoric. Even if frats and porn contributed to some negative instances and sentiments involving women, so long as individual people were not actually “sexist” or “racist” it was generally acceptable to claim “de-politicization” from issues that were located in the bodies of specific, “diverse” students. Throughout Wesleyan’s campus, targeting students taking up women’s and/or feminist issues was common. While most male students defended the existence of male-only fraternities, many questioned women’s organizing.
Women’s Organizing and Feminism: The Answer to Patriarchy

Women’s/feminist “issues” and organizing were considered by many students to be unnecessary. Within an environment that privileged male needs and experiences, and in which male social desires were prioritized, debates that largely became male verses female were either never resolved themselves or they ended in favor of the men. Ever since women had arrived at Wesleyan in 1872 and again in 1969, women’s and/or feminist organizing had been the primary venue through which female students responded to male dominance. In the 1800s and early 1900s, women had responded to their ostracization by creating women’s fraternities and literary societies, in addition to protesting their exclusion from the Olla Podrida yearbook (Potts 1992: 104; 214). However, in the 19th and 20th centuries these groups and meetings were prime targets for male students on campus. The first meeting of “Wesleyan Women’s Liberation,” a description implying a “movement” but in actuality referring to an informal meeting of “32 Liberated Women,” was reported in March of 1970 (1). The majority of attendees had come “out of curiosity” and included female faculty, student wives, and “[t]en Wesmen.” The agenda was informal, scattered, and overwhelmingly large, including: the inexistence of birth control pills, day care centers, and information about abortions on campus, to “job and salary discrimination, admission of women at Wesleyan, and women’s treatment by men in various areas of their lives.” The focus on women’s “issues” and needs had unearthed a multitude of venues through which to do this work.

The first discussion of “Women’s Liberation” at Wesleyan was determined by the make-up of the participants themselves, in particular, the “[t]en Wesmen.” The
men in attendance told the women they had “c[o]me to “observe” the meeting, but were ejected by the women when it was realized that their presence was not serving a useful purpose.” After being kicked out, the men locked the doors, “trapping the women inside.” Two women (infantilized by the article as “girls,” while referring to their male peers as adults, “men”) were forced to leave through the window and unlock the door. “Wesmen” literally and figuratively trapped Weswomen (a word never used by the Argus), attempting to hinder female organizing, even when it was not explicitly described as political. Female and feminist groups and discussions represented potential threats to Wesmen’s privileged role in a patriarchal structure. Feminist groups were the only venues through which women could escape their subjugated status, hooks writes (2000a: 14-15). She explains, “Female bonding was not possible within patriarchy; it was an act of treason. The feminist movement created the context for female bonding. We did not bond against men, we bonded to protect our interests as women.” Over the next ten years, feminism popularized at Wesleyan and continued to grow in the United States. For many at Wesleyan and beyond, feminism and women’s organizing was the answer to social and structural patriarchy.

The 1970 meeting of the “Wesleyan Women’s Liberation Movement” paralleled feminist and women’s groups of the 1960s that emphasized consciousness-raising (a.k.a. CR). bell hooks describes these early meetings as confessional and, for many, each session “served as a healing ritual” (8). The NY Radical Women’s Group (a.k.a. NYRW) is credited with having popularized the technique within the Women’s
“movement,” after appropriating it from Black Civil Rights organizing in the South.24 According to Alice Echols’ account Daring to Be BAD: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975, NYRW member Anne Forer recounted that CR was used as a technique in an early meeting of the group, because they had “no idea how women were truly oppressed” (83). Kathie Sarachild, a founding member of NYRW, described the feminist formula as starting with CR, which would then bring one closer to the “truth” once theory was added. The end result was action. Wesleyan’s first women’s meetings conducted themselves in a similar manner, trying to evaluate what action needed to be taken through a better understanding of their own experiences as women at Wesleyan (although it does not appear that this work involved feminist theory.)

A month later, on April 1, 1970, Lillian Robinson, a member of the Bread and Roses women’s organization and a professor at M.I.T., spoke to the Wesleyan community (Edmondson 1970: 1). Under the title, “Don’t Create Humanist Whores, Female Liberationist Demands,” the Argus summarized Robinson’s speech, including how the policies of schools like Yale and Princeton created “humanist whores.” She referred to Wesleyan as having an opportunity “for creative programs” and “called on college women to work out better ways for surviving, growing, and winning the

24Pam Allen and Shulamith Firestone founded NYRW in the fall of 1967 and the group existed for not much longer than a year (as was the case with many radical feminist groups formed and disbanded between 1967 and 1975) (Echols 1989: 73). After an initial go-around where each woman stated how she personally felt oppressed, NYRW began advocating strongly for the use of CR in feminist groups (84). The three step formula (start with experience, add theory, and create “true,” feminist action) was expanded upon and shifted throughout other feminist groups, but the three elements remained central to women’s and feminist movements during the time period.
struggle” (2). For Robinson, “women’s liberation mean[t] revolutionary politics” and she emphasized the need to recognize “the daily lives of women a[s] ‘objectively political’” (2). Whether or not the women organizing a month prior thought of themselves as of a similar vein as Robinson, the Argus lumped them together as “Female Liberationists.” If these women were truly “liberationists” they represented a real threat to male dominance on campus. Less than two weeks after the Argus report, Robinson sent an angry letter to the paper, entitled “Sexist Troll?” (Robinson 1970: 7). According to her, the Argus had misquoted her, “I assume there’s a sexist troll in your print-shop. All power to the people: off the trolls!” Even though Robinson was someone acknowledging oppressive systems, she also – as a part of the radical feminist movement of the early ‘70s – targeted specific, “sexist” individuals (i.e. “trolls.”)

Three weeks after Robinson’s talk, Florence Kennedy and Diane Shulder – both described by the Argus as “Women’s Liberationists” – presented a similarly radical lecture on the need for feminist action (Christensen 1970: 2). It is not clear who organized these speakers, although their presence directly following the March meeting certainly implies a connection. Kennedy and Shulder described women as “oppressed people,” and described how “oppressed people don’t generally challenge the power base of the oppressors, but the oppressors are always afraid they will.” Florence told the seventy people present, “Male chauvinists start shakin’ / Today’s pigs, tomorrow’s bacon!” Robinson, Florence, and Shulder all called on Weswomen for action, to overturn the patriarchal structures in which they existed. After all,
according to Kennedy and Shulder, men were already afraid of a potential gender rebellion – as exhibited by the actions of “Wesmen” in the March student meeting.

Despite initial setbacks, Wesleyan’s “Women’s Liberation” was making progress, and Tobias “was hired as a direct result of the movement started by Wesleyan women” the year before (Bryant 1970: 2). Tobias later described the sentiments of Wesleyan’s current President, Edwin D. Etherington, during her July interview as “truly interested in educating women, both for the sake of women and for the sake of the college” (Tobias 1990: 8). She described the school as wanting “to recharge the university and they thought that women would contribute to the process.” After joining Wesleyan’s staff over the summer of 1970, she opened the academic year with an informal tea for female students in August (Butler 1971: 1). Reflecting on the event a year later, Tobias remarked, “The tea had a feminist orientation, and apparently some women felt imposed upon.” Tobias had already dedicated her work to feminism for years, including her central role in founding the National Organization for Women (N.O.W.) and her decision to join Wesleyan’s staff as the “figurehead” of coeducation. Wesleyan’s female students referred to Tobias in reaction to their experiences at the school, not necessarily out of any political or feminist motivation. As a result, when a new group formed – “Women’s Liberation Makes a New Start at Wesleyan” – on October 30, 1970, the central role of personal experiences from the year before remained (Bryant 1970: 2). Their main goals were described as “form[ing] a strong link with the Middletown community” and creating “small group ‘rap sessions.’ In these sessions women would discuss the problem of
female identity and the need for solidarity between women.” In addition, they would be bringing a few speakers on women’s issues throughout the year.

On March 13, 1971, Wesleyan students and faculty shared their experiences with coeducation with the outside community. Freshman Sarah Cady and senior Steven Simons worked with Tobias to create a television program entitled “Educating Women for Leadership,” which would air on WTIC-TV Channel Three (“Sunday TV Show” 1971: 1). According to the WUNB article, featured in the Argus, the broadcast “examines Wesleyan’s initial experiences at a coeducational institution, and some of the educational and social adjustments the University is making for its women undergraduates.” The reporter implied a positive environment, where Wesleyan was “adjust[ing]” – making subtle, slight alterations for women. The wording coincided with the Argus’ October, 1970 description of “Women’s Liberation” re-forming “[t]o foster the causes of allegedly oppressed womanhood” (Bryant 1970: 2). In 1974, student Jerry Stouck presented a general evaluation of “the feminist cause” at Wesleyan (Stouck 1974: 1). Stouck summarized his research by describing “[i]nterviews this week with a number of students indicate that many of both sexes are less than satisfied with the progress of the feminist cause on this campus.” However, Stouck did not provide specific issues or student quotations. Instead, he described the recent opening of the Women’s Center in the Butterfield Dormitories, paired with the formation of “the Center for Women’s Activities.”

