

Women's Experiences in Male Spaces, Communities and
Cultures: The Introduction of Mixed-Sex Colleges at the
University of Oxford



Florence Smith

St Hugh's College

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Trinity Term 2023

Word Count: 97,299

Short Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of the first women who entered the initial five mixed-sex colleges at Oxford University in 1974. The University allowed Brasenose, Hertford, Jesus, St Catherine's and Wadham, previously male-only colleges, to accept one hundred women undergraduates between them from autumn 1974. Unlike previous studies of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, this thesis uses an oral history methodology. The thesis analyses the personal testimonies of forty-one women from this cohort to examine their attitudes towards and experiences of mixed-sex colleges, and their post-university career trajectories. It argues that the first mixed-sex colleges were not fully accommodating or welcoming of women students, who faced various difficulties living and learning within them. This resulted from a lack of effective consideration of women's needs by the men running these institutions. The spaces, communities and cultures of the first mixed-sex colleges remained essentially male, being led and dominated by men, catering primarily for the needs of male students, and having cultural atmospheres which revolved around stereotypically masculine behaviours. Women responded to these institutions in various ways, some actively embracing the masculine behaviours and rituals associated with the student cultures of their colleges. When facing difficulties, women developed individual strategies and resilience. This enabled the majority to continue to participate as members of the male-led and dominated institutions they had wanted to attend. A collective feminist mentality or critique of the general way that colleges responded to their first female undergraduates did not develop among the first cohorts of women. Furthermore, attending a mixed-sex college did not enable all women to have career trajectories resembling those of their male peers, as employment inequalities persisted. Where women entered male-dominated professions, their experiences of the male spaces, communities and cultures of their colleges informed their response to masculine working environments.

Long Abstract

This thesis is the first academic study to use an oral history methodology to examine the experiences of the women who entered the initial mixed-sex colleges at the University of Oxford in 1974. The thesis uses the personal reminiscences of this cohort of women to understand the various and complex ways they viewed and experienced the spaces, communities and cultures of formerly male colleges at Oxford. The thesis questions how far the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford can be seen as having been a progressive process which successfully established institutions that were fully welcoming and accommodating of women students.

The University of Oxford allowed five formerly male colleges to accept a limited number of women undergraduates in autumn 1974, after over a decade of debate and discussion within the University about whether, and how, such institutions should be implemented in Oxford. These debates resulted in the University introducing mixed-sex colleges within a closed and controlled scheme. This scheme allowed five colleges, Brasenose, Hertford, Jesus, St Catherine's and Wadham, to accept up to one hundred women undergraduates between them. The University stated that it would then review this scheme in 1977 and only after this review would other colleges be allowed to become mixed-sex.

The thesis argues that the first mixed-sex colleges were not fully accommodating of or welcoming to women students and therefore women faced difficulties while living and learning within them. This was because the spaces, communities and cultures of the first mixed-sex colleges remained essentially male in that they were male-dominated, primarily catered for male behaviours, and produced student cultures that revolved around stereotypically masculine behaviours. This was a product of the way mixed-sex colleges were introduced and established at Oxford. However, the thesis also argues that women responded to the difficulties they faced in these institutions in various ways, many embracing the masculine student cultures of their colleges. They dealt with problems they faced by showing personal resilience and developing individual strategies to overcome issues, rather than by developing a collective feminist response to the general inequalities that they faced in their colleges. This also became the way women approached inequalities they faced in their working lives when they left university.

The thesis employs an oral history methodology and uses the accounts of women who entered mixed-sex colleges as its central body of source material. These accounts are supplemented and contextualised with archival sources from the Oxford University Archive and college archives, newspaper articles, sociological studies from the period, and other women's written accounts and oral testimonies of experiences of secondary and tertiary education during the period. The thesis applies a feminist history approach in that it centralises the experiences of women and analyses them in terms of the dynamics of sex inequalities between men and women, and gender inequalities between the feminine and the masculine. This combination of methodology and approach has not previously been applied to study of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford and offers a valuable analytical framework for understanding how inequalities persist in elite male institutions and how women respond to them.

Historians who have studied the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford have not examined women's experiences of these colleges through their personal reminiscences. This has led some to argue that in the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, women faced few if any difficulties while living and learning in these institutions. Such conclusions present the introduction of mixed-sex

colleges in terms of a successful and progressive moment of change for women in the University. Some have challenged this narrative, suggesting the inequalities that were likely to remain in mixed-sex colleges and acknowledging the complex ways that mixed-sex colleges were perceived by women in Oxford's women's colleges before they were introduced. However, again, such studies do not examine women's lived experiences of mixed-sex colleges through their own personal accounts. Therefore, they do not offer insights into the various difficulties that women faced in these institutions, or the complex ways that women dealt with such difficulties and responded to the masculine cultures of their colleges. This thesis provides such insights, emphasising that women could both face difficulties because of the male-dominated, led and focused nature of their colleges, and also see this as what made them desirable institutions. Furthermore, women could find the masculine atmosphere of their colleges both uncomfortable and enjoyable, many embracing the male cultures and behaviours associated with them.

Alongside its examination of women's experiences of mixed-sex colleges, the thesis analyses both the factors that led to women seeing these institutions as desirable, and women's post-university experiences. In this way, the thesis contributes to a growing body of scholarship that examines women's relationship to higher education in twentieth century Britain in terms of ambitions, experiences and outcomes.

The women in the cohort examined in this thesis were born in the mid-1950s; therefore they experienced girlhood, went to secondary school, experienced their teenage years and then entered university during a period that has been defined as the 'long-1960s'. The thesis argues that women's experiences during this period, in terms of their familial, school and social lives, were significant in shaping their attitudes towards higher education, particularly in terms of mixed-sex institutions and women-only institutions. A growing body of literature has examined the experiences of young people during this period. In doing so, this scholarship has indicated the extent to which this period was one of both change and continuity in terms of attitudes towards women and women's lived experiences, and has demonstrated how this context shaped women's educational ambitions. However, such scholarship tends to focus on the social experiences of young adult women during this period rather than on the school experiences of young women who were at secondary school during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In examining the social, familial and schooling experiences of women who were at secondary school during this period, this thesis argues that the conflicting images of womanhood presented to girls and women at this time continued to impact the experiences and attitudes of young women who attended secondary school until the early to mid-1970s. For women in this cohort, the process of navigating these tensions led them to see male-led and dominated institutions as more desirable than women-led and dominated ones.

While no historians have examined the specific reasons why the women who attended mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 saw them as attractive institutions, some have suggested the general reasons why co-education became a popular system of higher education during this period. They argue that it was educational and social changes, such as the move to co-educational secondary schools in the state sector, the development of second-wave feminism and the liberalising of sexual mores, that caused such a view of the desirability of co-education to develop. This thesis challenges this narrative, arguing that, while such changes were relevant to women's attitudes, the continuation of conservative views of education and of women's lives, and the continued presence of the post-war system of education in which single-sex schooling was the norm, were equally significant in shaping the attitudes of women who entered university in the mid-1970s. Thus, the thesis contributes to our understanding of the lives of girls and young women who attended secondary school from the mid-

1960s to the mid-1970s, suggesting the importance of this context to understanding women's attitude towards male-dominated and male-led institutions and towards masculinity and femininity.

Through its examination of the daily experiences of women who lived and studied in Oxford's first mixed-sex colleges, the thesis also contributes to a growing body of scholarship that examines the history of higher education in Britain in the twentieth century in terms of the experiences of students rather than in terms of political or institutional change. This scholarship has emphasised the extent to which women's experiences of higher education could be shaped by their sex and by persisting inequalities within institutions. Within this scholarship, the movement of institutions towards a system of co-education or mixed-sex residence has been interpreted in conflicting ways. Some acknowledge the continued inequalities that persisted in 'co-educational' institutions while others have understood the move to systems of co-residence and integrated student services, that by the late-1970s had become the norm for British universities, in terms of the liberalising of attitudes of university authorities towards their students and an improvement in the dynamic between men and women students. However, this scholarship does not examine women's experiences at the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford. Therefore, this thesis contributes to our understanding of the way women experienced elite, mixed-sex educational institutions during the 1970s. It shows that on the one hand, women faced difficulties in these institutions because as spaces, communities and cultures they continued to be essentially male, but on the other hand women's attitudes and responses to this situation could be complex.

In its examination of women's accounts of being a member of a mixed-sex college, this thesis focuses on women's daily experiences of these institutions. In doing so, the thesis demonstrates that the difficulties women faced in their colleges were caused by the way they were physically structured, by the attitudes of individual members of academic and non-academic staff, and by the student cultures that shaped student life in these institutions. Through focusing on women's daily experiences as members of the first mixed-sex colleges, the thesis illuminates the various ways that inequality persisted in these elite, male-dominated institutions. This offers a fuller picture of the dynamics that shaped women's experiences of higher education during the period. Furthermore, the thesis offers an example of the complexities that were, and continue to be, involved in the process of women entering and gaining equality within elite male institutions.

This thesis also examines how attending a mixed-sex college impacted women's post-university experiences and in doing so contributes to a growing body of scholarship on graduate women's experiences of work through the post-war period. The thesis argues that in many ways the post-university experiences of women who attended mixed-sex colleges at Oxford followed similar patterns to those of other graduate women, and indeed non-graduate women, in the period. This indicates that attending a formerly male college at Oxford, and graduating after the establishment of equalities legislation during the 1970s, did not guarantee that women would have career experiences similar to those of their male peers. However, where attending a mixed-sex college did have an impact it was in that it prepared women for the male spaces, communities and cultures they came up against if they did enter male-dominated forms of employment. Therefore, the thesis indicates the complex impact that attending an elite, formerly male institution had on women's post-university careers and on their experiences of and attitudes towards inequalities in their working lives. Attending a mixed-sex college could reinforce the view that women succeed by showing individual resilience to discrimination and structural inequalities and by embracing the male behaviours and cultures associated with male-dominated working environments.

Chapter one examines the process by which mixed-sex colleges were introduced to Oxford, arguing that this process created the situation that women came up against when they entered mixed-sex colleges, and shaped their experiences. Chapter two examines why women students came to see mixed-sex colleges as desirable institutions, arguing that this view involved a rejection of female-led female-dominated institutions. The chapter argues that this view was shaped by the various often conflicting discourses about women's lives that were present in their school, family and social lives before they went to university. Chapters three, four and five examine women's experiences of living and learning within mixed-sex colleges. They argue that women faced various difficulties because the spaces, communities and cultures of their colleges remained essentially male and were not fully welcoming or accommodating of women. These chapters argue that women dealt with these difficulties by developing individual strategies rather than through a collective feminist critique of the general inequalities that women faced in their colleges. Chapter six explores women's post-university experiences, demonstrating both how far women's career trajectories followed trends of women's employment in the period, and the ways in which attending a mixed-sex college at Oxford affected women's attitude towards male-dominated working environments and the inequalities they faced within them.

Altogether, the thesis shows that women faced difficulties living and learning in mixed-sex colleges because as spaces, communities, and sites of student cultures they remained essentially male, a situation which was the result of the way mixed-sex colleges were introduced at Oxford. Women responded to these institutions by developing individual strategies to deal with difficulties and embracing the masculine cultures and behaviours associated with their colleges. This response did not involve a collective feminist critique of the inequalities they faced, and this mind-set, along with women's experiences of navigating life in their colleges, was relevant to women's post-university career experiences.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank the forty-one women who agreed to be interviewed for this project. Speaking to you all was incredibly enjoyable and rewarding. I am very grateful for your time, stories and encouragement – this thesis simply would not exist without you.

I would also like to thank my supervisors, Senia Pašeta and Selina Todd, for all your support, advice, constructive criticism and encouragement. I am also very grateful for all the support and opportunities you have offered me beyond the DPhil. This has been invaluable for my development as a researcher and a teacher and for supporting and encouraging my post-DPhil ambitions.

I am very grateful to the University of Oxford Clarendon Scholarship for funding this research and to the AHRC for funding my Masters course. Without this financial support I would not have been able to study and research at the University of Oxford, so the financial contributions of these bodies have been essential in enabling me to achieve my academic ambitions.

My deepest thanks go to my family, Mum, Dad, my sister Anna and my brother-in-law Greg, for all of the various and many ways that you have supported me through the last four years, and all those before. You have taken the brunt of my stress and anxiety over the past few years, and I am incredibly grateful for your unwavering love and commitment to helping me through what, at times, has been a very difficult process.

Thank you to the GG, Emmy, Eleanor, Hannah and Mary, for your constant presence in my life, even when we have been on different sides of the world. I am so incredibly grateful for your friendship over the past nineteen years – growing up with all of you has made me who I am today, and I do not know what I would do without you. Thank you to Marc for being a great dining buddy and for being so supportive in difficult times.

