Walking a Fine Line

Methods and Materials

In this essay, I examine the social disparity between the genders at Duke University, focusing on two critical time periods – the first decades of the founding of The Woman’s College and Trinity College from the mid 1920’s to late 1930’s and the politically transitional period of the early 1960’s to early 1970’s. I believe these phases juxtapose a rigidly defined society and critical period of challenging the norm for women. I also believe that these two periods best represent the university’s response to changing social standards. In respect to the social atmosphere at the University, I specifically focus on the dating culture and dating policies. I will not analyze an intermediate period, as I feel that there is insignificant change between these eras. Additionally, I will not focus on a later period because I think that after the dissolution of The Woman’s College and the integration of women into Duke University, differing policies concerning gender are not as explicitly stated.

Initially, I will analyze the general dating culture and society’s notions of standards for women both within and apart from Duke in response to the national context. Then I will examine how the university enforces a double standard through its policies regarding gender. I will focus on the shifting power between men and women in dating and how the administrative policies enabled a predominantly male-controlled dating culture. I will attempt to examine whether or not this initial favor toward men on the part of the administration was viewed by its female students as a disservice. To evaluate the extent of this prejudice, the internal perspectives of the female students are investigated.
To analyze these various areas, three different standpoints are accounted for. Through a logical progression of examinations from societal standards, to university policies, to individual reactions, one can see the former effect on the latter and the implicit disservice to the full spectrum of opportunities. First, the public perception of dating in the context of that time period is studied by using the yearbooks, *The Chanticleer*. This is meant to serve as society’s notions of women and dating and also to reflect the general campus culture. Then, the university handbooks, both for The Woman’s College and Trinity College, illustrate the differing social policies for women and men. This material will illustrate how the university bridged the gap between societal expectations of conformity and individual development. Finally, the internal disputes the female students faced are dealt with in the YWCA surveys and forums from 1938 and the Women’s Studies Surveys of 1987. These insights reflect the contradictory role the university played in the lives of these women.

However, each one of these sources has limitations that inhibit a true portrayal of campus culture to be exposed. The yearbooks are an inadequate source of social life, but due to the length of this essay, they are probably one of the most representative materials. Additionally, the handbooks and university policies depict a very constraining environment. Yet, not everyone abided by these regulations and opportunities for loopholes were found. Additionally, open forums and surveys are inherently biased. In open debate and discussion, it must be accounted for that some things said may be shaped towards their audience. For instance, a group of female students involved in the YWCA in 1938 might more openly discuss sexual activities with their peers rather than with a group of administrators. Surveys, on the other hand, have a twofold bias. Usually, only those with very strong opinions respond, skewing the overall perception of the issues. Additionally, when dealing with memory or past events, the participant’s reflection
of their experience can be easily distorted. Although I am incapable of resolving some of these limitations by using primary sources, these issues need to be acknowledged.

Introduction and Thesis

The initial decades of Trinity and The Woman’s College were largely a period of disparity between the genders. The social atmosphere created a great deal of pressure for the women to conform to a mold, yet men were allowed to forge an individual identity. The university defined each sex’s role in the dating culture through its differing policies. Given the national context of the time period, the university served as a social reinforcement of certain standards; however, women did not yet possess the necessary modes to challenge authority. Nonetheless, the seeds of revolution and change were established as women questioned the necessity to be traditional. During the controversial decades of the ‘60s and ‘70s, the beginnings of feminism meant the push for gender equality. Women began to break down the mold and embrace individualism. Yet, the allegedly progressive institution continued to uphold certain conformities and standards. Female students thought the institution provided a great disservice by playing this controversial role through offering a false message of self-government and development. But during a politically explosive era, women now had the means to create change.

1920’s-1930’s – Establishing the Mold: Society’s Standards for Women

The early decades of the establishment of Duke University and The Woman’s College simultaneously presented a tempting threshold of progression and a boundary of confinement for women. At a time when women first infiltrated higher education, the Woman’s College offered exciting opportunities into principally male-occupied territory. However, in a socially restrictive era, women found themselves also subjected to portraying an innocent, sexually pure identity
and searching for future economic stability. This priority indisputably equated to marriage. The natural progression of dating leading to marriage reflected not only university policies but the culture at large.

Nationally, domesticity and motherhood symbolized a patriotic loyalty. Successive national crises, such as the Great Depression and World Wars I and II, had rocked Americans’ unwavering assurance in the economy and government. As a result, the progressive women’s rights movement took a backseat to these more pressing issues. Additionally, the massive movement into the suburbs isolated women from one another and further fostered the growth of the nuclear family. It appeared that right after the push for equality through the suffrage movement, women were being forced back into their “natural” roles. The Victorian Code that women were expected to abide had not yet dissolved.