The only commentary on the new Women’s Center and group came from administrative members, specifically Tobias and Associate Dean Alison Heisch. Tobias and Heisch both viewed the Center as “inappropriate.” According to Stouck,
Tobias described Wesleyan as more advanced in its management of “institutional sexism” than other schools; “Wesleyan has largely been able to avoid the kinds of institutional sexism that may exist at other schools because women in the administration have worked to diffuse such problems ‘before the fact.’” Heisch explained that student efforts should instead “be directed toward increasing awareness of the subtleties of feminism and sexism.” According to her, “such heavy-duty problems as unwed teen-age mothers, abused wives, and unfair labor practices” were already being met by the Middletown Women’s Center (MWC), where students were welcome.

The three MWC services Heisch cited did not reflect the realities of life at Wesleyan. Although many students may have had part-time jobs (likely through the University), their primary role was in the classroom. Students certainly could have worked with the MWC to fight the issues Heisch described as “heavy-duty,” but these issues did not meet the personal needs of students. The MWC, as a community center, would not be addressing the institutionalized and permitted gendered prejudices on the Wesleyan campus, including the treatment of violence against women and fraternity infractions. In other words, Wesleyan formed its own population that was both separate from, and part of, the larger Middletown society. Wesleyan had its own legislation, leaders, and judicial system, to which the Center for Women’s Activities would be responding. The group sought to “identify and try to better meet the needs of the Wesleyan community with respect to the issues of feminism, sexual, and ‘sexual liberation’ in general among male and female students” under the guidance of Sheila Tobias, who would serve as their advisor. Even though Tobias approved of the
group’s existence – Heisch’s opinion on the Center for Women’s Activities was not included in the article – she described Wesleyan as largely having avoided “institutional sexism.” Apparently, Tobias believed that her original call for “radical restructuring” had largely been accomplished (Tobias 1990: 8).

If Tobias, the figurehead and staff coordinator of women’s “issues” on campus, did not see much “institutional sexism” at Wesleyan and did not approve of the opening of the Women’s Center, then students likely had few other options for staff support and assistance. In her text *Disciplining Feminism: From Social Activism to Academic Discourse*, Ellen Messer-Davidow explains that students and staff on U.S. college campuses could not publicly discuss the “systemicity of academic sex discrimination” until the 1970s, when these practices could be talked about in the context of academic feminism (2002: 49). Although Tobias may have discussed general and theoretical gender prejudice in her women’s studies courses (to be discussed in Chapter Three), as a paid member of Wesleyan’s staff, it is unlikely that she could have made a more judgmental statement about the gendered dynamics at Wesleyan. In 1978, Tobias left (Tobias 1990: 8). The following year, no one was hired to replace Tobias. And, during the 1979-1980 academic year, eleven assaults against women were reported, *Deep Throat* was shown and protested, a sex-doll was hung outside of Feminist House, and students hosted the first Take Back the Night! Not only had Tobias played an important role in women’s organizing, she had been the only administrator in such a position. After leaving Wesleyan in 1978, with her explanation being, “The reason I left Wesleyan was because I had done the job I came
to do as an administrator which was helping Wesleyan become coed,” student organizing became increasingly fractured and reactionary (Walker 1990).

In November of 1979, Laura Fraser ‘82 – one of the main reporters on campus assaults and problems with the Escort Service and a member of the Feminist House – assessed the current state of feminism on campus, following a formal conversation at the House on November eighth. Fraser summarized the meeting, entitled “Discussion in a Feminist Context,” where 130 participants “explore[d] issues like alienation, definitions of feminism and sexism, men’s roles in the movement, and how feminism affects personal relationships” (Fraser 1979: 2). According to Fraser, the dialogue ranged from “broad theoretical questions to varied personal reflections about attitudes, relationships, and sexual power games.” She concluded with a strong defense of feminism:

[A]ttitudes about feminism are as diverse as the Wesleyan cliché. But there is a sense that it has to do with a positive, deobjectified view of women, and the promotion of equality and personal control in social, economic, sexual, and political roles... As one woman put it, ‘We need change on all fronts. We need both loud and quiet feminists. We need radical separatists lesbians. We need women who will say, ‘I’m not a feminist, but...’ We need support from men. We need people in all spheres to do what they can.

The article itself was entitled “Feminism isn’t a bad word.” Instead of attempting to settle upon a singular definition and goal, Fraser described the group as “explor[ing],” “talk[ing],” and shar[ing]” rather than deciding, debating, or defining. Fraser admitted, “It’s rare at Wesleyan for a group of men and women to share their feelings, ideas, and confusion in such a warm and honest manner.”

Feminist conversations seem to have been the only means through which female students with or without men could come together and openly discuss their
personal, gendered experiences at Wesleyan. According to Fraser, “One Wesleyan male admitted that ‘many men on campus find it easy to be derogatory about women who call themselves feminist.’” Fraser also relayed the common categorization of feminists as “radical man-hating,” despite her call for “support from men,” who could serve as allies to actual feminists (i.e. women.). Not all Wesleyan women viewed feminism as the answer to patriarchal structures. Another student, Sonya Lee, responded to Fraser’s comments with an article entitled “Feminist Fanaticism” (Lee 1979: 2). Lee described herself as:

Sick and tired of the rampant feminist fanaticism that is penetrating the Wesleyan Community… abuse is not limited to gender. Men and women alike abuse homosexuals, the mentally ill and handicapped, and physically handicapped, the aged, etc., etc., in a way that feminists have characteristically and generally limited to men. Let’s take a stand against the abuse of human beings, not just the abuse of women.

Students concerned with initiatives and groups addressing women’s oppression had nowhere else to turn in order to discuss gender dynamics and stereotyping at Wesleyan and beyond. Since feminist groups privileged gender as their primary lens through which to react and understand the campus, this activism and organizing remained almost wholly distinct from other identity-based action.

By 1979, there were several Women’s groups on campus, two of which aligned themselves with other societal sites of oppression: the Minority Women’s Group (founded around this time), and LBQ (founded during the fall of 1979.) Other groups existent at the time described themselves in terms of “women” in general: The Women’s Coalition, The Women’s Health Task Force, The Women’s Center, Everywomyn’s Coffeehouse, and The Women’s Studies Support Group. The groups dedicated to feminism and women’s “issues” at Wesleyan changed frequently. By
1979, the Center for Women’s Activities was no longer meeting. W.S.A.P. had disappeared almost immediately after being created. The Women’s Health Task Force, first advertised in 1980, was no longer mentioned in the Argus by 1984. Everywomyn’s Coffeehouse was gone by 1988, at which time Womynculture Events Production Interns were established, as well as a Womyn’s Singer/Songwriter Collective (“FYI” 1988g: 16; “FYI” 1988h: 16). In 1988, a women’s sorority was formed in reaction to students debating the existence of fraternities at Wesleyan, which in turn caused many students to question and organize against the decision (Wyandt et al. 1988: 4).

Although feminist and women’s organizing was an important tool that allowed for opposition to patriarchal structures in place at Wesleyan, many students (including women) were against the feminist “movement.” The groups that did exist had no institutional backing that would have enabled them to become permanent aspects of the Wesleyan environment. As a result, many initiatives ended soon after forming, as has been the case throughout much of feminism’s history across the U.S. Nonetheless, feminism and women’s organizing became the solution to problems at Wesleyan for many students and feminist rhetoric and groups were used to combat the Deep Throat screenings in 1979, fraternities on campus and the actions of their members, and, particularly, violence against women.

**Conclusions: The Prevalence of Male Dominance**

When examining the social context during the re-admittance of female students in 1969, the only activities, groups, and organizations for women were those
formulated around their identities as “women.” Feminist organizing of a wide variety had popularized in the U.S. during the 1960s, along with the Black Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements. Feminist initiatives and groups were spreading across college campuses and leading to a variety of school-wide innovations. Resultantly, with their admittance to Wesleyan in 1969, women were quick to organize under both “women” and “feminism.” Feminism was a primary initiative for female students to respond to their subjugation and gendered treatment at Wesleyan, including numerous initiatives, the Feminist House, forums, and student groups. However, feminism was not always the best vehicle for organizing. The “movement” – as with all identity-based political initiatives – was fractured and multiple in organization, action, and definition. Where all feminist initiatives found commonality was in feminism’s base, best described by bell hooks: “Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression” (2000a: viii).

Feminist and women’s groups at Wesleyan were created in response to social and systemic prejudice on the campus. Beginning with the rhetoric of “diversity” and continuing with responses to violence against women, women were not treated or viewed in the same manner as their male peers. Through the feminist movement, female students were given a language and rhetoric to evaluate their experiences and position at Wesleyan. However, these groups were unstable and became popular targets of student harassment and violence. Instead of being able to confront underlying structural problems, students spoke out against particular individuals and events, creating debates over pornography, fraternities, or feminism in general. With only four years at Wesleyan, it was impossible for students to organize and combat a
history of structural and social patriarchy and an environment where male students had been privileged over their female peers.