Over the past five years, St Hugh's MCR has provided me with memories and friends I will always cherish and who have contributed so much to my Oxford experience. Thank you to Georgie and Avani for being the best housemates I could have asked for during my first year at Oxford and for your love and support since. Thank you to the greatest bunch of Thirsty Swans, JT, Anwar, JC, Ed, Amartya, Alex, Alice and Caroline for being there through the absolute best and worst of times. You have made the last four years so full of fun, joy and laughter, even when life was not very enjoyable, and I cannot thank you all enough for your friendship. Thank you to Gwen, Tom and André for helping St Hugh's MCR come back to life after the Covid pandemic and for always being there to laugh with or stress to. Thank you to Jake for your friendship and for all your support over the past two years, and for, along with Patrick, providing so many great nights and great tunes!

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis, with lots of love, to my niece Ilaria who was born as this project was coming to an end. Thank you for being a smiley bundle of joy to cuddle when I needed it the most.

For my niece

Ilaria June

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Co-education Debates and the Implementation of Mixed-Sex Colleges	36
Chapter Two: Women's Attitudes Towards and Reasons for Attending Mixed-Sex Colleges	66
Chapter Three: Women's Experiences in Mixed-Sex Colleges: Spaces	112
Chapter Four: Women's Experiences in Mixed-Sex Colleges: Communities	140
Chapter Five: Women's Experiences at Mixed-Sex Colleges: Cultures	168
Chapter Six: Mixed-Sex Colleges and Women's Post-University Experiences	206
Conclusion	254
Bibliography	259

Introduction

In October 1974 women students entered five colleges at the University of Oxford that had previously only accepted male undergraduate students. These women became the first female undergraduates at the University of Oxford to live and learn within mixed-sex colleges. This thesis offers the first examination of the experiences of these women.

The colleges, Brasenose, Hertford, Jesus, St Catherine's and Wadham, accepted their first female undergraduate members within a University-sanctioned 'closed experiment'¹ which limited the number of colleges to five and the number of women that could be accepted between these colleges to one hundred. Prior to the implementation of this scheme women undergraduates could only attend one of the University's five women's colleges. The University stipulated that the experiment of mixed-sex colleges would be reviewed in 1977 before other male colleges would be allowed to accept women. At the time when these institutions decided to accept women undergraduates the academics or 'fellows' who ran them were all male. The scheme that the University accepted did not involve any stipulations about women being accepted as senior members of the colleges. By 1974, only St Catherine's had elected one female fellow. This meant that the institutions women entered in 1974 were run almost exclusively by men and the student body of these institutions remained male-dominated.

The thesis argues that the first women to attend mixed-sex colleges at Oxford faced difficulties living and learning within these institutions on account of their sex. This was because the physical spaces of these colleges were not fully accommodating of women and the communities of academic and non-academic staff that ran these colleges were not fully welcoming of women students. This was the result of the process by which these colleges went about preparing for the arrival of this cohort of women undergraduates. This process was one in which individual men who made up the male-dominated governing bodies that ran these institutions made decisions about how colleges should and

¹ 'Report of the Committee on Co-residence', *Oxford University Gazette*, Supplement No. Vol. cii (May 1972), Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12/, File 3.

should not adjust for the arrival of women. Furthermore, the student cultures of these institutions remained overtly masculine, in that they continued to revolve around male behaviours, rituals and sensibilities after the arrival of women in 1974. This could pose further difficulties for the first cohort of women.

Women responded to the difficulties they faced in their colleges, and the male cultures of these institutions, in various ways. Many developed individual strategies to navigate problems to make their experience as members of their colleges easier. However, many also embraced the male cultures, behaviours and student identities associated with their colleges, enjoying this element of their experience and seeing this as a way to fully integrate into their colleges. Indeed, this cohort of women saw these colleges as desirable specifically because they saw female-dominated and female-led colleges, that appeared to have an overtly feminine atmosphere, as unattractive.

However, while women developed strategies to respond to the difficulties they faced and the male atmosphere of the colleges, they dealt with issues on an individual basis and generally focused on displaying resilience to problems or hostility. A collective feminist analysis of the problems that women faced in these institutions, or a collective movement to address these issues, did not emerge among the first cohorts of women to attend mixed-sex colleges at Oxford. This focus on displaying individual resilience to sexism, rather than challenging it through collective action, continued into women's post-university career experience.

Popular and institutional reflections on the histories of colleges and the University often celebrate the introduction of mixed-sex colleges as having been a successful and progressive moment of change for women in the University of Oxford. For example, in an article in the Brasenose Alumni Magazine written for the 40th anniversary of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges, Graham Richards, who was involved in Brasenose's decision to admit women, described himself and his colleagues as 'the

leading pioneers'² in the 'revolution'³ of co-education. Similarly, when Jesus College started its most recent college redevelopment in 2019, it enclosed the building site with hoardings displaying images and text that told 'the story of the historic college,'⁴ including a photo of the women and men students who matriculated in 1974, with the words 'progressive' and 'inclusive' printed nearby.⁵ This demonstrates how far, even in the present day, in colleges' own conceptualisation of their history, the move to mixed-sex colleges is seen as representing their forward looking liberalism, an image they present to a wider public.

Similarly, in an address given in the Sheldonian Theatre in October 2021 to mark the installing of the first Chair of Women's History at Oxford University, Hillary Clinton described the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford as being part of 'a century of progress' for women within the University. Within this narrative Clinton presented a pattern of linear development from the founding of the women's colleges in the late-nineteenth century, through the awarding of degrees to women in 1920, to the creation of mixed-sex colleges. She argued that 'those first women set the foundation'⁶ for future progress, such as when 'in 1974 the first male colleges began to admit women.'⁷ Clinton's presentation of the history of women at Oxford reinforces a view of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges as being part of a teleological narrative of development in women's position within the University. This emphasises how far in popular and institutional accounts of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges, this moment of change is presented as a successful moment of development for women within the University which consolidated the position women had already gained, and catalysed future progress. The fact that such an account was articulated by a figure as prominent as Hillary Clinton in the context of the celebration of the first Women's History Chair suggests how far such popular accounts of women's position in Oxford have the potential to shape institutional and

² Graham Richards, 'The Admission of Women to Brasenose', *The Brazen Nose*, vol 29, 2014-2015, (2015), p. 88.

³ *Ibid*, p. 92.

⁴ 'College History Goes on show in Cornmarket', *Oxford Mail*, 22 May 2019.

⁵ See images in 'College History Goes on show in Cornmarket', *Oxford Mail*, 22 May 2019.

⁶ Hillary Clinton, 'Women's History: The Future, Roundtable Discussion followed by Address by Sec Hillary Rodham Clinton', University of Oxford, (recorded and uploaded 26 October 2021).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WiVyTifwEU> (30 September 2023), 59:49.

⁷ *Ibid*, 1:00:22.

external perceptions of the history of women, both within the single case study of the University of Oxford and in society more generally.

This perspective is also evident in histories of the University of Oxford and of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges. For example, Laurence Brockliss's institutional history of the University argues that the University 'reacted rapidly to the challenges presented by the youth and feminist movements' and soon afterwards 'Oxford colleges had begun the process of going co-ed.'⁸ He argues that this process was one in which women were 'easily integrated' into male colleges, facing few if any difficulties.⁹ In contrast to Brockliss, this thesis centralises the accounts of women in its analysis and challenges his conclusions through demonstrating the various difficulties that women faced in these institutions.

Nancy Weiss Malkiel similarly suggests that the introduction of mixed-sex colleges was a straightforward one, describing the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford as having gone 'smoothly,'¹⁰ 'in many ways anticlimactic'¹¹ and seemingly free from 'sexist behavior.' Weiss Malkiel approaches the history of mixed-sex colleges in terms of a comparative history of the process at Oxford, Cambridge and American universities, and bases her analysis both on interviews with the senior academics who were involved in their colleges deciding to accept women, and college archives and publications. This means that her analysis does not offer insights into the complex ways that women students perceived and experienced mixed-sex colleges. Weiss Malkiel's conclusions reflect her approach and methodological choice. For example, she concludes that 'there is no evidence that Oxford men treated Oxford women (or that Cambridge men treated Cambridge women) in ways that made Princeton, Yale, and especially Dartmouth so awkward for, and at times so deeply inhospitable to, women students.' In suggesting that American co-educational colleges were 'worse' institutions for women, Weiss Malkiel suggests that women's experience at Oxford colleges had been generally

⁸ Laurence Brockliss, *The University of Oxford: A History*, (Oxford, 2016), p. 550.

⁹ Brockliss, *The University of Oxford*, p. 682.

¹⁰ Nancy Weiss Malkiel, "*Keep the Damned Women Out*": *The Struggle for Coeducation*, (Princeton, 2016), p. 588.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 581.

positive, arguing that ‘there are no sources that capture sexist behavior’ in the way members of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford treated the first female cohort.¹² While she acknowledges that ‘that does not mean that such interactions never happened’ she also argues that if there had been episodes ‘it would surely have made its way into the written record or oral recollections.’¹³ However, Weiss Malkiel only examines women’s accounts of their experiences in celebratory commemorative literature published by colleges themselves, such as *St Catherine’s, Oxford: A Pen Portrait*. This work was co-edited by the then Master of the College Roger Ainsworth, and the editors explicitly stated that the text was compiled ‘to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of St Catherine’s as a college.’¹⁴ Therefore, such texts tell us more about colleges’ sense of their own history than about the complexities of women’s experience of mixed-sex colleges. The ‘oral recollections’ that Weiss Malkiel focuses on are those of the men who ran the first five mixed-sex colleges and had campaigned for women to be accepted into their colleges. Thus, the record she relies on does not offer substantial insights into the personal experiences of the women who attended these institutions and leads her to draw conclusions that, as this thesis will show, do not acknowledge the variety of women’s experiences and the complex sex and gender inequalities that shaped these experiences.

In contrast to Weiss Malkiel and Brockliss, Carol Dyhouse has examined the introduction of mixed-sex colleges with greater consideration of the complex gender dynamics that were involved in this process, as well as the inequalities that would remain within these institutions. In her study of the introduction of co-education at Oxford, Cambridge and the London medical schools, Dyhouse argues that ‘questions of gender, prestige and identity have been closely entwined in the history of educational institutions’¹⁵ and that when considered in terms of a feminist analysis, the fact that the physical structure, character and atmosphere of formerly male colleges remained unchanged ‘was precisely the problem’¹⁶ for the women students who would enter them. However, Dyhouse comes to

¹² Ibid. p. 587.

¹³ Ibid, p. 588.

¹⁴ Roger. A. Ainsworth, Clare Howell, *St Catherine’s, Oxford: A Pen Portrait*, (London, 2012), p. 2.

¹⁵ Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History* (Abingdon, 2006), p. 172.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 181.

these conclusions without examining the experiences of the women who entered mixed-sex colleges through an oral history methodology. Unlike her study of the introduction of co-education at non-Oxbridge universities from 1870-1939,¹⁷ which uses ‘a questionnaire-based study’¹⁸ to examine the experience of women who entered these institutions, Dyhouse’s work on Oxbridge focuses on archival sources. This means she does not offer insights into the complex, daily inequalities and difficulties that women faced when they entered mixed-sex colleges. Furthermore, her study does not examine the various ways that women navigated these difficulties or the extent to which women embraced and could enjoy the masculine cultures of their colleges. Indeed, she argues that women who entered these institutions felt pressure to adapt to the ‘traditionally male aspects of student culture.’¹⁹ In contrast, this thesis suggests that women could both feel pressure to adapt to such cultures, and also actively embrace them, enjoying this element of student life. Therefore, this thesis extends and complicates Dyhouse’s conclusions by centralising the personal recollections of women to demonstrate both the various difficulties that women faced in mixed-sex colleges, and the complex ways in which they responded to such difficulties and engaged with the cultures of these institutions.

Beyond these works, women’s experiences of mixed-sex colleges have not been examined in histories of the University of Oxford. A number of contributions in the volume of *The History of the University of Oxford* series which deals with the twentieth century consider the move to mixed-sex colleges, such as Michael Brock’s chapter on ‘The University after 1970’. However, such chapters deal with the institutional processes that were involved with the introduction and later expansion of the scheme of mixed-sex colleges. None offer an examination of what life was like for the women who entered these institutions. Indeed, Keith Thomas’ chapter on ‘Student Life’ ends in 1970 and, where he does comment on how the move to mixed-sex colleges impacted student life, he argues that ‘nothing did more to breathe new life into the old college community’²⁰ while also suggesting that the essential

¹⁷ Carol Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex?: Women in British Universities, 1870-1939*, (London, 1995).

¹⁸ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. xii.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 208.