In the university, dating was a predominantly male controlled endeavor, giving women little freedom. The initiative to find a husband became a sole concern to many, and dating policies reflected this need to balance the pursuit for a companion and the depiction of grace and integrity. The publicly divided line of attitudes between the genders was reflected by the differing importance placed on dating. College women generally advanced their social status through the men they dated; however, various other spheres provided men the opportunity to achieve the same prestige. The university yearbooks exhibit the public gender division and its role in the campus culture. As reflected in the 1925 yearbook, the short descriptions of the senior class often alluded to drastically different characteristics of the men versus the women. The notes left to commemorate each sex held very different tones. Men were often characterized by their extended lists of athletic achievements, academic honors, geniality, and future aspirations. One class member was noted as “a man whose activities about the campus, in the
classroom, in the library, and among his fellow students prove the truth of the statement that
‘Knowledge is proud he knows so much; Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.’ …. Some
day we shall look confidently to the top to see Stack stacking up honors.¹” Some men, as an
afterthought, were characterized by their handsomeness or reputation with the ladies. Another
classmate, after listing numerous achievements, was so charming that “the ladies simply can’t
resist his attractiveness – to the envy of other gentlemen members of the class.²” In this manner,
dating was merely another facet of the men’s lives, not a definition of their reputation.

However, the descriptions of women in the senior class are drastically different, focused
primarily on attractiveness and social position rather than activities and accomplishments.
Popularity was made very public and sometimes biased towards the projection of each student.
One class member’s description notes that “no one will deny Merle’s a heart-breaker…may be
called ‘surprise girl’…beautiful, calm, and magnetic in personality.³” Many of the outgoing girls
were juxtaposed against the less sociable girls. In a biting tone, another member of the 1925
class was described as “another one of our town girls who has not thought it worth her while to
come up to campus and learn to know the rest of us.⁴” Social ranking dictated one’s popularity,
but perhaps one of the most significant advances up the hierarchy was dating. If someone was
seriously dating, it became a public affair. One woman was named a “most excellent companion
– ask ‘Joe!’⁵” Although the identity of the acquaintance is not clear, there is still a great deal of
emphasis placed on the association. At no point in the notations are any of the male members of
the class of 1925 explicitly engaged in a similar affair. This juxtaposition implies that women
were defined by who they dated rather than what they accomplished.

¹ 1925 Chanticleer, [p. 101]
² Ibid., [p. 87]
³ Ibid., [p. 53]
⁴ Ibid., [p. 65]
⁵ 1925 Chanticleer, [p. 43]
Another interesting aspect of the portrayals of campus dating is the rarity of women and men pictured together. Although in the yearbook dating is often alluded to, it still appeared to be a much hidden matter. The fact that a major component of a woman’s social character was very secretive reinforced the social imbalance between the genders. Whether a result of the confining structure of the university or the expectations to project a certain image, women were not encouraged to be as well-rounded as men. This societal confinement left women little freedom to explore other possibilities the university offered.

_The University’s reinforcement of the double standard through physical separation and policies_

The culture of dating was often dictated by the different domains each gender occupied on campus. West Campus was an exclusively male-oriented property. In order for any act of dating to be initiated, men had to enter and adhere to the strict guidelines of The Woman’s College on East Campus. Men however had very little restrictions placed on them upon entering the university. This liberty ensured that the dating culture was entirely controlled by men.

The university as an institution maintained a bridge between the public and private spheres of the women’s lives. While simultaneously providing opportunities into the unmarked terrain of higher education, the enforced regulations of The Woman’s College emphasized a larger perspective. The university proposed two different pathways for each sex. For men, it was a means to success and a future; for women, it was simply an opportunity to find a husband and reinforce the role of domesticity. By placing the power into the hands of the men, women felt themselves given only the opportunity to marry after graduation and confined to depict a delicate role. Entering the university was a tempting time to develop individualism and independence, yet policies and society restricted women, evident through The first-year Woman’s College handbooks. Standards enforced by the university provided the necessary
guidance to uphold sexual and social purity. In some manners, the regulations were a close extension of parental supervision. At a time when few independent role models were present, many followed the social norm to ensure a solid future.

The first-year handbooks reveal the university’s distinctive standpoints to deal with the men versus the women both socially and academically. Generally, in the first-year handbooks for Trinity College, various interests were addressed. Matters such as university history, traditions, academic guidelines, and diverse organizations offered on campus were described. Athletics and student government comprised a large majority of the booklet. Some sections concentrated on fraternity rush. In fact, an excerpt titled “Tips to new men” exemplifies that the overall tone as an encouraging one; the university wanted the students to have an enthusiastic attitude to an exciting frontier of change⁶.