While student feminist and women’s groups formed and disbanded, a separate movement was growing. However, this innovation was not student-driven and instead started with the work of Sheila Tobias immediately upon her arrival at Wesleyan in 1970, with the assistance of other faculty members. The solution to instability in the feminist movement came in the form of an academic discipline, Women’s Studies, a move that had the potential for institutionalized legitimacy. Where feminist student groups had failed to transform the patriarchal structures of Wesleyan, many hoped Women’s Studies would prevail.
CHAPTER 3: INTO THE CLASSROOM
INSTITUTIONALIZING ANTI-SEXISM THROUGH WOMEN’S STUDIES

“A life-changing experience for its participants.” – Description of Women’s Studies at Wesleyan in the 1977 pamphlet, “We Want... and Wesleyan Needs... A Women’s Studies Program”

“The very process of learning is considered as important as the actual knowledge gained” – Description of Women’s Studies in the 1980 Proposal for a Women’s Studies Program at Wesleyan (Boydston et al. 1980: 4).

The Informal, Fractured Arrival of Women’s Studies

“Traditionally, one small group of the faculty has been formally engaged in liberal education while the rest have been permitted, or have permitted themselves to avoid that responsibility,” Sheila Tobias told The Chronicle of Higher Education in 1981 (Watkins 1981: 5). Tobias wanted to bring feminism to the classroom, to revolutionize the school’s curriculum through the induction of Women’s Studies. Feminist action and organizing existed at Wesleyan and at other schools across the nation, but it was only through the formal creation of a discipline that feminism became an institutional element of the campus.

Immediately before arriving at Wesleyan, Tobias spent a year compiling data on the newly forming field of Women’s Studies. In between applying to join Wesleyan’s staff, moving into her new home at the school, hosting tea for the new female “recruits,” and helping the administration respond to their new students, Tobias assembled a book on the brand new discipline. The volume was entitled Female Studies: A Collection of College Syllabi and Reading Lists and was the first published work on the subject. Tobias announced the birth of what she referred to as “Female Studies,” through a catalogue of seventeen course syllabi from classes taught
throughout the United States during the 1969-1970 academic year, including two sections of a Wesleyan course on the “Status of Women,” taught by Dr. Vam (1970: 20-21). Tobias remained on the production staff for *Female Studies: No. 2*, released six months later with sixty-six new course descriptions, two of which were from Wesleyan.

Tobias’ role as an activist-educator was common in early Women’s Rights advocates and teachers. Some of the political excitement around identity issues and women’s activism from the 1960s had transferred into reforming the classroom. In her history of Women’s Studies’ formation, *When Women Ask Questions: Creating Women’s Studies in America*, Marilyn Jacoby Boxer states, “If the idealism of the 1960s was one parent of women’s studies, the other parent was activism, which began about 1969 to bring change to many academic professional associations” (1998: 26). However, for others Women’s Studies was less political:

For some the goal was simply to conduct research, to add knowledge about women to the canon, and to “mainstream” feminist scholarship, in order to gain legitimacy for women's studies. For others the new approach spanned disciplinary borders and engaged the foundations of all fields of knowledge. (56)

As the country entered the ‘70s, many “radical activists” from the Black civil rights, gay rights, and early feminist movements became leaders in creating Women’s Studies classes (hooks 2000a: 9). These early professors (almost all of whom were women) brought feminist activism into the classroom through Women’s Studies courses and Programs. bell hooks describes these early classrooms as activist in origin: “Most of us saw our commitment to women's studies as political action; we were prepared to sacrifice in order to create an academic base for the feminist movement” (hooks 2000a: 9). Others, like Marilyn Salzman-Webb in *Female Studies*
V: Proceedings of the Conference, even described Women’s Studies practitioners as revolutionaries:

We are part of a revolutionary movement whose goal is to end patriarchal rule, and included in that, class divisions in society. Our intellectual work is to understand our collective history, to join us closer in solidarity with all women, and to create a new order out of the depth of understanding from our studies. (Salzman-Webb in Siporin 1972: 75)

The Women’s Studies call to “revolution” served as a direct link to feminist action and organizing outside of the classroom.

According to Who’s Who and Where in Women’s Studies, “the movements for educational reform in the sixties had eased the administrative channel for change” (Berkowitz et al. 1974: vii). Many feminists continued these initiatives, emphasizing “integrat[ing] scholarship on women into the curriculum” (Schmitz 1985: 21). Betty Schmitz describes this brand of feminist work as the “curriculum integration movement,” which was usually driven by a few faculty members and lasted for around two years (1985: 13; 21). These initiatives sought widespread institutional change through the incorporation of women’s texts into the classroom. According to Schmitz, since these projects usually involved a small percentage of the faculty and were only financed for a brief period, they usually failed to develop into a lasting restructuring of the campus curriculum (21).

Conferences and groups formed across the country to address how to integrate feminist politics into the classroom. According to Ellen Messer-Davidow’s account of the field’s development, between 1968 and 1971 fifty women’s committees and caucuses formed in thirty-three national disciplinary associations (2002: 51). These groups crafted the majority of literature that would be used in early women’s studies
classrooms and predominantly formed in reaction to male-dominated spaces. For instance, patriarchal practices at a symposium in the spring of 1970 led to an all-women conference in November of 1972 at the University of Pittsburgh (Siporin 1972: iii). At the symposium, the topic of discussion had been creating innovations in higher education and the six women invited “felt systematically and individually ignored, disregarded, and discredited in professional and psychological terms.” Five of the six came together over breakfast, and, while discussing the problems they were experiencing, concluded “that a conference comprised solely of female participants would immediately provide a more positive atmosphere in which to discuss education.” One of the women – Rae Lee Siporin – organized the Pitt conference, one of the first all-female conferences to discuss patriarchy and female exclusion in higher education, entitled “Women and Education: A Feminist Perspective.”

The initiative to expand Women’s Studies and create a Program was just forming at Wesleyan in 1972 while contributors to Female Studies V and VI outlined the goals, methods, and strategies according to which a Program and courses should be formed. During that year, Tobias joined with fellow Women’s Studies Professor Carol Ohmann to organize a Women’s Studies Collective (WSC) for faculty interested in expanding the discipline at Wesleyan (Goldsmith 1984: 1). According to the “History of Women’s Studies and FGSS at Wesleyan” on the school’s website, the WSC became a formal faculty committee in 1977, concentrating on “ensuring a minimum number of courses” in Women’s Studies.25 During the summer of 1977, the

25 FGSS, “A History of Women’s Studies and FGSS at Wesleyan” (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University, accessed 10 January 2009); available from http://www.wesleyan.edu/fgss/history.html; Internet.
Collective arranged for four students to gather information on Programs at other schools, preempting a publicized initiative for an institutionally recognized Women’s Studies Program (Boydston et al. 1980: 1). Without a recognized Program, Women’s Studies research, courses, and faculty were completely reliant on other Departments and Programs. Those involved in Women’s Studies were unable to hire faculty, create a coherent discipline (other than designing courses and submitting them for approval to other Departments), or influence tenure reviews for professors teaching Women’s Studies courses. In fact, as an established Program, Women’s Studies only significant institutional changes would be the ability to draft a structured major and label courses “WMST” in the school’s catalogue. Only disciplines with Departmental status were able to hire new faculty and influence tenure decisions. Even the ability to major in Women’s Studies did not exist until 1989. Until then, students could either major in Women’s Studies by designing and receiving approval for an original University Major or by concentrating in “women” within another major. However, approval as a Program was the first step in a much longer process to becoming an approved major and, potentially, a Wesleyan Department.

The notion of a Women’s Studies discipline was spreading throughout academic circles across the nation and an increasing number of courses in the subject were offered each year. At the end of 1971, Female Studies III marked this expansion, shifting from the earlier focus on individual course syllabi to outlining various manifestations of Women’s Studies at schools across the United States. From reports of two programs at Cornell University and San Diego College in December of 1970, editors Carol Ahlum and Florence Howe testified to the existence of over six
hundred Women’s Studies courses taught through the fall of ’71 and at least seventeen Women’s Studies Programs (Ahlum and Howe 1971b: ii). A substantial increase in Women’s Studies courses offered at Wesleyan during the 1971-’72 academic year earned the school a spot in *Female Studies III*, after having been absent from the second edition. According to the report, eight Wesleyan professors taught seven Women’s Studies courses during the year, up from the three courses taught by three professors over the previous two years (28-29). During the late 1960s and early ‘70s, Women’s Studies evolved from the fragmented, informal desires of specific individuals to an established discipline.