²⁰ Keith Thomas, ‘Student Life 1945-1970’, Brian Harrison (ed), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 210.

character of these institutions remained unchanged.²¹ However, such observations are made with no reference to the lived experiences of women. Janet Howarth's chapter on 'Women' in this volume offers an important account of the development of the women's colleges, arguing that 'the 1960s were in some respects a golden age for the women's colleges.'²² Her analysis provides important context for understanding the concerns expressed by the women's colleges at the prospect of mixed-sex colleges. However, as she states explicitly, the actual arrival of women at formerly male colleges from 1974 'falls outside the scope of this chapter' meaning that she does not offer analysis of women's experiences of these institutions. As she states, the 'consequences' of mixed-sex colleges both for women's position within the University and for the University itself 'remain to be investigated.'²³ However, she does suggest two possible interpretations of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges, either as representing the decline of the women's colleges or 'as another stage in the continuing process of adapting Oxford to a changing world and, for women, a new kind of assimilation, opening to them for the first time the full Oxford experience.'²⁴ The women's experiences explored in this thesis suggest a more nuanced picture of the complexities of the process, that move beyond such duality. Therefore, this thesis offers an examination of a moment of change within the University that has not been explored extensively or effectively in histories of this institution. Its use of an oral history methodology offers an essential new perspective on this moment of change.

However, this thesis also makes a wider contribution to the history of women's relationship to and experiences of higher education during the 1970s. Historians have shown a developing interest in examining the history of higher education in Britain in terms of the experiences of students rather than the political and institutional policies that engendered the expansion of Britain's system of higher education through the twentieth century. Indeed, Peter Mandler has criticised the 'fixation on the political narrative' of educational change during the period, arguing that this focus has 'caused us to

²¹ Ibid, p. 214.

²² Janet Howarth, 'Women', Brian Harrison (ed), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford,1994), p. 373.

²³ Ibid. p. 375.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 587.

overlook some of the most powerful forces shaping society in modern Britain.²⁵ In examining the history of higher education in Britain through the student experience, historians have indicated the inequalities that persisted in higher education as it expanded in Britain through the post-war period, gradually enabling more women and working-class students to attend university. In his social and architectural study of Britain's redbrick universities, William Whyte argues that universities are 'societies in their own right' and that, through approaching the history of universities in terms of a social history it is possible to 'explore the divisions within these societies —divisions of gender, discipline, class, and much else besides.'²⁶ However, Whyte specifically does not focus on Oxford and Cambridge; therefore he does not offer examination of how these divisions persisted within mixed-sex colleges or indeed the ways in which the physical, social and cultural structures of these institutions enabled this persistence.

Women's historians have specifically focused on women's experiences of higher education during the twentieth century, particularly seeking to understand the ways in which inequality persisted through the 1960s and 1970s during a period where the number of women attending university was rising. Indeed, from 1964 to 1975 the number of women undergraduates rose from 25,777 to 60,676,²⁷ and by 1980 women made up 38 per cent of the student population.²⁸ Jennifer Jones and Josephine Castle have examined women's position in universities in the United Kingdom from 1920 to 1980, arguing that, while the numbers of women entering university increased from the 1960s, 'females still participate unequally with men at all levels of university education.'²⁹ However, they measure inequality in terms of the enrolment rates, degree classification and progression through an academic career, rather than in terms of women's social and academic experiences of university. Sarah Aiston,

²⁵ Peter Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education Since the Second World War*, (Oxford, 2020), p. 10.

²⁶ William Whyte, *Redbrick: A Social and Architectural History of Britain's Civic Universities*, (Oxford, 2015), p. 11.

²⁷ Department of Education and Science, *Statistics of Education: Vol. 6 Universities*, (London, 1975), Table 2, p. 6.

²⁸ Statistics in Carol Dyhouse, 'Education', Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*, (London, 2014), p. 127.

²⁹ Jennifer Jones and Josephine Castle, 'Women in UK universities, 1920-1980', *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 11 No. 3 (1986), p. 289.

Judy Wakeling and Bethany White have paid closer attention to women's daily experiences of higher education, examining their social experience, their experience of academic study and work, and the types of accommodation they lived in while at university. As Wakeling argues, a 'full analysis of women at university' must move beyond simply recording the levels of participation in higher education and 'take into account their lifestyles and social experiences.'³⁰ Such studies use women's personal testimonies to consider women's attitudes to, experience of, and longer-term relationship to higher education, and consider how all three were shaped by women's sex. For example, in her study of working-class women who attended university in the 1960s and 1970s, White argues that both class and sex were relevant to women's experiences of higher education and that 'experience of higher education in this decade embodied both opportunities and restrictions for working-class women.'³¹

However, where studies of student experience of higher education consider the move towards mixed-sex halls of residence, which occurred in British universities through the 1960s and 1970s, they generally associate this move with a liberalising of the attitudes of university authorities towards their students, and with a general improvement in everyday relations between men and women students. For example, Whyte argues that 'mixed halls' came about in the context of increasingly liberal attitudes towards sex on the part of students and a desire among university authorities to move away from 'the old rules about private behaviour' and to treat students as adults.³² In her study of the experiences of women who attended Liverpool University between 1947 and 1979, Sarah Aiston argues that 'mixed halls of residence were predominant by the mid-1970s'³³ and this contributed to an improvement in the way women were depicted in the student press. She argues it was at this moment that the 'proliferation of sexual imagery that had characterised the 1960s and early 1970s largely disappeared'³⁴ because mixed-sex halls meant that the 'mysteries of the female body were no longer

³⁰ Judy Wakeling, 'University Women: Origins, Experiences and Destinations at Glasgow University, 1939-1978', (PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1998), p. 11.

³¹ Bethany White, 'Working-Class Women's Experiences of Higher Education in Post-War Britain', (DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2019), p. 119.

³² Whyte, *Redbrick*, p. 293.

³³ Sarah Aiston, 'The Life Experiences of University-Educated Women: Graduates of the University of Liverpool, 1947-1979', (PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, 2000), p. 97.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 96.

such a mystery.³⁵ Similarly, Judy Wakeling argues that at the University of Glasgow, where sex segregation continued to influence student life up until 1980 when the Glasgow University Union opened to women, the opening up of facilities such as the ‘unions, welfare services and residences’ made ‘relations between the sexes more informal and more relaxed.’³⁶ Therefore, current histories of women’s experiences of higher education in Britain during the 1970s associate increases in mixed-sex accommodation and integrated student services with a liberalising of attitudes of universities and their students towards the way men and women should interact as students. They see these institutional developments as having a generally positive impact on these social interactions. In contrast, this thesis demonstrates that, at least at Oxford, the move to mixed-sex colleges was one in which women experienced difficulties on account of the sustained male-led, dominated and focused nature of these institutions. Relationships between men and women students in these institutions could involve complex dynamics and women could face various forms of sexism from senior members of their colleges and from male students – such relationships cannot adequately be described as ‘more relaxed’.

Some studies have acknowledged the ways in which inequalities persisted within mixed-sex environments, establishing this through an examination of women’s experiences. For example, unlike her study of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, Dyhouse’s analysis of British universities that became co-educational between 1870-1939 ‘concerns itself with the experiences of women, as both students and teachers’ in these institutions.³⁷ With this focus, Dyhouse questions the extent to which these mixed-sex institutions were ones in which women could have an academic, social and professional experience that was free from sex based discrimination.³⁸ Similarly, in 1990 Andrea Spurling published a report that examined the experiences of women academics at King’s College Cambridge to assess how far they had careers in the college and the university on an equal basis to men. She concluded that, while being one of the first Cambridge men’s colleges to accept

³⁵ Ibid, p. 97.

³⁶ Wakeling, ‘University Women’, p. 117.

³⁷ Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex*, p. 8.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 4.

women undergraduates in 1973, in the 1990s in King's, and indeed in Cambridge University more generally, there continued to be 'a series of attitudinal and structural factors which inhibit (women's) academic careers.'³⁹ However, such an assessment of the ways in which inequalities persisted in institutions that women gained access to through the twentieth century has not been made in terms of the experiences of the first female undergraduates who attended formerly male colleges at Oxford from 1974. Therefore, this thesis contributes a further case study to a growing scholarship which questions the assumption that the move to co-education in British universities which occurred from the late-nineteenth century can be understood in terms of a linear narrative of progress for women and their position in higher education.

In examining women's experiences of the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, this thesis also analyses women's attitudes towards mixed-sex colleges and motivations for attending these institutions. Furthermore, the thesis explores women's post-university experiences to understand whether, and if so how, attending a mixed-sex college at Oxford led them to have career trajectories that more closely resembled those associated with male Oxford graduates and differed from those associated with their female graduate peer group. These wider questions mean that this thesis engages with and contributes to a wider historiography examining the social and educational experiences of girls and young women from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, and to scholarship on women's experiences of employment from the late-1970s.

The personal factors that caused women who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 to see these institutions as attractive have not been explored by historians. Where historians have considered the more general reasons why co-education became normalised in British universities by the 1970s, they have argued that this was the result of social and educational changes in Britain during the period. For example, Dyhouse argues that the 'sexual revolution'⁴⁰ and the 'rise of 'second wave' feminism in the 1960s' contributed to women's perception of the desirability of mixed-sex

³⁹ Andrea Spurling, *Report of the Women in Higher Education Research Project 1988-1990*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. x.

⁴⁰ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 107.

institutions, as women perceived these institutions as ones which ‘treated male and female students more equally.’⁴¹ Phillida Bunkle argues that the gradual move away from single-sex to co-educational secondary schools that occurred in Britain from the mid-1960s as the state system gradually moved towards a comprehensive system, contributed to schoolgirls seeing women-only colleges as ‘anachronistic.’⁴²

In contrast, this thesis argues that, while these changes were important in forming women’s attitudes towards the kind of higher educational institutions they wished to attend, the continuation of conservative attitudes towards women’s lives and education, and experiences of single-sex schools, were equally relevant. For women in this cohort, the process of navigating a combination of liberal and conservative influences caused them to see male institutions and environments, and stereotypically male life paths, as more desirable and liberating than female ones. This view was then also relevant to their post-university experiences.

In this way this thesis contributes to the debate among historians about how far the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, a period which has been described as the ‘long-1960s’ (defined as 1957–1973),⁴³ was one of continuity or change in women’s lives and opportunities, and in attitudes towards them. However, the literature surrounding this debate tends to focus on the social and employment experiences of women who were teenagers and young adults during this period.⁴⁴ For example, Lynn Abrams argues that ‘the 1950s and 60s in Britain experienced a combination of conservative discourses on womanhood and a social reality incorporating greater freedoms and opportunities,’⁴⁵ which shaped the experiences of women who were born in the 1940s and ‘came of age in the

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 206

⁴² Phillida Bunkle, ‘The 1944 Education Act and Second Wave Feminism’, *Women’s History Review*, 25:5 (2016) p. 804.

⁴³ See Eve Worth, *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain Since 1945*, (London, 2022), p. 41.

⁴⁴ See Worth, *The Welfare State Generation* pp. 41-66, Selina Todd and Hilary Young, ‘Baby-Boomers to “Beanstalkers”’: The Making of the Modern Teenager in Post-War Britain’, *Cultural and Social History*, 9:3 (2012), pp. 451-67.

⁴⁵ Lynn Abrams, ‘Mothers and Daughters: Negotiating the Discourse on the ‘Good Woman’ in 1950s and 1960s Britain’, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (eds), *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*, (Toronto, 2013), p. 66.

1960s.⁴⁶ Helena Mills uses personal accounts of women to question the perception of '1960s young adults as affluent, permissive, promiscuous, delinquent, sub- or counter-cultural rebels.'⁴⁷ She concludes that the 'experience of youth in 1960s Britain was characterised by an uneasy and uneven mix of both new, more liberal and older, more conservative values and behaviours.'⁴⁸ This thesis argues that this 'uneven' mix of attitudes also shaped the experiences of girls and young women who were born in the mid-1950s and of school age through the 1960s and early 1970s. This influenced their attitudes towards education, gender and equality and had a long-term impact on the way they navigated inequalities they faced in their university and post-university lives.

This thesis also contributes to a growing historiography on the way graduate women engaged with and experienced the work-place through the second half of the twentieth century. Sarah Aiston has examined the post-university lives of women graduates of the University of Liverpool, arguing that from the 1940s to the 1970s women's post-university lives followed gendered patterns of employment and the 'role of wife and mother was never lost sight of.'⁴⁹ Pat Thane's examination of the lives of Girton graduates from the 1920s to the 1980s, which uses a questionnaire-based methodology, explores the life-patterns that these women experienced after they left Cambridge University. In this study Thane argues that Girton graduates, who she describes as 'talented and highly skilled women', generally 'had less conventionally successful careers than men of equivalent ability and training.'⁵⁰ Thane argues that this was, and continues to be, the result of 'deeply rooted and fundamentally discriminatory cultural and institutional practices' and 'failures at top management level to think imaginatively how best to mobilise talent and skill.'⁵¹ Thane suggests that examining the experiences of women who attended an elite university such as Cambridge is important as 'if any group of women

⁴⁶ Ibid p. 80.

⁴⁷ Helena Mills, 'Using the Personal to Critique the Popular: Women's Memories of 1960s Youth', *Contemporary British History*, 30:4, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Sarah Aiston 'A Good Job for a Girl? The Career Biographies of Women Graduates of the University of Liverpool Post-1945', *Twentieth Century British History*, 15:4, (2004), p. 361.