The Woman’s College Handbook, in contrast, held a very different tone. The handbook focused more on regulations and standards than opportunities and freedoms. An abbreviated version of activities and clubs available, like the Needlework Guild, appeared that were very different from Trinity College. The majority of the book comprised of committees, rules and the authority to whom to report in order to obtain permission for something. Unlike The Woman’s College, Trinity College did not have a standards committee, smoking regulations, closing hours for the dormitories, permission to go out of town or to a dance, dress codes, etc. The Woman’s College appeared more attentive to social boundaries, with little notice to any choices which the students now faced.

The harsh criticism and the distrust of women were graciously presented in the first-year handbooks in the section titled Social Standards. In the 1931 handbook, the excerpt below

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⁶ 1930-1940 Duke University First-Year Handbook, p. 16
imparts initially a sympathetic understanding of the difficult transition period a new freshman female student faces:

Accustomed as we are to having in Duke University a group of young women who obey the dictates of good taste, we sometimes feel that regulations are hardly necessary. However, since different living conditions bring about a change in recognized social requirements, there are certain things that our committee on Social Standards definitely expects of every young woman who matriculates at Duke. The contacts with men on our campus and in the classrooms mean much to us in life. The practice of a fine sense of dignity and self-control on the part of women students has contributed to the general feeling of respect and comradeship between the men and women.7

At this point, the handbook oscillates between the concerns for the individual and the group as a whole. The first suggestion is that these women are so refined that these standards are merely a precaution, for every student can surely direct their own lives. Yet, using phrases such as the “dictates of good taste” implies only one acceptable ideal to which everyone must conform. This coercion is again seen in terms like “definitely expects of every young woman” and the “practice of a fine sense of dignity and self-control.” One of the few social channels available was dating because the “contacts with men…mean much to us in life.” Stating this at the onset of a woman’s education conveys that one of her purposes is to earn her “Mrs.” Degree instead of her academic degree.

The writing quickly advances to the definite model of how women should present themselves at all times:

A violation of this practice by anyone in the group tends to destroy this respect and comradeship and is keenly resented by fellow students…There are also some things the avoidance of which helps to create standards of good taste among the women and

7 1930-1931 first-year Woman’s College handbook, p. 61
therefore we ask all women to refrain from talking from windows, leaving shades up at night, chewing gum in company, going to town without hats, dating on Sunday mornings, and going to drug stores on Sundays.  

This perspective of the difficult but necessary image for women to maintain reflected society at large. Any encroachment upon this perfectly balanced world was “keenly resented by fellow students.” The influential groups of the administration, parents, and public were not explicitly mentioned, however, their presence was always eminent. The fact that fellow students pressured themselves into these standards reflected their upbringing of “good taste” in a society dedicated to defining gender roles.

Engagements with men were immediately addressed after social regulations in the handbooks, indicating the allotted number of dates per week based on seniority and the closing hours of the dormitories. Each date needed to be reported to authority. In order to attend a dance, which counted towards a date, the approval of the Social Director had to be obtained.  

Even as late as the 1950 handbook, although slightly more lenient, the boundaries of gender interaction outside the classroom was strictly addressed. Female students could not entertain callers in the parlors before noon, men could not enter the dorms after closing time, and no men, including those of the student’s own family, could go into her room. The female students were almost treated as children, incapable of restraining themselves in front of the men. So as to prevent any potential urges, the university took upon itself to completely chaperone any cross of the gender segregation. Although marriage was the desirable end goal, one walked a very narrow line to get there. One could not be too unsociable, but act overly friendly and available to the opposite sex and the eligibility to gain the coveted “Mrs.” status decreased drastically.

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 71
10 1949-1950 first-year Woman’s College handbook, p. 72
Men, on the contrary, had no definitive restrictions concerning dating. In place of a social standards section, the handbooks advised that self-government was the key to success and that the men were fully capable of adjusting and commanding their individual paths. In the student government at Duke “the student body is its own police force …Each new student must decide what his attitude will be, and the ultimate fate of student government at Duke will be determined largely by the composite results of these decisions.” The male power in dating is again revealed in the 1940 handbooks: “In fact, we think a good deal of our girls. We take them to movies at Quadrangle Pictures, which is operated every Wednesday and Saturday, right on our own campus!” Rather than imposing procedures, the handbooks advise the first-years how to date. Constantly using the pronoun “we” implies a united force of rescuing the women from their boredom and controlling dating activities at the men’s convenience. The near belittling of women by calling them “our girls,” similar to property, again reinforces their subordinate and dependent position. The term “girls” suggests they are childish and need discipline and supervision. No repercussions punished men who failed to get their dates home on time.