**Constructing the Field**

As Women’s Studies was growing and gaining recognition as a discipline, practitioners and educators tackled the difficult task of developing the main principles of Women’s Studies classrooms and Programs. In national debates over the methodologies and goals of Women’s Studies that carried similar emphases as feminist initiatives through the 1970s – in particular the work of radical 1960s and ‘70s feminism – certain elements became generally recognized as central to the discipline. Marilyn Jacoby Boxer describes the goals of Women’s Studies as “a field that questions conventional knowledge, dissolves boundaries, and facilitates the quest to integrate one’s intellectual, professional, and personal experience” (Boxer 1998: xv). Numerous and extremely varied interpretations of Women’s Studies existed, each focused primarily on: linking theory and personal experience, creating a supportive environment, connecting theory with practice, and emphasizing social
change and action. All four areas of debate were interconnected and arguments for
one often incorporated rhetoric and support for some or all of the other three.

Early proposals for a Women’s Studies Program at Wesleyan incorporated all
four components, connecting the initiative with feminist action and organizing on
campus. In the fall of 1977, the initiative to create a Women’s Studies Program was
first announced. The four students recruited by the Collective over the summer
compiled their research on Women’s Studies throughout the U.S. into a pamphlet
entitled, “We Want… and Wesleyan Needs… A Women’s Studies Program.” The
main part of the pamphlet title, stating “Women’s Studies Program” was depicted
with the Wesleyan crest and the ‘o’ portrayed by the symbol for ‘woman,’ a
recognized logo of the women’s “movement” and feminism (see Figure 1).26 The
rendering symbolically united feminist
and women’s identities, activism, and
organizing with Wesleyan’s academic
environment through the Women’s
Studies Program. It would be an
accredited, intellectual site of
feminism at Wesleyan. However,
unlike other feminist organizations on campus, Women’s Studies was primarily
maintained and initiated by faculty members and the pamphlet listed the names of
fifty-two “Faculty Supporters of Women’s Studies at Wesleyan.” The discipline of

26 “We Want… and Wesleyan needs… a Women’s Studies Program” (pamphlet), 1977.
(Middletown CT: Wesleyan University, Olin Library, Special Collections & Archives, “3C
Depts – Programs: Women’s Studies”)
Women’s Studies throughout the nation had been predominantly faculty-driven, a way for faculty members – whose primary campus tool was curriculum – to impart feminist methods and knowledge into their campuses, through the classroom.

The Program portrayed itself as a radical, activist part of the women’s movement in the U.S. and at Wesleyan. The language of the pamphlet also called upon the feminist politics and organizational styles employed by Women’s Studies classes and Programs throughout the country:

**What is Women’s Studies?**
An interdisciplinary field which recognizes the significance of women’s history and experiences;
A serious commitment to uncovering women’s buried past;
A re-orientation of those disciplines based on male experience and perspective;
An analysis of those institutions and values which have excluded women from full participation in history and culture, and perpetuated the oppression of women;
A new approach which unites the experiential with the intellectual;
A life-changing experience for its participants.

Incorporating and examining the histories of students and women was mentioned in three out of six descriptive phrases of Women’s Studies, emphasizing that the lives and histories of participants would be a central component of the courses. In recognizing class material as inherently personal, Women’s Studies professor Phyllis Franklin stressed supporting students and legitimizing their experiences through course theory (Franklin in Hoffman et al. 1972: 40-41). Historically, feminist consciousness-raising sessions were understood as the venue through which participants would become aware of and analyze their own oppression (Echols 1989: 83). Now, with the advent of Women’s Studies, this work could be done in the classroom and be enriched with theoretical texts. Through combining theory, a
“buried” history, and students’ experiences, Wesleyan Women’s Studies sought an intellectual feminism that incorporated consciousness-raising with academic texts.

Five anonymous student quotations were used as examples of how students were already experiencing Women’s Studies classes:

**How have students responded to these courses?**
“…This course material dealt with my life’s most important struggles, and what I believe are the major issues we face…this course is extremely valuable to the Wesleyan community as it strives for self-consciousness linked with action…”
“…All of it was incredible—new material, thoughts, theories we’d never considered about our own past…”
“…The things I have thought about will be with me forever. The research began during this semester will continue for a long time to come…”
“…The course was wonderful. Wesleyan should realize that academics should not be entirely divorced from life…”
“…I came into womanhood vs. adolescence in this class…”

Women’s Studies was described as individualistic and personal, directly responding to the needs and experiences of all Wesleyan students. According to Gerda Lerner, a Women’s Studies professor featured in *Female Studies V*, the field needed consciousness-raising in order to properly function:

> Consciousness-raising is an integral part of teaching Feminist Studies. Before women can study Feminist Studies with any effectiveness, they must come to grips with their own deep-seated anxieties, tensions, and uncertainties in regard to their femininity… Once they have experienced this insight, they are able to approach the subject with an excitement, creativity and enthusiasm unlike their approach to any other ‘intellectual subject.’ (Lerner in Siporin 1972: 36)

Through classroom work, students would uncover and examine their internalized oppression, marking a broader “transition from consciousness raising in the community to feminism in the academy” (Boxer 1998: 11). Feminist Ginny Foster described the move as detrimental to feminist action:

> Women's groups are not concerned with the “troubles” of their members, rather they are centered around issues: the institutional effects of manipulation on women, which has resulted in the private “troubles,” many of which result from
resistance to the manipulation. Thus women's groups are taking a structural approach, one reason why women's groups so often lead to action-oriented discussion. (Foster in Hoffman et al. 1972: 26)

According to Foster, by centering personal experience in Women’s Studies, the field was neglecting many of the broader issues for women not present in academic settings, including “find[ing] ways of providing food, sex, shelter, clothes, health and education for all” (27). The first description of Women’s Studies at Wesleyan – through the pamphlet – centered students’ experiences, similar to Lerner’s understanding of Women’s Studies, rather than Foster’s call to action.

The goals of the Women’s Studies Collective continued to solidify over the next three years as more students became involved in the initiative. After the pamphlet’s distribution in the fall of ’77, WSC faculty prepared to submit an official proposal for a Program in Women’s Studies to the school’s Educational Policy Committee (EPC) for approval. A spring student tutorial was organized “to do the ground-work for a full-pledged proposal,” followed by a second tutorial in the fall (Boydston et al. 1980: 1). The first tutorial created and distributed a questionnaire to students participating in Women’s Studies courses in March of ’79. Of the two hundred students given surveys, eighty-eight completed and returned them (Appendix #1 in Boydston et al. 1980: 14). The surveyors were asked how the Women’s Studies course(s) they had participated in “changed [their] perceptions of or approach to other courses” (15). The answers were grouped under nine categories, with the most popular being “[c]ourse structure/group process,” mentioned by thirty-three percent. Boxer described various methods used by women’s studies professors throughout the U.S. to integrate politics and course readings into the classroom structure, stating,
“They adopted circular seating and rules for classroom participation like those used in consciousness raising, down-playing their authority and encouraging students to acknowledge their own and other’s experientially won expertise” (1998: 21). The goal was to value students and professors equally, shifting from the common belief in academic settings that the professor is the source of knowledge.

“A Proposal for a Women’s Studies Program” was presented to the Educational Policy Committee in early November of 1979 and officially reviewed on March 4, 1980. A month after the proposal’s submission to the EPC, students were invited to discuss the proposed Program in a meeting of the “Women’s Studies Support Group” in the basement of the Anthropology Department (“For Your Information” 1979: 11). The Anthropology Department was home to the Women’s Coalition office, where the aptly named Women’s Coalition student group met, although I have found no link between the two groups. As far I have discerned, the meeting of the Women’s Studies Support Group was never again publicized through the Argus.

Student involvement was central to early conceptions of a Women’s Studies Program at Wesleyan, emphasizing the need to center the experiences and desires of students throughout the Proposal. The Proposal emphasized the need for innovative teaching and classrooms styles and told the EPC, “The very process of learning is considered as important as the actual knowledge gained” (Boydston et al. 1980: 4). The Women’s Studies Collective was used as the model for this “process,” creating and stressing the need for a collective classroom environment. The “Coordinating Collective” would consist of two faculty coordinators and students who were
majoring in Women’s Studies either as University Majors or through concentrations within separate majors (5). Open to interested faculty teaching Women’s Studies courses and rotating faculty coordinators – who served as “spokespeople and contact people” – every two years would allow more people to become involved in the planning and implementation of the Program. The proposal emphasized the Collective’s practice of consensus and dedicated the third appendix to the definition of the term. Supposedly, conflict and disagreement would be welcomed in these meetings. Conclusions would only be reached if all involved parties agreed:

Any one person can state opposition to the proposal and this will block the collective’s adoption of that proposal... Don’t change your mind or withdraw an objection simply to avoid conflict or promote “harmony.” Don’t try to trade off objections or reward people for standing aside. (Appendix #3: 25-26)

The goal was an environment in which all opinions and disagreements would be welcomed,

Through the Collective, students would “actively participate in the running of the program,” with the goal of creating “an academic community which extends beyond the boundaries of the classroom” (4; 5). Students and faculty would have to actively work together to create “[t]ruly cooperative classrooms”:

The structure of the Women’s Studies program reflects the belief that people will work together in order to learn together, and that this cooperation is an integral part of their education... Truly cooperative classrooms do not spontaneously emerge. They grow out of a conscious willingness of students to take responsibility for the effective functioning of the class and a willingness on the part of professors to demand this active learning from students. (4)

The goal was a classroom that was completely cooperative, which was described as requiring students “take responsibility” for classroom dynamics and, in turn, professors “demand[ing] this active learning from students.” As the survey showed,
the creation of an innovative classroom environment had been the largest emphasis in
Women’s Studies courses at Wesleyan and the primary link to activism within the
field.