⁵⁰ Pat Thane, 'Girton Graduates: Earning and Learning, 1920s-1980s', *Women's History Review*, 13:3, (2004), p. 374.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 360.

could be expected to 'make-it' in conventional career terms'⁵² it would be women who were educated at elite universities such as Cambridge and Oxford. This thesis similarly makes this argument as part of its justification for examining the life experiences of women who attended elite formerly male colleges at Oxford University.

This thesis contributes to this historiographical field in various ways. Most basically, it adds insight into the experiences of a further cohort of women at a further university to the growing body of work examining women's relationship to higher education during a period of increased access for women. This also enables consideration of whether and, if so, in what ways, the type of institution women attended had an impact on the nature of their experience of higher education and their life trajectories after they left university. This thesis on the one hand confirms the trend found by Thane of increasing but still limited numbers of women entering male-dominated professions by the late 1970s and early 1980s, but on the other hand suggests that often women could feel less concerned with the male-dominated atmosphere of these working environments on account of their experiences at mixed-sex colleges. Therefore, this thesis indicates the complex ways that women's experiences of elite male educational institutions impacted their experiences of and attitudes to post-university employment.

Finally, this thesis interrogates the relationship between women accessing greater educational opportunities through the 1960s and 1970s and them sharing in the ideology of collective organised feminism. Phillida Bunkle has argued that women's increased access to educational opportunities following the 1944 Education Act contributed to the development of a feminist consciousness for some.⁵³ Dyhouse has similarly argued that increased educational opportunities at secondary and tertiary level following the 1944 Education Act and the expansion of British higher education through the 1960s were 'crucially important for the rise of feminism in the late-1960s and the 1970s.'⁵⁴ She locates the introduction of mixed-sex colleges as being part of this process of expansion. In the wider

⁵² Ibid, p. 349.

⁵³ Phillida Bunkle, 'The 1944 Education Act and Second Wave Feminism', *Women's History Review*, 25:5, (2016), pp. 791-811.

⁵⁴ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 205.

literature of the 1970s there is a focus on women's experiences in terms of their involvement in feminist organisations such as the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). For example, the only chapters specifically focused on women in *Reassessing 1970s Britain* are those by Pat Thane and Lynne Segal, both of which focus on feminist organisations and the WLM.⁵⁵ This thesis offers a case study of a group of women who accessed educational opportunities in the 1960s and 1970s who generally did not engage, or see the need to engage, in collective feminism or evaluate their experiences in terms of a feminist analysis. The thesis argues that the ways in which women viewed male institutions, behaviours and identities, and engaged with male-led and dominated spaces, communities and cultures shows the complex ways that they thought about gender and women's equality. For many, their experiences of increased educational opportunities and social freedoms made them less likely to associate with organised feminism. Furthermore, in becoming members of elite formerly male colleges women generally did not see this process as necessitating the establishment of a collective feminist consciousness or analysis in response to their position within these institutions. Thus, this thesis offers one case study that suggests a more complicated relationship between increases in women's educational and social opportunities through the 1960s and 1970s and the association with collective feminist sentiment or activity.

Methodology

To acknowledge the attitudes and experiences of women who attended the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, the central methodology employed by this thesis is that of oral history. This methodological choice means that this thesis primarily gives an insight into the subjective experiences of a select group of women, shared in the particular context of an oral history interview. The subjective nature of oral history research can both significantly benefit a historian and add complexities to their analysis. Historians of women and education have successfully used oral history to gain greater understanding of women's experiences of education as well as of the processes that caused and were caused by

⁵⁵ Pat Thane, 'Women and the 1970s: Toward Liberation?', and Lynne Segal, 'Jam Today: Feminist Impacts and Transformations in the 1970s', Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane (eds), *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, (Manchester, 2013).

educational change, which nuances understanding of the link between such change and the concept of progress. Indeed, as Stephanie Spencer argues, ‘oral history methodology offers the educational historian a way into understanding the nuances of the post-1944 education system in Britain, by privileging a multitude of individual stories against an overarching official narrative.’⁵⁶ In prioritising the experiences of women who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974, this thesis provides source material that has not previously been used by historians in their studies of the introduction of co-education at Oxford and of women’s experiences of higher education in the 1970s. In this way, the oral history methodology of this thesis offers a new perspective on a moment of change in the structure of the University of Oxford, as well as contributing to our understanding of how women experienced higher education in the 1970s.

However, using such a methodology requires an understanding of the complex dynamics that shape individuals’ reflections and retelling of the past. The way people recount their experiences in an oral history interview is influenced by a number of different dynamics, including that between the interviewer and interviewee, that between the interview and the context in which it is taking place, and that between an individual’s recollection of the past and the wider cultural scripts and historical narratives that shape collective understandings of the past. In the case of this thesis, a narrative of the successful way that women were integrated into mixed-sex colleges has been constructed by colleges themselves. For example, in his account of the process written for the fortieth anniversary of mixed-sex colleges, Graham Richards wrote that ‘as we all know, the admission of women was a great success. Few revolutions have been so happy and successful.’⁵⁷ It is in the context of such a narrative, and the claims of its objective nature, that the women in the cohort have formed their own narratives and analyses of their experiences of mixed-sex colleges. The enhanced awareness of the influence that such scripts have on individual narratives of the past that is achieved through a sensitive use of oral history methodology and theory, offers insights into the dialogues that shape women’s contemporary

⁵⁶ Stephanie Spencer, ‘Reflections on the ‘Site of Struggle’: Girls’ Experience of Secondary Education in the Late 1950s’, *History of Education*, 33:4, (2004), p. 449.

⁵⁷ Graham Richards, ‘The Admission of Women to Brasenose’, *The Brazen Nose*, Vol 49 2014-2015, (2015), p. 92

and later analyses of their experiences. Indeed, as Lynn Abrams argues, oral history is a ‘methodology that forces us to get to grips with many layers of meaning and interpretation contained within people’s memories.’⁵⁸ Through seeing oral history both as a way to, as Mary Stuart describes it, vocalise ‘silenced voices,’⁵⁹ and as a way to understand the various contexts that shaped women’s lived experience, attitudes and memories of the past, this thesis challenges the narratives of the ‘successful’ move to mixed-sex colleges, while also acknowledging that in complex ways women’s interpretation of their experiences contributed to the construction and reinforcement of this narrative.

Women were initially contacted through college development offices. While being an effective way to make contact with large numbers of alumnae at once, there were some limitations in this approach. Primarily, it meant that the only women contacted were those who were on college alumni lists and who had agreed that college could contact them, which itself depended on women being willing to maintain some form of relationship with their college. The concern here was that women who, for whatever reason, did not want to maintain a relationship with their college would not be represented in the sample. To mitigate against this as much as possible, the practice of ‘snowball’ sampling was used after the first women were contacted through their colleges. This meant that some women who did not want to participate in a project that appeared to be too connected to the colleges themselves were brought into the sample. Furthermore, the range of experiences that women recounted in interviews suggests that being on college alumni lists was not necessarily an indicator of women having had a wholly positive experience of their college.

The nature of the project meant that the only condition for participation was that women had to have matriculated at Jesus, Hertford, Wadham, Brasenose or St Catherine’s colleges at Oxford in October 1974. Forty-one women were interviewed. Thirteen women who attended Jesus College were interviewed. Ten women who attended St Catherine’s College were interviewed. Nine women who attended Wadham College were interviewed. Five women who attended Hertford College were

⁵⁸ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, (New York, 2016), p. 18.

⁵⁹ Mary Stuart, ‘You’re a Big Girl Now: Subjectivities, Feminism and Oral history’, *Oral History*, 22:2, (1994), p. 56.

interviewed. Four women who attended Brasenose College were interviewed. All women were interviewed once. Two women sent follow up emails that are referred to in the thesis, one woman sent a personal letter she received from her college prior to starting her degree which has been referred to in the thesis. Interviews were conducted between June 2020 and January 2023. Due to the covid pandemic the majority of interviews were carried out online. As restrictions were lifted, women were offered the choice of whether they wanted to be interviewed online or in person. This measure was taken to ensure the safety of participants while covid continued to circulate. The majority chose to be interviewed online, with only two women asking to be interviewed in person. All women are referred to with a pseudonym throughout the thesis and at times college names and participant pseudonyms have been obscured to protect the privacy of particular participants.

The women in the sample were born between 1952 and 1957, with the majority entering university directly from school or after a 'gap-year'. The one woman born before 1954 entered Oxford as an international visiting student part-way through studying at another university. The sample included women from various areas of the United Kingdom and one woman was from outside Europe. One woman in the sample specifically identified herself as having been 'working-class' before she went to university; five women suggested that to some extent they saw themselves as coming from a working-class background but because of the upward social mobility of their parents, or their parents' aspirations, they did not fully identify themselves as working-class. The majority of women said they did not think about class before they went to university. As White argues, by 1977 the participation rate of 18 to 19 year olds in higher education 'for the top three social classes was just over 30 per cent, while the rate for the bottom three was around six per cent.'⁶⁰ Therefore this cohort reflects Whyte's argument that, in British universities during the period, expansion of places alone 'did not bring in a larger proportion of new working-class students.'⁶¹

⁶⁰ White, 'Working Class Women's Experiences of Higher Education', p. 7.

⁶¹ Whyte, *Redbrick*, p. 239.

The school histories of this cohort were often complex, with many women moving between school types, and their schools moving from being grammar schools to comprehensive schools. Indeed, this reflects the fact that these women experienced secondary education during a period of gradual movement between systems. In terms of the schools from which they applied to Oxford, sixteen of the sample went to a state grammar school, although the schools of two of the women in this group became comprehensive schools while they were there. Four of the women attended direct grant schools, which were selective and partially funded by the government, two emphasising that they had a funded place. Five women attended a Girls Public Day School Trust school, two stating that they had been awarded a scholarship by their schools. Ten women in the sample attended an independent school and three of these women emphasised that they had received a scholarship to these schools. The rest of the sample attended state comprehensive schools or specialist or non-British schools, one attending a ballet school then a ‘crammer’, one moved from a girls’ boarding school to a ‘crammer’ for sixth-form, one attending the French Elysee school in London, and one attending school outside the UK. None of them reported having attended a secondary modern school. Howarth notes that by 1965 the proportion of women undergraduates entering Oxford from maintained schools was 42.7 per cent,⁶² while Sarah Curtis found that by the 1970s, of women who attended St Hugh’s College, ‘almost half came from state-maintained schools’ in which she does not include direct grant schools, while the latter also had a ‘significant’ role in sending girls to the college.⁶³ Therefore, the cohort who entered mixed-sex colleges in 1974 reflects trends in the number of women entering Oxford University from private and maintained schools during the period. Furthermore, it is significant that the majority of women who were educated in state schools attended grammar schools. White has argued that through the 1960s ‘the vast majority of those with successful UCCA (Universities Central Council on Admissions) applications came from grammar schools, which were themselves disproportionately middle-class,’ going on to point out that ‘in 1968-69, 75 per cent of applications

⁶² Howarth, ‘Women’, p. 535.

⁶³ Sarah Curtis, ‘Origins and Outcomes’, Penny Griffin (ed), *St Hugh’s: One Hundred Years of Women’s Education in Oxford*, (Oxford, 1986), p. 249.

received by UCCA from the state sector were from grammar school pupils.⁶⁴ Indeed, White argues that, for her cohort of women who attended school between 1957 and 1975, at which point 34.4 per cent of schools in England were comprehensive, ‘grammar schools were crucially important for enabling many women to access higher education.’⁶⁵ Therefore, the educational backgrounds of women who attended mixed-sex colleges reflect trends found by other historians in terms of the degree to which state school students who attended university during the mid-1970s were those who attended grammar schools. However, as chapter two of this thesis will show, the role that these and other schools had in shaping women’s views of and ambitions for higher education could be complex.

The majority of women in this sample also attended girls-only schools at least at some point during their secondary schooling. Six women in the sample attended co-educational schools for all of their secondary schooling and twelve women came to university from a co-educational school. As the thesis will show, experiences of girls-only education, which the majority of the cohort had, were significant in shaping their attitudes to women-only colleges and formerly male colleges.

Just over half of the women in this sample had at least one parent who went to university. Of these women, two had a mother who went to university when their father had not, and just over a fifth had a mother who went to university. The proportion of men and women of their age group entering higher education rose from 1.5 per cent in 1924 to 3.4 per cent in 1955.⁶⁶ Furthermore, as Dyhouse notes, women ‘still represented only 24 per cent of the university population in 1958: the same proportion as in 1920.’⁶⁷ Therefore, women in this sample were considerably more likely than average to have a parent and, for some a mother, who had attended university. As the thesis will show, parental experiences and attitudes towards university were significant in building women’s own views of

⁶⁴ White, ‘Working Class Women’s Experiences of Higher Education’, p. 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 52.

⁶⁶ Statistics in A.H. Halsey, ‘Further and Higher Education’, A. H. Halsey and Josephine Webb (eds), *Twentieth Century British Social Trends*, (Oxford,2000), p. 226.

⁶⁷ Dyhouse, ‘Education’, p. 124.

higher education and the types of institutions they wished to attend. Women's awareness of both the opportunities and the limitations their parents had experienced motivated their own ambitions.