The university also indirectly encouraged women to prepare for and accept their future role of domesticity inside the classroom. Although most of the same course listings were offered to both The Woman’s College and Trinity College, one of the most interesting disparities, exemplified by the undergraduate bulletin of the 1935-1936 academic year, were the physical education electives taught. Every student was required to take six hours of physical education credit, but the dissimilar courses offered showed a larger emphasis on social training for women. In The Woman’s College, activities taught included riding, natural dancing, folk dancing, and

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11 1930-1931 first-year Duke University handbook, p. 30
12 1940-1941 first-year Duke University handbook, p. 16
body mechanics. These courses placed less stress on physical endeavors and health and more importance on preparing the women for their future gracious roles in society. Another example of this future guidance was the electives offered to women in hygiene listed exclusively under The Woman’s College, for a woman always had to look presentable and desirable. In these manners, the university took a minor but a theoretically significant role in aiding women’s confinement. Overall, with the combination of its different policies and course offerings, it was as if the university was suggesting two drastically different paths for each gender - explicitly encouraging men to pursue academics and exciting future careers and implicitly training women for marriage.

**Recognizing the Internal Struggle**

However, a passive attitude towards the norm was not always the circumstance. In the YWCA surveys and forums conducted in the 1938 academic year, many controversial issues on the predicament of women dating and/or considering marriage were presented. These surveys and forums revealed the more private side of women and their internal struggle between independence and subservience. To be placed in a limbo, an indeterminate state of progression, was frustrating. Although the roots of change were initiating, for now, talking amongst themselves provided a support system.

The forum meetings listed controversial lists of topics, ranging from “How to choose a mate” to “Just how far do you think a man should go with a girl on the first date?” These questions expressed that women were not content with the social norm. They struggled to maintain an appearance of chastity and grace and to live up to an unnatural double standard. One of the addressed topics in a 1938 forum was the resentments Duke women felt towards the men. The attitude that women who were not dating were not “worth dating” at all was a great

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13 1935 – 1936 Undergraduate Bulletin, p. 115
concern, reinforcing the necessity of dating to popularity. However, the primary concern expressed by the women was the pressure to fit a mold. The discussion topics were listed as:

b. Women must fit the pattern of men’s expecting frivolous, gay person. Men don’t like capable, practical, efficient women.
c. The “Here I am, amuse me” attitude of men. Put all responsibility for topics of conversation etc. on women.
d. Girls feel necessity for fitting pattern. Resent the fact that man makes little effort to discover if girl is intelligent; seldom indicates whether he wants her to be intelligent.14

Women understood yet disliked their position as little more than accessories of entertainment for men. They were fine trophies for men to admire, wondering if sacrificing their intelligence would make them more desirable. If all the pressure was placed on them to simply amuse the men and conform to act “frivolous and gay,” what demands could they place on their dates? The students were in a very confusing state, knowing they were “practical” and “efficient,” but questioning if they should conceal this because men simply were not interested and they needed to conform to this “pattern.” In this manner, it could be argued that rarely any interests in dating were mutual. Women were searching for a future to be provided for in a time when they could not provide one for themselves; men, on the other hand, were searching for a subordinate companion. The students came to the university aspiring to be intelligent, achieving women, but they were trapped in a Catch-22, and the conflict of how to break out of this framework in a restrictive environment was unavoidable.

Women’s limited image was not the only issue addressed. Other topics became important points of interest for women in this era. In a YWCA meeting the same week as the forum, students approached critical questions concerning the process of dating and the roles each

14 “Discussion Points – Forum Meeting,” YWCA Records, 11/22/38
gender should play. For example, “Dutch” treatment, where each person pays for his/her end of the date, conveyed that the shift of power was questioned. Perhaps women could grasp some control from the men and simultaneously elude violating university policies. Modifying the line of acceptance provided another means to transfer the power. One of the questions asked if it was alright to kiss a man and not feel strongly about him. Another asked how far a man could be allowed on the first date. This proposal lent itself to a twofold objective. One aim was embracing a marginal sexual liberation and reinventing the image of conservative and chaste. However, this liberation came with a cost – sexual advances simultaneously degraded women and often ostracized them from society. Yet, this is not to say that some form of sexual activity never occurred. Even though a woman with an unblemished reputation was the most sought-after, some women fought against this standard. In a YWCA report on a discussion conducted in December 1938, 8% of the women interviewed reported dating exclusively for the “sex thrills.” Yet further comments suggested that if the majority of the students answered honestly, “sex thrills would take a much more prominent place.” In the same survey, when asked to estimate the percentage of “dates in which petting actually occurs,” the reported average was nearly half.15

Many female students were aware of their expected roles, yet did not know how to resolve the daily inequalities they faced. Given the social environment where women’s rights felt a national backlash, they did not own the tools or means to challenge authority or unite to change their current position. Thus, these students thought they were trapped in surroundings - they were considered intelligent and revolutionary by being among the few in higher education; however, they felt they were only allowed few options upon graduation.