Faculty members who supported and worked within Women’s Studies at
Wesleyan were divided into four categories, based on their status as tenured or
untenured and their level of commitment to the Program: “[t]enured faculty who have
a substantial, demonstrated commitment to women’s studies” (five professors),
“[t]enured faculty who have expressed an interest in offering, on an irregular basis,
courses relevant to the program” (three), “untenured faculty who have been actively
involved in supporting the proposal for a women’s studies program, and who are
committed to teaching in it regularly” (six), and “untenured faculty who have
expressed an interest in offering, on an irregular basis, courses relevant to the
program” (nine) (10-12). Of the twenty-three faculty listed, only eight were tenured
and only eleven were “committed” to involvement in the program and regularly
teaching courses. All who dedicated their time to Women’s Studies at Wesleyan did
so on a “voluntary basis” and had full-time commitments to the disciplines that hired
them (5). The proposed Program centered on three core courses, each with professors
assigned to teach them. First, “Women and Political Theory” was described as:

An exploration of the ways different political theorists have seen women's
relationship to such ideologies as capitalism, socialism, anarchism, lesbianism and
separatism. Most readings will be theoretical, but some primary materials will be
used. (6)

The next course was entitled “Sex Roles in a Cross-Cultural Context” and examined
theoretical and methodological approaches to studying sex roles from historical and
anthropological perspectives, including “the sexual division of labor, the influences of
patriarchal ideologies on female subordination, and women’s role in economic
development.” The third course was entitled “Women and Work in American
Society,” an “[i]ntroduction to the history of American women – as a group, as
individuals and as members of different classes, races and ethnic communities”
through “primary and secondary documents” (7). The courses introduced students to
three different feminist perspectives through theoretical and personal texts.
Continuing the courses would impinge upon faculty available in political theory,
anthropology, and labor studies.

Faculty not only volunteered their time to Women’s Studies, but also
dedicated extra time to try and increase the number of faculty involved. On October
11, 1979, a month before the Proposal was submitted, Professor Joan Hedrick invited
“Faculty Women and Associates” to a “meeting of faculty and students interested in
women’s studies. The purpose of the meeting is to give faculty a chance to inform
themselves about the proposed women’s studies major and to discuss the curricular
and philosophic issues it raises.” Hedrick was one of the leaders in Women’s
Studies at Wesleyan, organizing what was likely the first open meeting to discuss the
proposed Program, one of the eleven professors listed as “committed” to Women’s
Studies, and originally designated to teach “Women and Political Theory” (6; 10).
However, the copy of the Proposal in Wesleyan’s Special Collections & Archives
section had Hedrick’s name crossed off, replaced with Professor Elizabeth Young-
Bruehl (6). Within a few weeks of the Program’s approval on April 15, 1980, several

27 Joan Hedrick, Memorandum To Faculty Women and Associates, 11 Oct 1979
(Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, Olin Library, Special Collections & Archives, “FGSS VERTICAL FILES – 3C Depts – Programs: Women’s Studies”).
letters appeared from students expressing their outrage over the recent decision to reject Hedrick’s submission for tenure at Wesleyan (Plave 1980: 1; Brady et al. 1980: 2). Students submitted multiple articles to the *Argus*, each citing Hedrick’s central role in the creation of the Women’s Studies Program (Miller 1979: 2; Brady et al. 1980: 2; Blier 1980: 2; Blum 1980: 2). Even though Women’s Studies had been approved as a Program, it was not a Department and still had *no* control over the hiring or tenure process of professors. Hedrick’s loss was an early blow to Women’s Studies right before the Program’s official start in the fall of 1980.

Women’s Studies was established under the precedent of responding to student needs and desires, in addition to formulating itself alongside and with students. Through coursework examining the oppression and treatment of women in various contexts, including the work force, politics, and through a “cross-cultural context,” the proposed Program was described in close proximity to feminist work on and off campus. However, unlike other feminist groups and action at Wesleyan, this sect had the opportunity to be institutionalized and receive funding directly from the school’s administration. Furthermore, it had the opportunity to legitimate feminist theory and work at Wesleyan and beyond through the Program’s existence.

**An Inadequately Funded Program**

In 1984, the Program submitted a self-evaluation to the EPC, the first step in appraising the Program’s success. Carol Ohmann – the original organizer of the WSC with Tobias – told the *Argus*, “We suffer” (Goldsmith 1984: 6). She described the Program as “not hav[ing] staff from year to year.” The EPC agreed, deeming the
Program “both intellectually very lively and institutionally very precarious.” After an initial evaluation during the 1985 to 1986 year, the EPC conducted its official ten-year assessment during the 1988-1989 academic year to determine if a major in Women’s Studies should be approved. In its January 30, 1989 final report the EPC cited the Program as having “problems that continually produced institutional instability” (1). They went on: “Those problems were, specifically: (1) non-guaranteed staffing and (2) ineffectual internal governance and administration.”

According to the evaluation, since the creation of “a steering committee and director who gets course relief for her task” and a part time administrative assistant, the Program had become somewhat more stable. Additionally, during the 1985-'86 academic year, staff cross-listing their courses with Women’s Studies (i.e. listing them under multiple subject areas, including Women’s Studies) doubled to two dozen (2). However, the capricious availability of Women’s Studies faculty remained a problem.

The EPC reported on the results of a survey of Wesleyan faculty, finding that increased support for Women’s Studies on the campus “did not include staffing guarantees/tenure.” Despite increases in faculty affiliated with the Program, many core Women’s Studies faculty had taken their sabbaticals during the spring of ’89 and non-Wesleyan professors were brought in to teach both of the Program’s core courses. The report explained that it was “not fair” for students to major in Women’s

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Studies if the core courses would not be available for them to take (3). The first appendix, outlining “Institutional Contexts,” stated that between 1975 and 1985 “Women’s Studies was staffed by young and untenured teachers all of whom had heavy responsibility in their home departments” (Appendix #1: 5). At other schools, the Collective explained, an administrative supporter of Women’s Studies (usually a woman) was key to the continued growth of the discipline (Appendix #1: 6).

Wesleyan had no such person; “the Administration (aside from the Dean of Students’ staff) is male—and the push given to Women’s Studies by the former Associate Provost Sheila Tobias has not been seconded since her departure” (6).

During the 1984-'85 academic year, out of a total of 323 faculty at Wesleyan, only twenty-three female professors were on a tenured track, with an additional twenty-two having already received tenure (5). These women comprised just thirteen percent of all tenured faculty and the majority were situated within the humanities.

The lack of faculty in Women’s Studies was listed as one of two primary concerns, the other being a deficient “cross-cultural” element (3). As with the low numbers of Women’s Studies faculty, the situation was described as doing the student majors “a serious injustice” (3). The Program requested their first joint appointment (i.e. a professor hired by two Programs/Departments), ideally with the Anthropology Department. Even though this hire was described as a “wish,” the WSC acknowledged there was “no point in having a major… if the present staffing problem is not addressed” and the lacking “cross-cultural perspective” was not fixed. In its original composition as a proposed Program in 1979, Women’s Studies was divided into two concentrations, “Women in America” and “Women in a Cross-Cultural
Context” (Peers 1979: 1). However, ten years later in the 1989 review, this plan was abandoned, as the “cross-cultural” component was inadequately represented within the Program.

In October of 1988, during a forum describing the proposed major, Women’s Studies faculty emphasized the need for “a strong cross-cultural determinant” (Beria 1988: 7). However, in this context, Professor Hazel Carby of Women’s Studies described the goal as hiring “a non-white professor to teach some of the classes” (Beria 1988: 1). According to Carby, hiring a professor of color emphasized that “race should be completely integrated with gender” (7). Carby described the hire as the top priority of the Program. Students, in large part, were not pleased with the emphasis placed on hiring a woman of color by the four professors present, focusing instead on the discontinuance of the course “Feminist Methods.” The class, taught by an adjunct professor (Professor Swinney), was not funded through Women’s Studies and, according to Carby, “was not one of the main priorities of the new program.” The university was no longer willing to pay Swinney, “[e]ven though [the course] is extremely popular among students” (1). The class had been rooted in personal experience, including the teaching of Margaret Cruikshank’s Lesbian Studies, Hull, Scott, and Smith’s But Some Of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies, and Marilyn Frye’s Some Reflection on Separatism. However, since the Program had no finances and almost no ability to control available professors, Carby and other faculty were stuck between pleasing students and working toward what they saw as the Program’s primary need.
Mary Irvine ’92 came out of the gathering extremely concerned and told the *Argus*, “What bothered me about the meeting was that it seemed [the faculty] was pitting the hiring of women of color against maintaining Feminist Methods as if we can only have one or the other.” Without their own faculty, Women’s Studies was suffering, needing an outside professor – who the University would no longer pay – to teach the popular “Feminist Methods” course. Irvine blamed the Program for being “too timid to request everything it wants and has to be satisfied with bargaining. We should be able to ask for everything we want and tell [the administration] what our priorities are.” While the Women’s Studies faculty was confronting the administration in an attempt to finally create a full major, they also met resistance at the hands of students like Irvine. Professors had to choose between students’ personal desires and the more permanent hiring of a new faculty. Without the resources needed, many elements of Women’s Studies sought since the 1970s were being sacrificed and students responded to inadequacies in the Program by turning on the professors who volunteered their time to Women’s Studies. For students majoring in the Program, the face of Women’s Studies came in the form of these professors.