The majority of women in this cohort studied arts and humanities degrees. Of those that did not, six studied medicine, one studied maths and one started a degree in biochemistry before switching to study law. Jones and Castle argue that at UK universities 'female participation rates in science have remained fairly stable between 1950 and 1980 (at about 20%).'⁶⁸ Therefore, women in this cohort reflected general trends of women's academic choices at UK universities in terms of the number that took degrees in the sciences. The majority of women obtained a second-class degree with only one woman reporting having been awarded a first-class degree. One woman in the sample did not complete her degree. Daniel I. Greenstein presents data that shows that the proportion of all students at Oxford achieving a first-class degree at the end of the 1970s stood at around 12 per cent.⁶⁹ This suggests, the women in this sample were less likely to obtain a first-class degree than their peers at Oxford, regardless of sex. The data given above provides an overview of how far the experience of this cohort resembled and differed from those of other women, and indeed men, in Oxford University and in British universities more generally. However, this thesis, through its analysis of the personal testimonies of women in this cohort, explores the complex implications of factors such as women's schooling and familial background for their attitudes and experiences, both prior to, while and after attending a mixed-sex college at Oxford University.

Interviews were carried out in a life-history format and, while interviews were structured in such a way that a number of key themes were addressed, such as the process by which women came to apply to Oxford and a mixed-sex college, their social and academic experience at college, and their life-trajectory after they left university, within this framework the interview was somewhat unstructured.

While the nature of the project meant that women had a preconceived sense of the centrality that their

⁶⁸ Jones and Castle, 'Women in UK Universities', p. 292.

⁶⁹ Figure 3.5 'Distribution of Class Results, All Finalists, 1900–1986' in, Daniel I. Greenstein, 'The Junior Members, 1900–1990: A Profile', Brian Harrison (ed), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 63.

time at mixed-sex colleges might have in the interview, the inclusion of questions on their longer-term life experiences meant that women could reflect on and interpret their student experiences in this wider context. As Donald Richie argues, taking such an approach ‘establishes links that neither the interviewer nor the interviewee may have considered.’⁷⁰ Furthermore, as the accounts of the women in this cohort demonstrate, such a process can enable greater consideration and acknowledgement by the interviewee of how far changing cultural scripts of wider society can influence an individual’s analysis of their past experience. For women in this cohort, their accounts of their experiences were formed in a dynamic with the rhetoric of their own colleges which, as noted above, emphasised the successful nature of the move to mixed-sex colleges. Furthermore, as chapter six will show, college expectations of the career destinations of their first alumnae could also influence the way women evaluated their own post-university trajectories. On a more basic level, taking a life history approach provides insight into the pre-university motivations and post-university destinations of the cohort, contributing to the historiography of the lives of women graduates of elite universities in the 1970s.

In order to contextualise the personal accounts of women who attended mixed-sex colleges at Oxford within the longer term and wider social and educational history of women in Britain, as well as in relation to the discussions and debates that surrounded the move to mixed-sex colleges, this thesis also uses a range of textual sources. This is the methodological focus of chapter one. Oxford University and college archival sources, as well as national, local and university newspapers and magazines give an indication of the way mixed-sex colleges were perceived by people within and beyond Oxford before and after they were implemented. Such sources also help to establish the institutional decisions and processes that shaped women’s experiences of mixed-sex colleges. Written accounts of women who attended secondary school during the 1950s and 1960s, such as Mary Evans’ *A Good School: Life at a Girls’ Grammar School in the 1950s* (1991), accounts of women who attended a women’s college at Oxford in the 1960s, such as Sheila Rowbotham’s *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (2000), and accounts of women who attended other mixed-sex tertiary

⁷⁰ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, Third Edition, (New York, 2015), p. 27.

educational institutions, such as Judy Holyer's account of her experience at Churchill College, one of the first mixed-sex colleges at Cambridge,⁷¹ are all used to compare the experiences of a single cohort to those of other women during and prior to the period. These are further supplemented by other studies which consider women's attitudes to and experiences of education, such as Lynn Abrams' intergenerational study of how mothers and daughters negotiated 'discourses on the "good woman" in 1950s and 60s Britain.⁷² In using such sources the thesis considers both the particularities of the experiences of women who attended mixed-sex colleges, and the ways in which these experiences represented wider trends in women's lives during the period.

Approach

Alongside its oral history methodology this thesis takes a feminist approach to its examination of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges. This primarily motivates its centralisation of women's experiences and attitudes. Some scholars have argued that to understand gender dynamics and the process by which patriarchal hierarchies are sustained, the male experience needs to be understood alongside the female experience. Joan Kelly in her essay 'The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History', refers to Natalie Zemon Davis's argument that, if we are to understand women's history in terms of the perpetuation of patriarchal hierarchies 'we should be interested in the history of both women and men, that we should not be working only on the subjected sex any more than an historian of class can focus exclusively on peasants.'⁷³ While recognising the insights that further comparative analysis of the female and male experience of mixed-sex colleges may offer, this thesis focuses solely on women's experience, arguing that women's experiences need to be fully acknowledged and analysed before such a comparative study can be embarked upon.

⁷¹ Judy Holyer, *A Maze of Twisty Passages The Life of a Student in 1970s Cambridge and What Came Next*, (2019).

⁷² Lynn Abrams, 'Mothers and Daughters: Negotiating the Discourse on the 'Good Woman' in 1950s and 1960s Britain', Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (eds), *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*, (Toronto, 2013), p. 60.

⁷³ Natalie Zemon Davis quoted in Joan Kelly 'The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History', Joan Kelly, *History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, (Chicago, 2014), p. 9.

This thesis also applies a feminist approach in that it analyses the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in relation to the dynamics of patriarchal sex and gender hierarchies. Adrienne Rich defines patriarchy as:

a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play; and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.⁷⁴

This approach is valuable to study of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford as this change within the University was part of a longer historical process which saw women's position within this male-dominated institution determined by the decisions of men who held power within it. Indeed, it was only in 1957 that the quota that limited the number of women that could attend the University to 970 was abolished. Furthermore, the relationship between these colleges and the women's colleges involved complex gender power dynamics and hierarchies. As Laura Schwartz argues, 'status has always been bound up with gender within educational institutions and particularly at the ancient monastic universities of Oxford and Cambridge.'⁷⁵ Using this approach in its analysis, the thesis considers the impact of mixed-sex colleges on relations between the sexes, both within mixed-sex colleges themselves and in the wider university. Secondly, it examines the implications of mixed-sex colleges for perceptions of gender hierarchy. The thesis argues that in various ways the move to mixed-sex colleges involved a reinforcement of hierarchies which evaluated what was male, whether that be in terms of institutions, behaviours or cultures, as superior to what was female. Thus, approaching the move to mixed-sex colleges in terms of an analysis of the dynamics of patriarchy indicates how far this moment of apparent 'progress' for women within the University of Oxford, represented the phenomenon that Judith Bennett describes as 'patriarchal equilibrium,'⁷⁶ in that while a change may have occurred in women's access to particular institutions at Oxford there was 'little transformation in women's status in relation to men'⁷⁷ or indeed in the status of what was feminine

⁷⁴ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, (New York, 1976), p. 57.

⁷⁵ Laura Schwartz, *Serious Endeavour: Gender, Education and Community at St Hugh's, 1886-2011*, (London, 2011), p. 94.

⁷⁶ Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, (Philadelphia, 2006), p. 55.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 62.

compared to what was male. As Bennett argues, through analysing women's experiences in terms of patriarchy and 'its mechanisms, its changes, its forms, its endurance,' women's historians will produce a 'history that speaks more strongly to central feminist concerns.'⁷⁸

Thus, the feminist approach of the thesis has two goals: firstly, to centralise women's experiences, vocalising their own accounts of their experiences; secondly to understand these experiences in terms of the dynamics of sex and gender hierarchies. The conclusions of the thesis develop from not seeing these goals as mutually exclusive. In exploring women's experiences in terms of their own analysis of these experiences, this thesis indicates that women could both face difficulties because of the patriarchal dynamics that structured mixed-sex colleges, and be agents in the dialogues and processes that sustained these dynamics. Indeed, as Bennett acknowledges, 'women have not been innocent of collusion with patriarchy; some have supported it, some have benefited from it.' Recognising this fact, she argues, enables the writing of a history of women and patriarchy that moves away from 'a simplistic history of misogynistic men oppressing virtuous women.'⁷⁹ Dyhouse has assessed the move to co-education at Oxford, Cambridge and the London medical schools in terms of the 'gendered nature of student experiences,'⁸⁰ recognising the complex ways that 'gender, prestige and identity were entwined in the history of educational institutions.'⁸¹ However, the fact that she does not use the personal accounts of women who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in her study, means that she does not apply theories of the dynamics of gender hierarchies to an examination of women's experiences of or attitudes towards mixed-sex colleges. Therefore, the combined methodology and approach of this thesis provides a new perspective on the move to mixed-sex colleges at Oxford which offers insights into the complex ways women experienced and navigated male-dominated, led and focused systems, structures and cultures.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 54.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 56

⁸⁰ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. xi.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 172.

Alongside its feminist approach, different chapters in the thesis apply approaches that have been used in other studies of the history of British universities and women's entry into elite male environments. For example, the analysis of colleges as both spaces and institutions that engender particular student cultures and social dynamics is informed by Whyte's architectural and social history of Britain's 'redbrick' universities. He argues that educational institutions 'produce cultures that are every bit as complex as any other society, and they deserve to be studied with the same seriousness and attention to detail.'⁸² Furthermore, Whyte sees the physical nature of universities as both contributing to and reflecting the form these societies take. As he argues, 'the notion that a university's identity could be embodied in its architecture'⁸³ was relevant throughout the physical and social development of British universities. Applying such ideas to the process of formerly male colleges becoming mixed-sex institutions enables deeper consideration of how far such institutions were physically, socially and culturally structured around the assumption that their undergraduate members would be exclusively male. This consideration then indicates the complexities that were involved in such institutions changing their institutional identity when women entered them in 1974.

Works of feminist architectural theory and feminist geography have also informed the approach of this thesis. In the 1980s the feminist design co-operative Matrix applied theories of gender and feminism to theories and practices of architectural design and urban planning. They argue that gendered trends are represented and reinforced by the material and spatial nature of buildings and urban centres, as the way they are designed communicates assumptions of who will be using them. Therefore, spaces that were designed by men under the assumption that the normative user of these spaces will be male are likely to have 'misrepresented women's needs' in their physical structure.⁸⁴ Such theories inform the works of feminist geographers such as Linda McDowell, who argues, in reference to women's position within merchant banks in the 1980s, that 'the location and the physical construction of the workplace – its site and layout, the external appearance and the internal layout of its buildings and

⁸² Whyte, *Redbrick*, p. 11.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 13.

⁸⁴ Jos Boys, Frances Bradshaw, Jane Danke et al, 'Introduction', Matrix (eds), *Making Space: Women and the Man-made Environment*, (London, 1984), p. 8.

surrounding environment’ mirrors and informs the power dynamics and gender hierarchies that structure relationships between workers. Her focus on the interlocking relationship between ‘gender, power and space,’⁸⁵ and on the ways in which gender identities are ‘constructed and maintained... through everyday talk and behaviour at particular sites,’⁸⁶ informs the approach of this thesis.

The Colleges

With its feminist approach this thesis centralises the experiences of women in its analysis rather than the institutional histories of the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford University. However, elements of the institutional histories, identities and structures of these colleges were significant in shaping women’s experiences.

Four of the colleges, Brasenose, Hertford, Jesus and Wadham, were predominantly built in the medieval and early modern periods and followed the traditional medieval architectural layout of a medieval Oxford college. St Catherine’s was built in the 1960s and incorporated elements of this traditional design. The implications of the physical layout and structure of colleges for women’s experiences will be discussed in chapter three.

These colleges were run by governing bodies that were made up of senior members of the college or ‘fellows’. Fellows voted in these bodies on college matters. When college governing bodies voted on whether their institution should accept women, a two thirds majority was required to pass this motion. Therefore, not all fellows in the first mixed-sex colleges were required to vote in favour of the scheme for it to go ahead in their college. As chapter four will show, this had implications for women’s experiences. Colleges were led by what A. H. Halsey describes as a ‘head of house,’⁸⁷ variously named ‘Principal’, ‘Master’, ‘Warden’ and other terms. As noted previously, during the period when colleges decided to accept women all the fellows who made up the governing bodies of these

⁸⁵ Linda McDowell, *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City*, (Oxford,1997), p. 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁸⁷ A. H. Halsey, *Decline of Donnish Dominion: The British Academic Professions in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford,1995), p. 165.

institutions were men, the first woman fellow only being admitted to St Catherine's in 1974.

Therefore, the decisions taken by colleges in the process of them becoming mixed-sex were made by men. Again, this had implications for women's experiences.