15 “Seeking Creative Agreements on Duke Dating,” YWCA Records, 12/07/38
The Women’s Studies survey mailed in 1987 to female alumni provide additional insight into the contradictory struggles female students coped with. The survey asked basic background information, such as the type of degree earned from Duke, their current occupation, and the sequence of events leading to that occupation. However, the survey attempted to assess the degree of involvement or sympathy the women had for the feminist movement, asking questions such as which organizations she belonged to or if she considered herself a supporter of the movement. Perhaps the most telling responses to the internal battle many women felt were to the questions of what might Duke have done better for you as a woman and if you were able to discuss anything with Duke women today, what would it be? These contemplations provide insight into not only the power struggle between the administration and the students, but also between society and women at large.

Although most former students listed their occupation as homemaker or housewife, many questioned, upon reflection, the university’s disservice. A member of the class of 1939 considered this insufficient education when asked what the university could have done better for her:

Lacks: The obvious – Young women were sheltered, but not the men. They were not oriented toward independence and pride in being women. The goal of a “college education” was to make one a better wife and mother. I remember hearing nothing about career orientation or even aptitude testing. We were almost completely unaware of women’s participation in the history of our nation and the world. I realize that these lacks were the fault of the times and not Duke.

Her confrontation of this issue exposes an inconsistent anger. She uses “obvious,” fortifying the suggestion that this inequality was standard. Initially, she appears slightly bitter towards these notions of fostering women with a lack of independence and pride. The mocking tone expressed
by the quotations around “college education” illustrates her resentment to continue to develop her natural role. The university did nothing to encourage a future career, again implying the marriage training. Yet interestingly, she shifts the blame from the university to disperse it to a larger enemy - the “fault of our times.” This reallocation of blame reflects her instinctive womanly nature of forgiveness and sympathy. She expresses anger at the confinement and neglect of higher education and then society at large, yet she cannot become aggressive enough to confront the issue without dispersing her blow. This diffusion exemplifies the reason for the stagnant position of women in this generation. The inability to direct their anger at a specific source prevented them from uniting to contest their environment.

Many other alumni who responded to these surveys implied the same frustration towards the university. A classmate of 1937 recounts that she received no career counseling or guidance on how to provide for herself. In essence, she was “trained to do nothing on graduation…..I am afraid in my day we naturally supposed we were to marry – have children – and keep the home fires burning.” When asked what she would mostly likely discuss with Duke women today, she urged to please prepare themselves for future independent economic stability. An independent future, denied by the university’s one-way guidance to marriage, angered women. Men, upon graduation, were prepared to forge their own identities and pursue challenging and exciting careers. Women, however, realized that come graduation day, they were trained to be socially presentable. Yet they did not possess the resources and social context to challenge authority. The university meant to provide a complete education to each of its students, but failed to recognize the harm in its social difference towards its female students.

Although the period of the 1920’s to 1930’s portrayed an exciting era for women as they gained access to the male-controlled institution of higher education, limitations still prevented
them from gaining an equal “college experience.” Publicly, they were confined to an ideal of
grace, beauty, chastity, and integrity. The administrative policies of the Woman’s College
reinforced these social principles, whereas Trinity College encouraged self-government as a
means of development. The internal battles of the women maintaining their fixed roles indicated
that revolutionary change was imminent.

1960’s – 1970’s: A period of change?

The years between the 1960’s and 1970’s for Duke women signified an intermediate state
of progression towards gender equality. The social standards of women began to break down,
and public notions were no longer peer enforced. Now individualism attempted to take shape
and was slowly embraced. The politically turbulent atmosphere shaping this era allowed women
to rebel in some sense. The university, however, played a vacillating role. While more lenient
than years past, it continued to be one of the barriers towards equality. The university attempted
to maintain some former traditions and standards. While symbolizing an institution of
progression and development, it still managed to hinder a true gender balance.

Embracing Individualism: Leveling the Playing Field

The 1960’s to 1970’s was a pivotal moment in American politics and culture. The idea
of basic rights gradually became an expectation rather than an exception. The nation was now in
a state of uneasiness as many former institutions began to dissolve and radically change. The
beginning of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement introduced an era of peaceful
rebellion. The growing support of the Civil Rights Movement paved the way for the Feminist
Movement, inspiring such fundamental works like The Feminine Mystique that established the
critical “problem with no name.” Suddenly, on national television in 1968, women protested at
the Miss America pageant by burning their bras. In the late 1960’s, the first Women’s Studies
programs were introduced into universities. Sexual health became an issue that some national
groups and organizations do not shy away from. Nationwide, people were forced to finally pay
attention to the predicament of women. And now, using these modes, women in the university
would have a means to challenge and resist their constraining surroundings.