According to the *Argus* article, “During and after the meeting, several of the students expressed concern with the apparent lack of a personal aspect in the proposed course sequences. They said the courses were intellectually and academically distant” (1, 7). The field of Women’s Studies suffered at Wesleyan into the end of the ‘80s under lack of institutional support in the form of targeted hiring and/or a joint appointment in the field. Wesleyan’s Women’s Studies had already abandoned the three core courses listed in the 1980 Proposal, replacing them with
“Introduction to Women’s Studies” and “Feminist Theory” (2). The Programs’ main focus had shifted from multiple avenues of feminism, to the examination and study of the discipline of Women’s Studies, centering the academic field itself rather than various lenses through which to analyze women’s roles and positions in society. From the original focus on women’s oppression and an examination of women’s experiences, courses now centered Women’s and Feminist Studies and Theory. While the specialized courses had particular faculty designated to teach them, these courses were listed generally, meaning that multiple professors could teach them. The move for a more general, theoretically-based foundation in Women’s Studies would allow any professor with a general background in the field to teach the course, rather than needing faculty with backgrounds in the more specific fields of Political Theory, “Cross-Cultural” (ex. Anthropological), and labor studies. This move reflected a broader change within the field of Women’s Studies as it continued to develop as an established discipline. A study two years later by the National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) and the Association of American Colleges (AAC) found that, nationally, “a women’s studies major typically… include[s] an introductory course” and “[n]early 40 percent of the majors mandate study of feminist theory, with almost as many requiring a course that incorporates perspectives on gender and ethnic, racial, and cultural differences” (Boxer 1998: 27). Although Women’s Studies at Wesleyan sought both of these goals, it only had the resources to provide one.
An Established Discipline

By creating an intellectual field of work, Women’s Studies had become an institutionalized discipline, with its own theorists and texts to draw on. By the end of the 1980s, Programs at Wesleyan and beyond could center writing in the academic branch of knowledge known as Women’s Studies. It could now claim the position and prestige of a discipline, defined by Messer-Davidow as containing three primary components:

First, [disciplines] produce [academia’s] knowledge discourse—and let’s understand these discourses to consist of not just statements but more fundamentally the knowable objects and knowing subjects… And, together with academic institutions, they create and maintain the power-prestige hierarchies that order the knowledge enterprise—from instructor to professor, conference presentation to award-winning book, unaccredited program to top-ranked department. (2002: 20)

Those working in academics could not only study women and feminism because Women’s Studies was an accepted discipline, they could gain prestige and fame through writing on the subject. As a discipline, the field contained its own Theorists who wrote in conversation with one another’s texts and presented their own opinions on the field, enabling professions in Women’s Studies, which included the writing and teaching of feminism. Additionally, there existed a body of work through which to create courses introducing the field (i.e. Introduction to Women’s Studies) and examining its theoretical inclinations (i.e. Feminist Theory.) The creation of an accredited field with its own careers simultaneously enabled Women’s Studies to draw on its own monetary funds:

Second, disciplines control the knowledge economy because… they are organized and organizing. Each one is organized as an infrastructure of university and college departments, professional associations, and publications, each one organizes by using this infrastructure to assemble, direct, and monitor the
processes essential to its functioning. At the macro level a discipline sets the knowledge problems, regulates the market, and distributes the goods, and at the micro level it inculcates and enforces the schemes of perception, cognition, and action that practitioners must use.

Women’s Studies was one of the stores of knowledge within the broader Wesleyan corporation. As a Program it could not control the hiring of salespeople (i.e. professors), but those working within the discipline could control the transaction, the sale of knowledge to the student-customers. However, Women’s Studies still remained a small sub-section of the Wesleyan conglomerate, having to prove its existence and course load to the EPC, Board of Trustees, and administrators. The third component of a discipline, according to Messer-Davidow, is staying power:

Finally, disciplines endure through practice, the continuation of practice depends upon reproduction, and reproduction is accomplished by socializing practitioners. When a discipline trains future practitioners, it doesn’t just teach them its knowledge contents; it exercises them in its way of perceiving, thinking, valuing, relating, and acting… Once the discipline has credentialed and employed them, it ensures that they continue to observe its “good subject” practices by subjecting them to ongoing evaluations. It rates their teaching performance, appraises their publications, checks their professional service, and tenures or terminates them. (20-21)

Students’ knowledge in the field hinged on the curriculum offered, which was restricted first by governing administrators, then by Women’s Studies faculty. An academic feminist “way of perceiving, thinking, valuing, relating, and acting” was now an established, institutionalized field of knowledge. Each consumer of Women’s Studies left with a wealth of profitable feminist knowledge to use and pass on to others.

As an institutionalized discipline, Wesleyan professors could establish themselves through writing and teaching Women’s Studies theory. While in 1980 Hedrick’s tenure process had looked at her role as an English professor, the hope was
that faculty could now be evaluated and hired based on their teaching and writing on Women’s Studies. This also meant that professors had to be established within Women’s Studies to teach in the field. Five years before she became a central theorist in the discipline with the book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler was denied tenure at Wesleyan (“Outraged Over Decision” 1985: 2). Without the ability to hire into the Program, Butler’s teaching role had been within the Philosophy Department and the College of Letters Programs. However, even with increasing stability as a discipline and Program at Wesleyan, Women’s Studies still stood on unstable ground, deterring students from taking courses and majoring in the field.

In the March 1979 questionnaire, when asked if they would take a Women’s Studies course in the future, 52.8 percent of the students replied either “yes” or “maybe,” while 42.7% responded that they would not take courses in the future because they were graduating. If nearly half of students taking Women’s Studies courses were seniors, only a small majority of classroom participants would have the opportunity to use their new knowledge gained in these courses while at Wesleyan. Only 30.1 percent had considered or were currently considering majoring in the subject as a University Major or (15). Nearly three-quarters of the participants (69.9 percent) had already decided against creating their own University Major in Women’s Studies. Five students cited “bureaucratic hassle” and “lack of support” as their reasons for deciding not to complete the University Major, while two students mentioned the limited number of courses available in the discipline as their determining factor. Only one respondent was completing the University Major, while an additional four “contentrat[ed] in women” within their outside, established majors.
These students demonstrated the need for a Women’s Studies Program on campus, with the current curriculum offering inadequate support and course offerings for those with an interest in the field. Of the eighty-eight participants, eighty-two recognized the establishment of a Women’s Studies Program as fulfilling a “need” on the campus.

In 1989, a Program had existed for nine years, but little had changed. Even in 1997, Beverly Guy-Sheftall with Evelynn M. Hammonds were describing the unstable position of Women’s Studies:

I think that in some ways, despite the fact that there are over six hundred women's studies programs in the U.S. academy, that women’s studies is still institutionally fragile, in the sense that most women’s studies programs are without their own faculty lines and have inadequate budgets and very little control over their curricula because they depend on departmental courses or joint appointments. (1997: 38-39)

Women’s Studies Programs and curricula suffered across the nation, not just at Wesleyan. However, some other schools had granted Women’s Studies Programs (and in some cases Departments) more power over hiring and tenure processes, allowing them to exist as stable and self-sustaining areas of study. According to the 1989 evaluation, when Amherst College “was considering the institution of its major in 1986 the college had thirty courses listed under the rubric Women’s Studies and an endowed university professor specifically dedicated to scholarship on women” (“Sub-committee formed,” Appendix #1 1989: 5). After looking to Wesleyan in 1974 to determine whether to admit women, the school now had a larger and more substantial faculty and course backing in Women’s Studies. The 1989 evaluation concluded with hope for the future, describing Wesleyan’s Women’s Studies Program as “a program that could catch up with programs at comparable institutions only with a sudden
infusion of staff – ‘targeted hiring’ in departments, or in the form of specifically Women’s Studies hiring” (Appendix #1: 7).