Finally, as suggested by previous histories of the first mixed-sex colleges, and by the women who were interviewed for this study, these institutions tended to have more male students from state school backgrounds than other Oxford colleges. In some colleges, this tendency to admit greater numbers of state school students has been seen as demonstrating the 'progressive' social atmosphere and outlook of the college. For example, Weiss Malkiel argues that 'Jesus was widely understood to be "a liberal college"' as it had a 'preponderance of students from Welsh grammar schools.'⁸⁸ Similarly, she notes that, at Hertford, in the mid-1960s 'a small group of fellows took steps to expand the college's reach by appealing to grammar schools.'⁸⁹ Women who attended St Catherine's and Wadham similarly emphasised the extent to which the male cohort of their colleges were predominantly from grammar schools and often described their colleges as 'liberal' or 'egalitarian'. The background of male students at Brasenose is less clear. Some women who attended this college suggested the men were predominantly from public schools, but others suggested there were some who attended grammar school. Indeed, Abigail Green, who was the second woman fellow at Brasenose, elected in 2000, wrote in an article on the move to co-education at Brasenose, published in the college alumni magazine, that members of a male drinking society at Brasenose at the time that the college became mixed-sex 'were state-school boys from the North.'⁹⁰ This suggests that Brasenose similarly had at least a number of male students from a less elite background.

However, significantly, the social make-up of the male student body of the first mixed-sex colleges, or the extent to which they were seen to have had a 'liberal' atmosphere, did not mean that women were less likely to face difficulties in these institutions or were less likely to find the student cultures of them to be overtly masculine. As chapter five will show, women from all colleges could find elements

⁸⁸ Weiss Malkiel, *The Struggle for Coeducation*, p. 552.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 556.

⁹⁰ Abigail Green, 'Memories of Brasenose', *The Brazen Nose 2014-15*, p. 106.

of their college culture uncomfortable as these revolved around stereotypically male student behaviours and rituals and involved men sexualising the first women students. Therefore, the thesis shows that regardless of the social make-up of the male student body at their colleges, it was the fact that these institutions were dominated by male students and that the culture shared among these groups revolved around stereotypically masculine behaviours and sensibilities, that was most relevant to women's experience of these institutions.

Structure

This thesis has a thematic structure but addresses themes chronologically. Chapter one focuses on archival sources and provides an introduction into the way mixed-sex colleges were perceived by members of the University through the 1960s and 1970s, through analysis of the debates and discussions that took place in Oxford University and in the University, local and national press during the period. This chapter argues that women within the University, and others, who raised concerns about the introduction of mixed-sex colleges raised valid and important questions of women's position within male spaces, communities and cultures, as well as about the likely implications of mixed-sex colleges on the position of women, and women-led and focused institutions in the University. This chapter argues that the nature, focus and result of these discussions meant these valid concerns were not effectively considered in the process of colleges actually opening to women students. When colleges prepared for the arrival of women, decisions were made by the male-dominated governing bodies of colleges and individuals who made up these bodies. This meant that many of the issues that such concerns predicted materialised and impacted on women's experiences of mixed-sex colleges. This chapter therefore illuminates the processes that created the situation that women entered when they arrived at mixed-sex colleges in 1974. This process shaped their experiences.

Chapter two moves to consider the significant factors that led women in this cohort to see formerly male colleges as more desirable institutions than women-only ones. It argues that this involved a rejection of female-dominated, female-led institutions that appeared to cultivate a 'feminine' student culture. The chapter argues that this developed from the specific educational and social context in

which women who entered formerly male colleges experienced their girlhood and teenage years. This context was one in which women navigated conflicting ideas of womanhood and femininity within their educational, social and familial lives. These conflicting ideas led to them associating traditional forms of femininity, and anything seeming to represent them, such as women-only colleges, with conservatism and restriction. In contrast, male behaviours, institutions and experiences were perceived as liberating and desirable. Therefore, this chapter argues that women's preference for mixed-sex colleges was not simply caused by a movement towards co-educational schooling and a manifestation of a general liberalising of attitudes towards women's position in British society. Instead, it was the result of a combination of conservative and liberal messages about woman's lives and opportunities, and informed by experiences of female-dominated and led institutions at secondary school level.

Together, these chapters demonstrate that, prior to the establishment of the first mixed-sex colleges in October 1974, women academics and potential students had complex and varying attitudes towards these institutions and their relationship to the women-only colleges. Furthermore, in many ways students' views of the desirability of attending formerly male colleges reflected and reinforced gender hierarchies which assumed male superiority over the female. Thus, these chapters demonstrate that, in terms of the way mixed-sex colleges were perceived by women at the time, their introduction cannot easily be defined as a progressive change in terms of the feminist theories that underpin this thesis.

Chapters three, four and five then move on to consider women's experiences of mixed-sex colleges through assessment of their personal testimonies. Chapter three analyses women's experiences of living within the physical space of their colleges. It argues that the institutional identity of colleges as being spaces of male exclusivity was ingrained in their physical structure. When women entered these colleges their essential physical structure, and the male-focused systems by which these spaces were used, remained. Where adjustments were made they generally reflected men's gendered assumptions of the requirements of women students compared to men. This meant that women could face difficulties interacting with areas and physical elements of colleges, particularly those that were most

representative of their historic identity. However, for many women, the historic physical identity of colleges characterised the Oxford University experience 'proper'. Therefore, the physical elements of colleges that were most tied to their historic identity of being spaces of male exclusivity were also what attracted women to them. When faced with difficulties women developed individual strategies to overcome them and to make their student experience easier. While women did not approach the physical difficulties they faced in their colleges in terms of a collective feminist critique of the way these institutions had prepared for women, it was generally through these strategies, rather than the proactive preparation of colleges, that effective change was made to the physical space of colleges to accommodate women.

Chapter four considers women's experience of mixed-sex colleges in terms of their entry into a community of academic and non-academic staff who had various roles in the daily running of colleges. This chapter examines women's experiences of interacting with the heads of colleges, college fellows, college doctors, college administrative staff and college domestic staff. Daily interactions with these members of college society, as well as the way college communities collectively responded to the first cohorts of women, influenced women's social and academic experiences within mixed-sex colleges. This chapter argues that members of college communities were not all welcoming of women students, and the normative student identity associated with these communities continued to be a male one. This meant that women's sex was reacted to in various, conflicting, often problematic ways; for example, some women found their sex was not acknowledged, while others felt they were viewed primarily in terms of their sex and sexuality in the way members of college communities responded to them. However, this chapter also argues that women had various interpretations of the ways college communities reacted to the presence of women students. While many acknowledged the sexism they faced as problematic, they did not perceive this as representing their inequality within these communities. Women focused on showing resilience to such treatment and navigating around it on an individual basis. Furthermore, where women felt their sex was ignored and they were perceived in terms of a male student identity, this could be perceived as representing their full acceptance into college communities.

Chapter five examines women's experiences of mixed-sex colleges in terms of their position within the student cultures and lifestyles that were formed among the student populations of mixed-sex colleges. The chapter argues that while the wider cultural and social changes that had occurred in 1960s and 70s Britain did affect the form that student cultures took in mixed-sex colleges, this did not necessarily lead to women being unproblematically welcomed into the student bodies of their colleges. Cultures of mixed-sex colleges remained essentially male in that they revolved around stereotypically masculine behaviours and sensibilities. Students' perception of affiliation to their colleges continued to be defined by participation in various rituals that were associated with this male culture. Within these cultures women generally had two roles, one of the 'honorary man' and one of the sexualised potential romantic or sexual partner. Furthermore, women's contribution to college communities, and indeed their presence within mixed-sex colleges, was evaluated in terms of their performance of these two roles. A separate woman-focused or feminist culture did not develop among the first cohorts of women at mixed-sex colleges. However, women themselves did not necessarily see this as desirable at the time, or as an important part of them entering and feeling accepted within the student community of mixed-sex colleges. For many women, acceptance was achieved by participating in and embracing the male cultures, behaviours and rituals that structured student life in their colleges.

Collectively, these chapters show what daily life was like for women students in mixed-sex colleges. They demonstrate that women had various and complex experiences at mixed-sex colleges and, while many enjoyed their experiences, many faced difficulties and various forms of sexism. Furthermore, they indicate that as spaces, communities and cultures the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford remained essentially male institutions in that they accommodated men more easily than women, were led by men, were dominated by men and were masculine in their atmosphere. In various ways, these institutions were not fully accommodating of or unproblematically welcoming to women students or female student identities. However, these chapters also suggest that women saw their colleges' male institutional identities as an inviting feature, and could both embrace the male identities associated with them and participate in the male cultures that had developed within them. Thus, women both

faced difficulties on account of and were agents in the perpetuation of their colleges identities as essentially male institutions.

Finally, chapter six explores what women did after university and examines how far women who went to mixed-sex colleges at Oxford had different experiences, and reflections on their experiences, to other cohorts of graduate and non-graduate women from the period. The way mixed-sex colleges were discussed by members of the University, both at the time they were formed and since, assumed that attending the same college as men would make it more likely for women to have post-university experiences that were more similar to those of their male peers. This chapter argues that this was not the case for the majority of women in the cohort. Instead, despite the fact that women in the cohort graduated after the introduction of equalities legislation such as the 1970 Equal Pay Act, which became law in 1975, the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act and the 1975 Employment Protection Act, gendered trends relating to women's careers advice, women's employment, the pay gap between men and women, and attitudes towards and expectations of maternity leave and parenting, all continued to have the potential to cause women's post-university career trajectories to differ substantially from those associated with male Oxford graduates. Where women perceived attending a mixed-sex college to have contributed to their post-university career experience most substantially it was in that having experienced the male space, society and culture of their college prepared them to deal with the male working environments that were a factor of high-paid, high-status professions in the late 1970s and beyond. Thus, women's experiences within mixed-sex colleges could perpetuate the idea that gaining greater equality with men depended on them working within, adapting to, and succeeding as individuals within male spaces, societies and cultures and their patriarchal structures, rather than through a dismantling of such structures.

Therefore, together these chapters build the central argument of this thesis that women faced difficulties living and learning within mixed-sex colleges at Oxford because these institutions remained essentially male institutions, in that they were male-led and dominated, masculine in their cultural atmosphere and they continued to primarily cater for male students. This was the result of the

way mixed-sex colleges were introduced to Oxford. Women engaged with these institutions in various ways, at times embracing the male culture of their college and often developing strategies to overcome the difficulties they faced. This enabled them to participate in the student life of the formerly male colleges that they saw as desirable institutions to attend. However, women's strategies were focused on displaying resilience to issues and navigating them on an individual basis rather than through a collective feminist critique of the inequalities that persisted in mixed-sex colleges. Women in this cohort then took this mentality into their working lives.

While this thesis focuses on the experience of one group of women at one institution, the case study of women's experiences of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford offers important contributions to the understanding of the complexities that are involved in women entering elite educational and social institutions. Oxford University has historically held, and continues to hold, an elite position in the structure of the British and global higher education system and in attitudes towards it. Furthermore, it is an institution that has historically had a significant role in producing students who have gone on to form the social, political and economic elite in British society. Therefore, understanding the complexities involved in the process of women entering the male institutions that made up this elite university, through the lens of their own experience, makes a significant contribution to our understanding of women's relationship to the elite institutions and spheres of influence which have shaped, and continue to shape, British society.

Definitions

Where the thesis describes mixed-sex colleges as 'male' it refers to the fact that, as spaces they were more accommodating of men than women, the communities that ran these institutions were dominated by men and led by men, and the dominant student cultures that existed in these institutions were ones produced amongst male students, revolving around stereotypically masculine behaviours. Similarly, where the thesis refers to women's colleges as 'female' colleges it refers to the fact that these institutions were dominated and led by women. Where the thesis refers to women's view of these

institutions as having a 'female' or 'feminine' atmosphere it does so in terms of normative stereotypes of femininity.

Where the thesis refers to women's 'sex' it does so in terms of their biological difference to men.

Where the thesis refers to gender, gendered difference or gender stereotypes it does so in terms of the socially constructed characteristics of masculinity and femininity that are attributed to men and women by society. At times through the thesis the terms 'male' and 'female' are used in term of sex; where this is so, they are followed by terms such as led and dominated, referring to the number of men or women in an institution, environment or space, and in positions of authority. At times through the thesis the terms 'male' and 'female' are used to denote a culture, characteristic or behaviour that is stereotypically associated with men and women respectively. The terms 'masculine' and 'masculinity' and 'feminine' and 'femininity' are also used to refer to socially constructed stereotypes of men's and women's behaviour and characteristics.

From the implementation of mixed-sex colleges these institutions have been referred to by some as 'co-educational', and by others as 'co-residential'. Indeed, during the debates over the implementation of the scheme, it was a contentious point whether, because by the 1970s lectures were mixed and students would often go to other colleges for tutorials, the University was in fact already 'co-educational' and that mixed-sex colleges would simply make it 'co-residential'.⁹¹ Since this debate, both terms have been used by different scholars studying the move to mixed-sex colleges. This thesis does not seek to come to a conclusion about which term most accurately describes mixed-sex colleges, and its focus on the interlinked nature of women's social and academic experiences of these institutions make such enquiry in some way counter to its ambitions. Therefore, throughout, the thesis uses the terms 'mixed-sex', 'co-educational', and 'co-residential' interchangeably to refer to a formerly male-only college moving to accept women undergraduates, and, in some instances, a formerly women-only college moving to accept men undergraduates.