The perceived social divide between men versus women appeared very different in the
period of the mid 1960’s to early 1970’s than before. No longer were women merely confined to
popularity and beauty as a means of social advancement. In the 1965 issue of The Chanticleer,
women are pictured participating in a variety of activities – recognized for their involvement in
the arts, drama, sports, clubs, student government, and Greek life. More social channels were
available to women that enabled them to be defined by more than just dating. Women were
closer to gaining a more balanced college experience, much like one the men had experienced for
years.

In addition to penetrating the male-dominated social life, women also managed to
partially fracture the mold of conformity during this era. In the 1969 Chanticleer, they appeared
more individualistic in hairstyle and clothing, inferring that the same standard of style did not
seem to be enforced. When they are pictured together, the female students appear less rigid and
posed. Several of the sorority shots look as if they were taken spontaneously, so as if to catch
them off-guard, during a skit. Even one portrait of the Panhellenic Council has all the women
posed and smiling on one page; then, on the opposite page, they are in some sort of pie-throwing
contest covered in whipped-cream¹⁶. All of these illustrations reflect a new sense of liberation.
A rebellion against conformity and standards of acceptance was beginning to take shape.
Attractiveness and desirability took on new forms rather than just physical appearance.

¹⁶ 1969 Chanticleer, p. 264
Furthermore, dating appeared to be less of an implied affair. This differing importance placed on dating showed that women were not restricted to this social outlet. Now, even in the yearbook, couples were pictured together expressing affection. In the 1965 yearbook, one picture is shot from a distance, catching a guy walking a girl to the door of her dorm, leaning in to kiss her goodnight. The 1969 yearbook has couples pictured more frequently in more public places. One image shows couples kissing on the quad, another shows a couple hugging in a dorm room. Because dating was more out in the open, a shift of power had occurred. Couples publicly acknowledged in this manner illustrated two major transitions in the dating culture. Women now visibly embraced their marginal sexual liberation. By refusing to conform to the ideals that the only desirable lady was a chaste and proper one who did not make herself available to men, they broke the social constructs. In this rebellion, a modification of power in the relationship occurred. A balance of the playing field between women and men in dating had been partially achieved.

Yet, the issues of beauty and grace did not totally disintegrate. Some traditionalism still left traces during these years. In fact, beauty appeared to be categorized. The 1965 yearbook had an entire section entitled “Beauties.” Within this section, the Chanticleer Beauty court, Homecoming court, the “May Queen” selected by The Woman’s College student body, the “Nurses Beauty,” The N.R.O.T.C. Queen and the A.F.R.O.T.C Queen are all pictured one right after the other in an overwhelming array of aesthetic splendor. Each picture of the women is large, sometimes full-page photographs; yet their typed names are so small that unless one had the intention of looking for something other than their prettiness, their identifications would be easily missed. No descriptions of their activities, involvements, or justifications for their

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17 1965 Chanticleer, p. 51
18 1965 Chanticleer, pp. 90 - 103
nomination are given. All are posed in a similar manner with similar hair and make-up. The fact that some representatives were chosen from The Woman’s College student body implies that peer coercion towards certain standards still remained. This combination of emancipation and conformity illustrates how transitional this period was. Although women had achieved much in terms of recreational opportunities, diluted some of the men’s power in dating, and experimented with individualism, not enough had changed. Women were still the objects of beauty, labeled in some manner by their attractiveness.

*The University: In Loco Parentis*

The university continued to assume a parental, guiding role in the lives of its female students and a laissez-faire attitude toward its male students. Restrictions presented in the freshmen handbooks were slightly more lenient than previous years, and, in some cases, the administration made it apparent that some regulations were merely “suggestions” to abide by. However, the institution still kept a hand in the supervision of the female students’ social lives, representing an intermediate between society and the individual.

The last edition of the first-year Trinity College handbooks appears in the academic year of 1964 – 1965. Many of the traditional sections of university history, academic guidelines and organizations and activities offered on campus continue to comprise the majority of the handbook. Under the section entitled “Social Life” is a brief description of the available opportunities to date:

> Since Duke tries to graduate a socially integrated student with a balance of intellectual integrity and social poise, social life is a vital part of your college experience. Parties, dances, and open houses will provide you an opportunity for you to take a break from your studies and meet the lovely girls from East Campus and Hanes House.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{19}\) 1964 – 1965 Duke University First-Year Handbook, p. 74
The impression given by this excerpt reinforces the independent and well-rounded experience the university provided. Stress is placed on a “socially integrated student” with a “balance” of intelligence and social wherewithal. In fact, this well-roundedness is termed “vital.” But at the expense of all of this, women are belittled yet again. They are the source of entertainment and an excuse for the men to “take a break from your studies.” They are the “lovely girls,” separated not only physically, but also symbolically in nearly every service the university offers. Separate spheres continued to permeate the social atmosphere because of the university’s involvement.