Women’s Studies was officially institutionalized as an academic Program at Wesleyan in 1980 and became an existent major in 1989. With a nationally recognized discipline in Women’s Studies, the field had control over its own “knowledge discourse” and “knowledge economy” (Messer-Davidow 2002: 20). In her essay “Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure,” Robyn Wiegman explains that institutionalization “has enabled feminism in the academy to both claim and inhabit institutional power” (1999: 119). However, during that time period no additional faculty were hired to assist the Program in meeting students’ needs and providing a minimal number of required courses. Women’s Studies at Wesleyan, as with many Programs across the country, had been forced to choose between elements understood to be central to the teaching of the discipline. Although Women’s Studies faculty recognized the need for a “cross-cultural” element, without the ability to hire their own staff this important component was severely lacking. However, when trying to rectify the deficiency in 1988 and ’89, professors came against students prioritizing other elements of the Program, specifically the “Feminist Methods” course. Becoming a Program was meant to give Women’s Studies stability, regular course offerings, and the institutionalization of feminist studies. Although a more permanent existence was granted, the Program was not given the opportunity to hire any faculty, furthering difficulties in offering core and supplementary courses.
Conclusions: A Valuable, Yet Suffering Addition to Wesleyan’s Reputation

Approval of the Women’s Studies Program had directly benefited Wesleyan’s reputation as a school dedicated to “diversity.” As with the admittance of women in 1872 and 1969, this move did not necessitate the school provide sufficient resources to adequately sustain the Program. However, throughout the approval process it helped formulate a language and argument for why Wesleyan should endorse the establishment of a Women’s Studies Program. In the 1977 “We Want… and Wesleyan Needs… A Women’s Studies Program” pamphlet, the authors had concluded their descriptions of Women’s Studies by labeling the Program “[a] rich contribution to Wesleyan’s current move toward ‘general education’ and improvement of the freshperson year.” Women’s Studies would provide an important “contribution” to the work administrators were already engaged in under the movement to “diversify” the school by institutionalizing the study of women and feminism. It also followed the school’s emphasis on interdisciplinary studies since the 1940s, as described in “A Brief History” from Wesleyan’s website. The 1980 Proposal focused on the numerous benefits Wesleyan would receive through the creation of a new Program in Women’s Studies. The Program was described as “the addition of a neglected area of study,” rather than “a drain of resources” (Boydston et al. 1980: 2).

Receiving approval had required selling the Program to Wesleyan’s image, including compromises on the part of involved faculty. In 1980, the WSC dedicated the majority of the Proposal’s main body to emphasizing the necessity for examining
women’s experiences and identities. They defined Women’s Studies multiple times in the brief, four-page description of the Program:

Women’s Studies examines the nature and significance of gender identity as a determinant of individual and social experience across time and in various societies. Gender identity refers to the system of identification based on cultural notions of gender—of what it means to be male or female. Thus Women’s Studies treats gender identity as a culturally-created category which has exhibited culturally-distinct characteristics in past and present societies. It examines those characteristics as fundaments to the political, economic, intellectual, and social arrangements of the cultures in which they appear (Boydston et al. 1980: 2).

In the 1977 pamphlet, the WSC had instead described Women’s Studies as forming under the assumption that women are oppressed, providing “[a]n analysis of those institutions and values which have excluded women from full participation in history and culture, and perpetuated the oppression of women.” The only referral to women’s oppression in the 1980 Proposal came as a series of “questions raised by women’s studies”: “To address issues of sex role stereotyping, to understand the causes as well as the cultural and psychological effects of women's subordination, and to retrieve women's experience from invisibility” (Boydston et al. 1980: 1). This phrasing repositioned the evaluation of “women’s subordination” from the 1977 pamphlet into an inquiry, rather than an active recognition. While the pamphlet had primarily described Women’s Studies through individual student experiences and links to feminist practices and activism, the Proposal had to show the intellectual role the Program would fill at Wesleyan. They provided Women’s Studies as a link between various disciplines at Wesleyan, focusing on “[i]nter-disciplinary and comparative frames of reference” (Boydston et al. 1980: 2). Furthermore, the move was described as a confirmation and actualization of Wesleyan’s claims to “diversity” in educational styles and subjects: “Wesleyan has committed itself to innovative, cross-disciplinary
education; this program affirms and extends this commitment” (2). If the Program’s founders had to compromise their language and goals in a Proposal to the EPC, they would not be able to avoid doing so in their Women’s Studies courses in the future.

In the creation of a Women’s Studies Program at Wesleyan, the school furthered its highly acclaimed reputation as a school committed to “diverse” fields of study and students. The Wesleyan administration had presented a school committed to all students, including women. By sanctioning a Women’s Studies Program, the school was institutionally accepting a less traditional field of study that emphasized multiple forms of learning and knowing. Nonetheless, a history of offering minimal resources to women’s “issues,” including responses to violence against women on campus and acceptance of women’s objectification, persisted in the school’s treatment of Women’s Studies. As a result, the Program suffered under lack of faculty, unable to provide a “cross-cultural” component, or meet the desires of its students. By the time of the 1989 review, many students like Irvine still expected to find themselves in Women’s Studies courses and have their personal needs met through coursework and discussion. However, the Program’s inability to sustain minimal requirements prevented Women’s Studies from behaving in a responsive manner, as was the case with other feminist groups on campus and beyond. Robyn Wiegman describes this phenomenon:

Feminism is by definition as well as by historical fact a reactive force; it is most generally an argument against politics and social systems, ideological practices, and cultural discourses that subordinate women and the feminine on one hand and that arrange human potential, roles, and qualities through binary apparatuses on the other. (1999: 111)
One of the institutions feminism has historically argued against is academic settings of higher education, Wiegman explains. Women’s Studies has, as a result, “craft[ed] a knowledge formation for feminism from an originating identification with social movements whose profound political force had a great deal to do with their ethos of anti-institutionalism.” However, the establishment of a discipline was seen as the only venue through which to obtain stability and adequate resources for feminist ways of thinking and action. The result was a severely compromised field, with a deficiency of available funds and faculty, and less politicized language used to describe the Program.

The Women’s Studies Program was a financial component of the school known as “Diversity University,” one that supposedly utilized and legitimated feminist methods of knowledge and study. The founders needed approval from students (who would take the courses), administrators (who would fund the courses), and fellow faculty (who would teach the courses.) Resultantly, in its original conception, the Women’s Studies Program was described as serving multiple purposes: feminist learning and action, consciousness-raising, acknowledging and examining student experiences, studying the roots of female oppression, and unearthing a hidden history of women. Women’s Studies professors wanted the Program to serve and center the needs of students. However, Wesleyan administrators successfully kept the Program underfunded and without adequate resources. Without any professors hired for the Program and with the need for administrative approval, Women’s Studies shifted emphasis from examining specific sites of female oppression to the study of an established discipline. Unfortunately, the situation of
Wesleyan’s Women’s Studies Program is far from an anomaly in Colleges and Universities across the United States, with many lacking funds and professors. As a result, the Program has highlighted certain lacking elements, such as the deficient “cross-cultural” aspect. And, the prominent positions of the Women’s Studies Collective, which emphasized a communal decision-making process, and the two concentrations in “Women in America” and “Women in a Cross-Cultural Context” were both abandoned by 1989. Students have historically confronted Women’s Studies faculty about problems and inadequacies in the Program, while administrators kept institutional support for the Program at a minimum. A history of tolerance rather than support for feminism and women’s “issues” has allowed the Women’s Studies Program and feminist and women’s groups to endure instability at Wesleyan. After failing to change structures when admitting women in 1872, the school made the same mistake in 1969. Women existed in a patriarchal structure at Wesleyan, as did the Program itself, privileging male students, faculty, and administrators, and preventing the study and practice of feminism to become an integral part of the school campus and environment.

By examining the origins of a Women’s Studies / F.G.S.S. Program at Wesleyan, I have unmasked the school’s supposed commitment to “diversity” and found a severe case of neglect and injustice. Wesleyan’s women were never admitted for their benefit; they came as a tool, a strategy to further Wesleyan’s reputation and have existed within a patriarchal structure, in which they have been subjected to violence, objectification, and severe neglect. When faced with problems, these women often turned to feminist and women’s groups for support and action. When
entering the field of study supposedly devoted to their existence, they instead found a Program suffering under the burden of trying to take on the needs of every female – and perhaps male – student on campus. They found a Program asked to bring the school into a new era of “diversity,” bringing the movement from the admittance of specific bodies to the integration of new ways of learning, studying, and knowing through the institutionalization of feminist discourse. However, in a school steeped in patriarchy, exhibited through male dominance and the sexualization of women, feminist and women’s organizing and fields of study have been systematically neglected.
AFTERWORD: MOVING FORWARD

Women’s Studies Gets a New Name

“It should be Gender Studies,” my friend told me as I walked out of my first F.G.S.S. class, “Gender in a Transnational Perspective.” He was a senior, finishing up his F.G.S.S. thesis and frustrated with the new name given to the Women’s Studies Program. I could not understand why he was so concerned about something that seemed purely superficial. Women’s Studies faculty and majors had been debating the Program title since 2003, with the core faculty unanimously voting on Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies in the spring of 2005.29 According to the F.G.S.S. Program House files, the process for a new name began in 2002, as students and faculty looked for ways to revitalize the Program:

During the 02-03 academic year a group of WMST students were involved in a year long student forum that sought to investigate the history of WMST at Wesleyan and to evaluate the program in comparison to other programs at similar institutions. During the same time many of [the core F.G.S.S. faculty] were involved in a two-year faculty seminar on intersectionalities. One of the conclusions that the students and faculty had separately, but simultaneously, drawn was that while “Women’s Studies” served us well for a long time, it no longer fully captured what the program is and does.