⁹¹ For example see David Stockton, 'Co-residence at Oxford?', *Oxford Magazine*, vol 89 no 3 26 May 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12/ File 3.

Chapter One

The Co-education Debates and the Implementation of Mixed-Sex Colleges

The formerly male Oxford colleges of Brasenose, Hertford, Jesus, St Catherine's and Wadham first accepted women undergraduates in 1974 after over ten years of intense debate and discussion about whether mixed-sex institutions should be established in the University. During these debates, members of the University, particularly women academics from Oxford's women's colleges, raised concerns about the proposal for mixed-sex colleges. Their concerns posed valid questions about both the likely impact that the scheme would have on the position of the women's colleges and female academics within the University, and the potential negative experiences that women students would have in a male-dominated college. These arguments raised wide reaching and, in some ways, radical questions about women's position within male-led, dominated and focused systems and structures.

However, as discussions over colleges' desire to accept women became more organised and associated with University committees through the early 1970s, the debate focused on the question of how mixed-sex colleges should be introduced in a way that protected the interests of the women's colleges. This focus meant that the valid concerns about women's potential position within the male-dominated spaces, communities and cultures of mixed-sex colleges were raised in the context of whether the scheme should be accepted, not in reference to how it should be implemented. When it came to colleges preparing for the arrival of their first women undergraduates, decisions were made by individuals within these colleges. Oxford colleges were and are self-governing institutions, run by a governing body of senior academic members, 'fellows' or 'dons', led by the head of the college. The fact that the governing bodies of the first mixed-sex colleges continued to be male-dominated, and in four of the five colleges exclusively male, and the fact this was not addressed as these colleges became mixed-sex, meant that the practical decisions that colleges took in preparing for the arrival of women were made by men. As the later chapters will show, this context meant that women students, as predicted by those who raised concerns, faced challenges living and learning within these institutions as the specific needs of women had not been considered.

A number of accounts of Oxford's move to mixed-sex colleges condemn the women who expressed concern over the scheme as standing in the way of progress. For example, in a commemorative account of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges written for the 40th anniversary, Graham Richards, one of the driving forces behind the scheme at Brasenose College, comments that after the agreement of two-thirds of the college's governing body to the scheme 'a more formidable barrier was the response of the women's colleges.' Richards argues that these women were simply defending their own positions in the women's colleges and that, to them, 'the needs of undergraduate women were very much secondary.'¹ Such a characterisation of the women who were concerned about the scheme is also present in much of the historiography. For example, Joseph Soares argues that it was 'puzzling'² that the women's critiques had such influence over University policy on co-education. Similarly, Marie Hicks argues that it is 'counter to one's intuition' that 'the most important critics of co-residence were to be found among the women of Oxford.'³ Weiss Malkiel argues that the men at colleges pushing for the acceptance of women were the 'protagonists'⁴ in the 'struggle for coeducation,'⁵ language which implies that the female heads of colleges were 'antagonists,' standing in the way of a heroic 'struggle' against inequality in higher education. Such arguments overlook the validity of key elements in the concerns of the female heads of college and employ a reading of women's history based on an assumption of a singular narrative of linear progression and a simplified understanding of concepts such as equality. This creates a sanitised version of women's history, failing to acknowledge the complexities involved in women entering, and gaining equality within, elite male institutions.

In contrast, Carol Dyhouse shows greater recognition of the valid arguments that underpinned women's concerns about the proposed scheme of mixed-sex colleges, stating that they 'stemmed in

¹ Graham Richards, 'The Admission of Women to Brasenose', *The Brazen Nose 2014-2015*, vol 49 (2015), p. 90.

² Joseph Soares, *The Decline of Privilege: The Modernisation of Oxford University*, (Stamford, 1999), p. 99.

³ Marie Hicks, 'The Price of Excellence Co-residence and Women's Integration at Oxford and Harvard Universities 1964-1977', (BA thesis, Harvard University, 2000), Bodleian Library Oxford, Oxford University Archives, Pamphlets 101, p. 5.

⁴ Nancy Weiss Malkiel, "Keep the Damned Women Out" *The Struggle for Coeducation*, (Princeton, 2016), p. xx.

⁵ Ibid, Title Page.

part from concern about what kind of experience young women would have in colleges controlled by men and characterised by male traditions and a masculine ethos,⁶ alongside a fear that co-education would reduce the number of positions open for female academics in the University. This chapter builds on Dyhouse's argument, suggesting that this concern had implications beyond just women's experiences of Oxford colleges themselves. In asking questions about the likely impact of co-educational colleges, those who engaged with this debate were, consciously or unconsciously, raising wider questions about whether women could achieve equality within the structures and systems of a patriarchal society. However, while to some extent such ideas reflected a radical feminist approach to women's equality, they were often expressed alongside a conservative attitude to women's education and, as the next chapter will explore further, conservative ideals of femininity and female sexuality. Furthermore, the chapter argues that, while those who expressed doubts about mixed-sex colleges raised valid concerns, the general focus of the debate meant that the important ideological questions that underlay such concerns were not constructively applied to the process by which male colleges became mixed-sex. Therefore, as the next chapters will demonstrate, many of the concerns that were raised about women's position within mixed-sex colleges materialised. Thus, Oxford's co-education debates indicate the complex, and often conflicting, ways that educational and social equality were perceived and pursued during the 1960s and 1970s. This complexity was then reflected in women's experience of living and learning as members of the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford.

First Proposals

The first men's college at Oxford to consider accepting women undergraduates was New College in the mid-1960s. The suggestion, initially raised by college librarian and tutor Henry Bell, was voted on as a resolution of intent by the college's governing body, receiving the necessary two thirds majority. In October 1964, a fellow of New College, Geoffrey de Ste Croix, wrote an article entitled 'The Admission of Women to New College' published in the *Oxford Magazine* in which he expressed his belief that a move to mixed-sex colleges would help bring about greater numerical equality between

⁶ Dyhouse, *Students A Gendered History*, (Abingdon,2006), p. 171.

men and women within the University. He commented that ‘the argument in favour of our becoming a mixed college which weighed most with us is that the proportion of women undergraduates at Oxford is far too small,’ going on to state that ‘what keeps the proportion of women undergraduates below the normal national figure is precisely *the existence of separate colleges for men and women*’ (original emphasis). Thus, early calls for mixed-sex colleges were rooted in a view that it was unfair that fewer women than men could come to Oxford, ‘equality’ being conceived of as a numerical issue.

However, within this article de Ste Croix also indicated other various reasons that motivated early calls for mixed-sex colleges. He argued that Oxford in the 1960s was not a fully co-educational university (a point disputed by others, as noted previously) and this led to male and female students forming relationships that were only based on sexual desire. He wrote that those calling for mixed-sex colleges ‘believe that if undergraduates live in a community of which both men and women are full members, and are meeting the opposite sex collectively all the time, in the JCR, in Hall and in tutorials, and can easily have non-sexual friendships with them, emotional and sexual tension is likely to decrease.’⁷ Therefore, for de Ste Croix, creating a mixed-sex community within colleges was assumed to be a way of establishing a more healthy dynamic between men and women students.

Others disputed this point, raising their concerns about New College’s proposal in national newspapers. For example, on 2 February 1965 the *Guardian* reported that the Fellows at Lady Margaret Hall had expressed concern over New College’s proposal, considering ‘it is absurd to pretend that the injecting into this society of a quota of young women will produce a ‘natural’ community; it will on the contrary, produce a highly artificial and self-conscious one in which tensions that in any case go with adolescence are bound to be intensified.’⁸ These contrasting arguments indicate that from the inception of the idea of mixed-sex colleges, questions were raised as to whether or not the community and culture of a mixed-sex college was likely to be one in which

⁷ G.E.M de Ste Croix, ‘The Admission of Women to New College,’ *Oxford Magazine*, 15 October 1964, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

⁸ Fellows of Lady Margaret Hall quoted in ‘Opposition to the Mixed College’, *Guardian*, 2 February 1965, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

women were sexualised and perceived primarily in terms of their sexual difference to the male students.

Concern was also raised about how the New College proposal would affect the women's colleges. Lord Franks, who had led a commission examining practices at the University of Oxford in response to the 1963 Robbins Report on higher education in Britain, wrote to the Warden of New College in March 1965 stating that 'we believe rapid action of this sort would inflict great damage on the existing women's colleges which with steady purpose and devoted effort over nearly a hundred years have achieved a distinguished position in Oxford.'⁹ Thus, Franks suggested his critique of the movement to mixed-sex colleges stemmed primarily from a defence of the position and status of the women's colleges and an understanding of their history.

Indeed, while running the commission, Franks had heard evidence from senior members of the women's colleges which demonstrated their concern about New College's scheme for accepting women. In her evidence to the Commission Dr Lucy Sutherland, the Principal of Lady Margaret Hall, considered what a truly 'co-educative' college would look like and questioned whether the New College proposal would lead to the formation of such an institution. She stated that, in a truly co-educational college, women and men should be 'roughly equal' and that women should play 'a full part rather than forming a small appendage to an essentially male institution.'¹⁰ Thus, from the initial point at which male colleges raised the idea of accepting women, women in the women's colleges expressed a dual concern both for their own position within the University and for the likely position of women who entered male-dominated colleges. Furthermore, in comments made to the press, women academics also showed a sensitivity to the extent to which the issue of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford was tied to wider discussions of women's position within the University and society more

⁹ Lord Franks, letter to Warden of New College, 15 March 1965, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

¹⁰ Dr Lucy Sutherland, University of Oxford, Franks Commission, Oral Evidence, 24 November 1964, Typescript, Bodleian Library, Oxford, quoted in Marie Hicks, 'Integrating Women at Oxford and Harvard 1964-1977', Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (ed), *Yards and Gates: Gender in Harvard and Radcliffe History* (New York, 2004) p. 248.

generally. For example, the *Oxford Mail* reported in June 1964 that Mary Ogilvie, then Principal of St Anne's College, argued that the question of whether men's colleges should accept women was 'part of a much wider problem and I do not think one college should try and solve it alone,'¹¹ suggesting that the New College plan failed to recognise the importance of discussing a possible move to co-education in terms of inequalities between men and women in the University and society more widely.

These concerns were arguably influential in preventing a move to coeducational colleges in the early 1960s. When the Franks Commission reported its findings in 1966 it made no arguments for the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, making no reference to New College's proposal.

However, in a personal letter written to the Warden of New College, Lord Franks suggested that he had considered the implications of a move to mixed-sex colleges and considered that, if this change was not implemented in a planned and gradual way it may have a negative impact on the women's colleges. He wrote that; 'if New College decides to proceed with the proposal and, in so doing, sets a fashion which several other men's colleges would wish to follow' this would be detrimental to the women's colleges. He went on to argue that 'if changes should come, we are clear that they should be gradual... there should be immediate consultation... between the men's and women's colleges to reach a reasonable view on the extent and the timing of any proposed changes.'¹²

The fact that Franks expressed such concern for the women's colleges in his public and personal comments contributed to the presentation of the women in the women's colleges as standing in the way of progress towards greater equality within the University. For example, John Vaizey, a fellow of Worcester College with strong left-wing sentiments, wrote in an article in the *Oxford Magazine* in March 1965 that, 'as supporters of the New College proposal we regard the views of the women's colleges as presented to the Franks Commission as narrowly conceived.'¹³ Similarly, A. J. Ayer, who

¹¹ Mary Ogilvie, 'New College Agrees to Admit Women', *Oxford Mail*, 26 June 1964, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

¹² Lord Franks, letter to Warden of New College, 15 March 1965, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

¹³ John Vaizey, 'Mixed Colleges', *Oxford Magazine*, 11 March 1965, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

had been involved in New College's initial conversations about accepting women, reflected in an interview for an article in *The Times* in August 1968 that 'to our surprise there was opposition from the *women's* colleges. All they seemed to care about was the danger that we would get some of their best undergraduates'¹⁴ (original emphasis).

Such analysis of the way women in the women's colleges engaged with early calls for mixed-sex colleges presents them as self-interested parties with greater concern for their own institutions than for women's education at Oxford more generally. Indeed, this was clearly expressed by a letter written by E.M. Thomas and published in *The Times* in May 1966. While recognising that the concerns for the impact on the women's colleges might be valid, he opined that 'have we perhaps come to a position where the interests of the women's colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, these great pioneers of women's education, no longer run parallel with interests of women's education.'¹⁵ In this way, those who criticised the women in the women's colleges for their reaction to the New College proposal failed to recognise the valid and important ways that their concerns addressed questions of whether women could achieve equality as a minority in an essentially male institution. The presentation of women in the women's colleges as concerned only with their own institutions meant that the women's perceptions of the structural and social issues that might arise if a small number of women entered male-dominated spaces, communities and cultures were generally not acknowledged or considered by those who desired to bring mixed-sex colleges to the University.