Only one page in the “Social Life” section contained the regulations concerning dating. Yet, this list comprised of 7 short policies from The Woman’s College that indirectly affected the men. Included were the closing hours of the dorms, the in/out card, and a short description of how to wait for your date while she is paged from the reception desk. These policies illustrate that not all of the power in dating had been leveled. There was no need to place any restrictions on these responsible, independent men, and, in some respects, men had considerable control over dating in general.

The Woman’s College first-year handbooks professed the students’ rights to self-government and individuality, yet still managed to “suggest” certain conformities for the betterment of the university and each student. The tone of the handbooks is very diplomatic, cautious to avoid strict guidelines. It is as if the administration is advocating for progression yet discreetly upholding old standards. In the 1964 first-year handbook, the Woman’s Student Government Association immediately presents a “Petition of Self-Government,” which resembles the male students’ rights for autonomy. This petition acknowledges that self-government is fundamental to teach the student responsibility and to prepare the student for a

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20 Ibid., p. 78
future place in society. However, this petition is modified to include that the College acknowledges this right to govern their own loves “to the extent consistent with their age and experience.” This appeal is then followed by the “Grant of Power” from The Woman’s College, actually conceding these rights except for those in which the “Authorities” are only responsible for that are included in the Constitution. In this manner, the administration, or “Authorities” appear to modify their commanding role and institute a healthy environment for development. This primary initiative is fortified in the “Code for Campus Living.” This code recognizes a delicate balance between full autonomy and certain responsibilities, as it states that “Each member of The Woman’s College student body has principles in which she believes. Most of us call the total of these principles our personal honor... As mature students we accept self-responsibility for seeing that our actions are in accordance with Duke standards of conduct which have been formulated for the welfare of the entire community. Furthermore, we acknowledge the need for cooperation in our campus living – a respect and concern for our fellow students and our college.” However, this reassurance of power in the university’s hands to govern as they please is emphasized in the following two sentences. “Some regulations may not be agreeable to everyone, for they have been formulated to meet the needs of the entire group. This, however, does not lessen the individual’s obligation to uphold them [emphasis original].” The offset and bold font of this assertion symbolizes the administration’s reluctance to fully grant an independent experience. It serves as a reminder of the power structure of the university.

Following this false grant of the right to self-govern is the long list of regulations similar to the 1931 handbook. A directory of committees, rules and authority to report to in order to receive permission for certain social activities were included. Additionally, the relations between men and women outside the classroom were addressed. An allotted number of dates per

21 1964-1965 Woman’s College First-Year Handbook, p. 30
week based on age were still intact. Also, the in/out card policy and closing hours for the women’s dormitories were highlighted. For the first time, the policy regarding student marriage was instituted. The student had to have her parent notify the Dean of The Woman’s College and must have the Dean’s permission in order to maintain her enrollment.

Perhaps the most startling attacks on individual authority appeared in the Student Life section:

Social regulations alone cannot create an atmosphere of gracious campus living. The Woman’s College community, guided by this philosophy, entrusts the majority of its standards of good taste to each individual’s sense of social responsibility: the community prefers to suggest, rather than dictate, basic standards of conduct that contribute to a pleasant, attractive environment in which all students can develop to best advantage. The flexible framework of campus mores is based upon the conviction that a Duke “Duchess,” although an individual with a unique social background and a unique sense of social propriety, nevertheless retains an acute sensitivity to the good of the college society as a whole.22

Efforts to control conformity had not yet disappeared, as evident in this carefully worded excerpt. Although the administration seemed to cautiously approach the brink of progression, it evidently still grasped to old notions. The need to create a “gracious” campus environment is strangely familiar to the language of The 1931 Woman’s College handbook. Oscillating between the individual rights and overall authority, the university appears to “entrust” each student to abide by the “standards of good taste.” These “standards,” though perhaps slightly more lenient than a few years before, are still moulds for the women to fit, nonetheless. Rather than relying on individual judgment to guide one’s development, “social responsibility” placed the individual’s conscience to conform to the larger picture. However, the administration quickly qualifies its stance by preferring “to suggest, rather than dictate, basic standards of conduct.” In fact, it is not in order to uphold certain ideals, but rather to establish a “pleasant, attractive environment” to better the entire community. A so called “flexible framework” gives

22 Ibid., p. 31
the impression that individual rights are still intact. To support their position further, the university states that a Duke “Duchess” acknowledges her unique abilities but then conforms to a whole for the better of the college.

These “suggestions” that are not considered dictates include restricting Bermudas and blue jeans to East Campus. On East, “at no time” should these clothes be worn in the Union, the East Duke building, the library, the dining rooms, West Campus, or downtown. This blatant restriction, illustrated by emphasizing “at no time,” only allowed this liberating style of clothing to be worn in the dormitories. Also, a standard of heels or flats and hose for Sunday dinner was instituted. Following this list was a clear message of women’s expected public image. Simply stated, “Her conduct should neither embarrass her fellow students nor infringe upon their rights and feelings.”