In addition to exploring possible names for the Program, faculty and students decided to shift from “Introduction of Women’s Studies” to multiple “Gateway Courses.” The Women’s Studies name and single introductory course were thought by many to deny the intersection of gender with other social categories:

The name “Women’s Studies” and our introductory course “Introduction to Women’s Studies” tended to suggest a unitary reading of the subjects of our

29 “From WMST to FGSS: Recognizing Changes” (Middletown, CT: F.G.S.S. Program House Files).
scholarly work and could occlude important focal points that are an integral part of our curriculum and pedagogy, i.e. sexualities, including lesbian, bisexual, queer, and other radical sexualities; multiplicities of gender; the intersection of gender, race, class, ethnicity and other mutually constructed categories of social difference, and transnational dimensions of feminism, gender, and sexuality.

By changing the name, the Program wanted to suggest and prioritize a complex study of gender that acknowledged and incorporated overlaps with other social identities.

The new Program title privileged the study of Feminism, Gender, and Sexuality, shifting from the earlier focus on Women. The move reflected a trend in Women’s Studies publications, Programs, Departments, and organizations across the country, featured in the feminist journal *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* in 1997. The shift was primarily addressed in *differences* and elsewhere in terms of a transition from Women’s to Gender Studies, the label my friend advocated for in 2006. Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Evelynn M. Hammonds believe “women’s studies is inherently gender studies” and the name change simply acknowledges this relationship (Guy-Sheftall with Hammonds 1997: 41). However, on the other side of the argument, Shirley J. Yee portrayed the shift from Women’s to Gender Studies as antifeminist:

> The fact that it seems so easy to erase women as a title, women as a social category, and women as an analytical category, should give feminist scholars reason to pause. The university system has allowed women's studies to exist and even to expand over the last several decades within the existing structure of the university. This, I believe, can convey a false sense of security at the same time that it reflects real changes that have occurred in course offerings and in scholarship across the disciplines. (1997: 60-61)

As with discussions of the need for a “cross-cultural” component in Women’s Studies, the debate over Program names was understood as a move toward making the field “more inclusive,” with Gender Studies allowing people the freedom to not
identify as feminists, according to Yee (49). Wesleyan addressed this claim by including “Feminism” (in addition to “Gender”) in its new title. Leora Auslander believed the move from “a direct relationship to the women’s movement” to be positive for Women’s Studies (1997: 16). According to her, “Gender studies is different in that there is no ‘gender movement,’” instead acknowledging the variety of approaches to studying gender within Gender/Women’s Studies.

The debate was one of representation, of how the field could best portray its primary focus and central nature through a title. While Yee focused on the need for centering the discipline in feminism, Auslander believed the field had grown to include sexuality and it no longer made sense to label the field in terms of the category ‘women’ or the feminist movement:

I would argue that because of both likeness and differences in approach it is crucial both that gay and lesbian and women's studies and gender and queer studies be kept under the same roof and that scholars whose dominant perspective is one among these thus have the opportunity to learn from each other. Thinking about sexuality, gender, gay and lesbian rights, queerness, and feminism will be mutually enriching. (12)

In Auslander’s view, the fields of “gay and lesbian and women’s studies and gender and queer studies” need to be united under a common discipline, incorporated in Wesleyan’s decision to include “Sexuality” in the Program title. The debate over Gender verses Women’s Studies became a discussion of what the discipline was and what it should be prioritizing as it moved into the 21st century: developing its relationship with the newly-forming field of Queer Studies, strengthening its commitment to the Women’s “Movement” and feminism, emphasizing multiplicity and all social identity categories, or something else entirely. In Wendy Brown’s
contribution to the debate, she described the problem that has plagued Women’s Studies’ self-conception since its original formation:

There is something about women's studies, though, and perhaps about any field organized by social identity rather than by genre of inquiry, that is especially vulnerable to losing its raison d'être when the coherence or boundedness of its object of study is challenged. (1997: 86)

Women’s Studies, like its cousins, parents, close friends, distant relatives, enemies, or allies in the feminist and women’s “movements,” has travelled through a complex history of debate and disagreement over its existence and, as Brown puts it, “raison d'être.” The inherent personal element of groups, classrooms, and meetings formulating through these political and academic “movements” necessitates a certain preconception of what will be prioritized in discussions and/or action.

**Modern Remnants of an Old History**

The 1989 review process of the Women’s Studies Program did not result in a faculty hire. Women’s Studies received its first (and only) half-hire in 2001, sharing Professor Anu Sharma with the Anthropology Department. Professor Sharma’s office is in the Anthropology House, next door to the house where the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program resides. While Anthropology has its own space for professors, a classroom, and a fancy coffee machine, the house next door is shared between the school’s *History and Theory* publication, F.G.S.S., and an office for Information Technology Services. F.G.S.S. has one office for the Program Chair, who is rarely there as she is hired through a different Department/Program. Although

30 Since I have been at Wesleyan the Program Chair has always used the pronoun ‘she.’
currently under a new name, the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program still suffers from inadequate resources and faculty.

This year, the Program is up for annual revue. On March 2, 2009, I sat at a table with six of my peers in F.G.S.S. and three external reviewers to discuss where the Program should focus its resources in the future. As the conversation progressed, a few underlying issues prevented us from expressing real hope in the Program’s potential. First, each of us came to the meeting with our own concerns and opinions of the Program’s major inadequacies and rooms for improvement. Secondly, in the end it did not particularly matter what we wanted. After a brief period of optimistic discussion about F.G.S.S.’ future, one of the external reviewers reminded us that at Wesleyan the outgrowth of Women’s Studies had almost no money. The reviewers each came from Women’s Studies Departments, which hired their own faculty who were able to dedicate themselves fully to the field. Wesleyan’s F.G.S.S. Program may have had the newer, “hipper” name, but it seemed archaic compared to where these Professors came from. The external reviewers’ final question was, “If you could only change one thing about F.G.S.S., what would it be?” We sat there is silence, thinking over the numerous issues we had discussed during the past hour. None of us seemed able to pick just one problem; they were all interconnected. Every time I thought of a single “solution,” I stumbled upon five more problems that would not be addressed. We all knew there was not one “solution.” Without the funds, support, and recognition as a legitimate, valid field of study, F.G.S.S. will continue to be unable to meet the needs of its students.
I never thought that I needed to be supported in the classroom. This was, in fact, an expectation I only gained through my participation in F.G.S.S. After all, I was studying gender, a topic that, through my own personal identities I had spent years closely studying, although never from a theoretical perspective. Like Wesleyan’s female and feminist students from the 1800s and 1900s, I used my experiences to formulate my battles. As someone who has been read and treated as a woman and a man within our societal constructions of these categories, I have lived on both sides of patriarchy as it exists at Wesleyan today. I have been treated as a “sister” or comrade in F.G.S.S. classes, as a part of the feminist and Women’s Studies “movements.” I have also had my role labeled “ally” and been told I am not in the “movement.” I have even been the object of study, an interesting phenomenon heretofore thought only to exist in theoretical texts (and perhaps the body of Kate Bornstein.) At Wesleyan’s Freeman Athletic Center, I have had the privilege of experiencing two very different worlds. I have changed in the women’s locker room, where modesty is the common practice, the showers have curtains, and a scale is readily available to check one’s weight. I have also awkwardly changed in the men’s locker room, where nakedness is the norm, all of the showers are public, and there is no scale. Even better, I have spent hours searching for the mythical gender-blind bathroom, only to find it near the perimeter of Freeman, through two unlabeled doors, and down an unlit hallway.

Wesleyan has certainly changed since the time of “quails,” and even the more recent era of lopping off “branches.” Nonetheless, the school has not escaped its patriarchal origins. Wesleyan continues to be labeled the school for “diversity,”
where students of all backgrounds and identities will be openly welcomed and feel safe and comfortable. Wesleyan became *the* school for “Gender-Neutral Housing,” even though for two consecutive years administrators lied to students about the existence of this housing option. A history of false reputations has allowed the school to exist through patriarchal structures as “Diversity University,” which is still primarily defended through statistical representations of students of color on campus.

On April 3, 2009 the *Argus* stated:

The composition of the class itself seems to mark an increase in diversity. According to [Senior Associate Dean of Admissions Gregory] Pyke, the number of students of color admitted this year marks the largest in his memory, if not in the history of the University. Excluding international students, the University admitted 237 African-American students, 233 Hispanic or Latino students, 290 Asian-American students, and 21 American Indian or Alaska Native students. (Paterno)\textsuperscript{31}

It is time to move beyond a history of emphasizing statistical “diversity” that has masked underlying problems. I do not want to merely cut off a branch while the patriarchal tree of Wesleyan remains, standing tall and proud.

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