Although seemingly more lenient, the overall structure of the first-year Woman’s College handbook showed how the administration continued to assume in loco parentis relationship. First, the student body must ask for permission to retain more control over their own lives in the “Petition for Self-Government.” Then, the university in the “Grant of Power” compromises some individual rights. However, they must continue to modify their position in the “Code for Campus Living,” and then seem to blatantly disregard any self-government by adding a long list of regulations under the false title of “suggestions.” All of these adjustments made are an uncomfortable power struggle between the student and the university. The female student has long been controlled, unlike the male student; even some grant of command over their social development is difficult for the institution to allow.

The Repercussions of University Bias
The Women’s Studies surveys are perhaps the clearest evidence of the university’s
disservice to its female students. Although the beginnings of feminism and had been established,
many women pondered over the consequences of the continued bias. They were caught in a time
of exciting change and liberation, yet still restricted in many ways by a supposedly open-minded,
progressive institution.

The limitations and obvious bias left a bitter taste for some women. One member of the
class of 1960 argued, “The restrictions of women students at that time as to when they came and
went and what they wore I found irksome. They would have been more degrading if they hadn’t
seemed so silly. Duke could have treated me like a responsible individual. …..I would like to ask
you why Duke always (even with this mailing) addresses me as “Mrs. William….? My name is
Nancy, not Bill.” This excerpt illustrates a drastically different attitude than the surveys
submitted by the alumni in the 1930’s. Illustrative of the changing times, this defiant woman is
now able to show explicit directed anger at the source of the problem – the university.

Another member of the class of 1964 best defines the university’s indecisive position on
women’s rights: “Duke in the early ‘60’s was a paradox. The University spent inordinate
amounts of time telling us that we were the best and the brightest (EVEN as good as the
IVIES…) but when it came time to graduate there was little or no encouragement to do anything
except get married or to hold some inconsequential job with that prospect in mind.” Although in
this era, thanks to women infiltrating the workforce, more career opportunities were available,
the university did nothing to prepare women for life after graduation. Even though “marriage
training” per say was not necessarily the intended path for female students, the lack of career
preparation continued to suggest one way. Another story exemplifies this mindset. A graduate of
1971 explained the events following the commencement day ceremonies as a defining moment:
My most memorable experience was on graduation day. My husband and I had to go pick up our diplomas after the commencement service. Since I graduated from the Women’s and he from Trinity we went to different rooms. In my room I was handed a diploma. In his room, in addition to the diploma tables, there were additional tables for job counseling and even some recruiters from companies. I had the feeling I was supposed to go out into the world and pour tea for my executive husband!

Her shock at her implied role of service to her husband enforced by the university again exemplifies two conflicting themes - the injustice in a place symbolizing progressive ideals and the feminist frustration trying to break down these barriers.

This feminist frustration is also seen in the discussions of the administration’s submission to standards. Women still found themselves trapped in a discriminatory atmosphere and given two basic choices to make upon graduation – career or marriage. No happy medium had been established yet. One classmate of 1969 recounted her hard times:

I suffered at Duke….Many of the faculty were overtly antifeminist and enjoyed attacking women. Women themselves – faculty and students – were confused about what they expected. For too many women students, the achievement they wanted most was an engagement ring their senior year, as if that was the only thing that mattered. To many believed in that old classic “either/or” fallacy – career or marriage…Duke was very schizophrenic then: half finishing school (no slacks, hours of makeup before dates) and half academic citadel (women’s SAT scores were second only to those of Radcliffe women). And the men were absolutely intimidated by intelligent women.

Times had changed, yes, but not enough. Some progression had been made according to the feminist agenda, but not enough. Even women found themselves “confused” about their own position at Duke. This either/or myth prevented social change.

The 1960’s to the 1970’s introduced notions of individualism and more social equality. With marginal sexual liberation, the playing field in dating culture equalized between the genders. However, during this politically tumultuous period, the university needed to step cautiously. Although allowing some form of personal liberties, it constantly reminded its female students of the power structure instate. This controversial position, in turn, frustrated and
angered women. The feminist movement had begun to take shape and individualism and independence was not only embraced as notions but as basic rights. Unlike previous years, women recognized that the university was at fault for the source of this discrimination, not the larger society. Thus, they were caught in a progressive mindset and restrictive environment. One graduate of the class of 1964 defined this era as a true state of uncertainty, explaining that “There was little room for individuality and certainly no recognition that training out minds and touting traditional roles might result in some internal conflict for us. We were the women caught in the middle of a true ‘generation gap.’ I assume that today is an entirely different world there. If it’s not, God help us all.”
Works Cited


1938-1939 Seeking Creative Agreements on Duke Dating: Reports on Discussion. 7 December 1938. In: YWCA Records, Box 2.