While it is important to recognise that women expressed valid concerns over women's potential experience and position as a minority within mixed-sex colleges, it is equally important to acknowledge that there was not a singular, collective reaction to New College's proposal among the women at Oxford. Many women in the women's colleges reacted positively to the prospect of mixed-sex colleges and were keen to emphasise their separation from the groups of women who were

¹⁴ A.J. Ayer, 'Women's Page – Interview with A.J. Ayer', *The Times*, 28 August 1968, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

¹⁵ E.M. Thomas, 'A Problem of Talent', *The Times*, 15 May 1966, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

presented as being opponents of the scheme. For example, in a letter published in the *Oxford Magazine* in May 1969 a group of over thirty-three women academics from the women's colleges responded to an article entitled 'The Case for Co-residence.'¹⁶ In the initial article the author, Jonathan Glover questioned 'which comes first: the cause of women's colleges or the cause of women's education?'¹⁷ This, again, presented the women in the women's colleges as standing in the way of progress in women's education. In the response the women dons stated that 'we wish to point out the women dons are by no means unanimous on this issue. Indeed many, including the signatories of this letter would welcome the introduction of some scheme which would include the admission of women to a man's college.'¹⁸ On the one hand this indicates the fallacy of seeing the debate over mixed-sex colleges as simply one in which men and women in Oxford took opposing sides. However, on the other, it emphasises how influential the negative characterisation of women who did raise concerns over mixed-sex colleges was, in the way people perceived this debate; the fact that these women dons felt the need to publicly emphasise their distance from this characterisation suggests its influence on conceptualisations of the different sides of the debate.

While many of the women in the women's colleges expressed opinions that could be seen as demonstrating, albeit often probably unconsciously, a nuanced and radical analysis of the issues that women might face trying to achieve equality within an essentially male institution, they could simultaneously express opinions that appeared to doubt the quality and desirability of their own institutions. One of the concerns expressed by senior members of the women's colleges was that if previously male colleges opened to women, many able female candidates would want to apply to a mixed-sex college rather than a women's college and therefore the women's colleges would struggle to fill their places. Indeed, in his initial article proposing the New College scheme de Ste Croix

¹⁶ 'Letters', *Oxford Magazine*, 23 May 1969, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archive, UR6/W/12, File One

¹⁷ John Glover, 'The Case for Co-residence', *Oxford Magazine*, 7 March 1969, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

¹⁸ 'Letters', *Oxford Magazine*, 23 May 1969, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

referred to the ‘fears of “cream-skimming”’¹⁹ that the women’s colleges had with regards to the prospect of mixed colleges, and *The Times* reported in February 1965 that ‘St Anne’s and Lady Margaret Hall felt that the women’s colleges would lose a significant number of their ablest candidates’²⁰ should any of the male colleges move to accepting women. Therefore, in their critiques of a potential scheme of mixed-sex colleges, women from the women’s colleges could tacitly appear to confirm the view that the men’s colleges were academically more desirable and of higher status than the women’s colleges.

Those who favoured a move to mixed-sex colleges pointed out at the time that such views presented a negative assessment of both the academic potential of girls and the desirability of the women’s colleges. For example, in a letter to the *Guardian* published on 2 February 1965, Janice Johnson, whose connection to Oxford University is unclear, stated that she found it ‘interesting’ that the women’s colleges appeared concerned about mixed-sex colleges. She wrote that ‘the women’s colleges it appears are afraid that if the proposal is put into effect they will lose the cream of their future students. Is this cream then such a rare commodity?’²¹ Others pointed out that it was not a given that girls would prefer a mixed college over a women’s college. For example, Peter Ady, a fellow of St Anne’s College who was supportive of the New College plan, wrote that the concern of ‘cream-skimming’ itself ‘does not prove that the most intelligent women would prefer mixed colleges.’²² Indeed, as Laura Schwartz argues, those who expressed concern over the future desirability of the women’s colleges were ‘sometimes appearing to work on the assumption that female institutions were irredeemably low status.’²³ However, as future chapters will show through their analysis of if, and why, young women decided to apply to a mixed-sex college in 1973, such

¹⁹ G.E.M de Ste Croix, ‘The Admission of Women to New College’, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

²⁰ ‘Women Principals Fear Mixed Colleges’, *The Times*, 23 February 1965, Bodleian Library, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

²¹ Janice Johnson, *Guardian*, 2 March 1965, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

²² Peter Ady, ‘Mixed Education and the Women’s Colleges’, *Oxford Magazine*, 3 December 1964, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

²³ Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour*, p. 80.

attitudes showed an astute understanding of the ways in which the desirability of mixed-sex colleges was linked to their historical identity, status and legacy of male exclusivity.

Within these discussions of the merits and likely outcome of mixed-sex colleges there was limited consideration of how or indeed if a college which had been established and developed in the context of male exclusivity would have to change its established practices or physical structures in order to accommodate women effectively. Where there was consideration of this kind, it focused on the practicalities of how women students would live within colleges. In his initial article explaining New College's ambition to accept women, de St Croix suggested that 'we have several modernised staircases which could easily be set apart for women.'²⁴ Indeed, when he reflected on the initial thoughts that Brasenose College had in terms of becoming mixed-sex, Graham Richards noted that 'we were at the time starting to plan a new student accommodation building at Frewin Hall in New Inn Hall Street' and therefore suggested to his colleagues that 'any new buildings should be designed to facilitate' accommodating women students.²⁵ These comments suggest that some senior members of male colleges that wanted to accept women perceived the more historic parts of their colleges would not be suitable for women. Furthermore, they suggest that, at least by some, it was assumed that there would continue to be a degree of separation in the way men and women were accommodated. Indeed, in the case of Brasenose College, Frewin Hall is several streets away from the main college quad. Such considerations highlight some of the complexities, conversations and decisions that a move to becoming a mixed-sex college involved. These points will be discussed in more depth in chapter three.

However, while some in the women's colleges did raise concerns about women's position within a male-dominated institution, discussions of the practical, systematic and social considerations that would be involved in admitting women to such institutions did not loom large in the university-wide discussions that took place around the early proposals for mixed-sex colleges at Oxford. Indeed, in a

²⁴ G.E.M de Ste Croix, 'The Admission of Women to New College', Oxford Magazine, 15 October 1964, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

²⁵ Richards, 'The Admission of Women to Brasenose', p. 89.

letter written in response to the de Ste Croix article, A.N. Sherwin-White noted that ‘we do not know exactly what New College has in mind in proposing “to allocate certain staircases” to women undergraduates.’²⁶

Thus, when the idea of a male college accepting women was first raised in the early 1960s, those who expressed concerns about the scheme asked questions about it that, whether consciously or not, acknowledged the complexities involved in women entering and attempting to gain equality within a male-dominated, led and focused institution. Such questions were raised alongside valid concerns for the impact of mixed-sex colleges on the recently achieved status and position of the women’s colleges. However, those who supported mixed-sex colleges interpreted the wide-ranging arguments of the women’s colleges as simply representing conservative, self-interested arguments. Therefore, the initial debate over mixed-sex colleges came to be framed as one that simply considered the merits of establishing mixed-sex colleges in Oxford in principal and the likely effects on the women’s colleges, rather than one which involved an exploration of the complexities involved in the process of women entering male-dominated spaces, communities and cultures. The chapter will now move on to consider the nature of this debate when the scheme for the introduction of mixed-sex colleges gained greater momentum in the early 1970s.

The ‘Jesus Group’ and the 1970s Co-education Debates

While the New College plan was not implemented, from 1968 other men’s colleges which favoured opening to women established working parties to discuss the matter, forming, in 1972, the ‘Jesus Group’, to explore the possibility of a scheme and the implications of a move to co-education on the wider University. This group met in March 1972 chaired by John Habakkuk, Principal of Jesus College, and reported to the Hebdomadal Council, the University’s executive body, later that month. Simultaneously, the Hebdomadal Council established its own ‘Committee on Co-residence’. This committee’s report, delivered in April, was quickly accepted by the Hebdomadal Council. On 30 May

²⁶ A.N. Sherwin-White, ‘Mixed Colleges’, *Oxford Magazine*, 4 March 1965, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

1972 the 'Report of the Committee on Co-residence' was debated in Congregation, the University's governing body, and voted through. Unlike Cambridge University, where the first male colleges to accept women in 1973, Clare, King's and Churchill, made this decision individually without formal consultation with the wider university, in Oxford, colleges could only act with the consent of the wider University. As Weiss Malkiel notes, 'Oxford was different from Cambridge in the statutory relationship of the colleges and the university'²⁷ and therefore any change in college statutes became a University issue rather than simply a college one. This context shaped the form that the co-education debate in the University took in the 1970s. It contributed to a focus on the relationship in the University between the women's colleges and the potential mixed-sex colleges and discussions of the implications for the former of the latter accepting women. Therefore, the nature of this discussion resulted in a lack of effective consideration of and consultation on the complexities that would be involved in formerly male colleges becoming fully accessible, accommodating and welcoming institutions for women students.

Individuals and groups within the male colleges that wanted their colleges to accept women, and indeed those beyond the University who supported these colleges, had various reasons for doing so. In some cases, it is possible to suggest that there was a degree of feminist motivation behind their desire for their college to admit women, in terms of a belief in increasing the number of women at the University. However, equally often, it is questionable how far women's educational and social experience was the primary concern. The 'Report of the Committee on Co-residence' emphasised that, in their view, the key motivation for introducing mixed-sex colleges was to 'correct the imbalance of women to men in Oxford.'²⁸ Similarly, in their 'Report on Co-education', St Catherine's College argued that they desired to accept women 'because of the desirability of making an Oxford education available on equal terms to women as well as men.'²⁹ Indeed, in their reflection on their contribution

²⁷ Weiss Malkiel, *The Struggle for Coeducation*, p. 541.

²⁸ 'Report of the Committee on Co-residence', Supplement No.6, *University Gazette* vol. cii, (May 1977), Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Two.

²⁹ Alan Bullock and Wilfrid Knapp, The Admission of Women to St. Catherine's, 12 October 1971, St Catherine's, Box XIID/B IV 14(f).

to their college's decision to admit women, some stated they were motivated by a belief in women's right to equality. For example, John Torrance, who became a fellow of Hertford College in 1960, stated he desired coeducation because of his 'belief in equality of opportunity.'³⁰ Another fellow, Miles Vaughan Williams argued that he 'felt strongly that women should be given the same educational opportunities as men', holding this belief 'on the grounds of social justice.'³¹

Many of the male academics who supported co-education had ties to socialist politics and ideological groups both in Britain and Europe. For example, the push for co-education at Brasenose college involved a group of young male fellows who came to the college in the late 1960s. Weiss Malkiel describes this group as having 'progressive inclinations'³² and it included Laszlo Solymar who, coming to Oxford from communist Hungary, argued that single-sex education was 'unnatural,'³³ and Graham Richards, who had lived in the Cité Universitaire while studying at the University of Paris, where he enjoyed the mixed-sex environment and was, as Weiss Malkiel argues, a 'supporter of the women's movement.'³⁴ A similar picture appears within most colleges in the 'Jesus Group'. For example, a number of fellows at Wadham were left-leaning, supported the Labour Party and 'prided themselves on being progressive,'³⁵ while John Habakkuk of Jesus was considered to be liberal in his ideology and views of education. In an address given at a memorial service held for Habakkuk, historian Keith Thomas claimed that Habakkuk's 'father's struggle to gain an education left him with an abiding conviction that opportunities should not be wasted', while also arguing that 'his mother's frustration at being forced to give up teaching when she married... helps explain his own commitment to the higher education of women.'³⁶ Although these statements, being delivered in an obituary, were likely to be coloured with a degree of flattery, nonetheless they, and the profile of fellows noted above, suggest that the decision of certain colleges to work towards co-education was partly inspired

³⁰ John Torrance, 'Hertford College, Admission of Women', quoted in Weiss Malkiel, *The Struggle for Coeducation*, p. 573.

³¹ Miles Vaughan Williams, "Admission of Women", *Hertford Revivals* quoted in Weiss Malkiel, *The Struggle for Coeducation*, p. 573.

³² Weiss Malkiel, *The Struggle for Coeducation*, pp. 545-546.

³³ Laszlo Solymar quoted in Weiss Malkiel, *The Struggle for Coeducation*, p. 546.

³⁴ Weiss Malkiel, *The Struggle for Coeducation*, p. 546.

³⁵ *Ibid* p. 550.

³⁶ Keith Thomas, 'Obituary: Sir John Habakkuk', *Jesus College Record*, (2002), p. 19.

by the views of liberal-minded male fellows and heads of college seeking to democratise Oxford generally. Their definition of sex-equality was bound up with ideas about social democracy and socialist 'progression'.

However, in both women's and men's colleges, some doubted that plans for co-education were fully motivated by a selfless concern for the education of women students and a desire to achieve greater equality for men and women within the University. For example, Hertford fellow Keith McLauchlan later claimed that 'it was obvious that many clever women were not being admitted ... we saw our chance to improve the quality of our entry', and 'at no time was anything approaching a feminist argument made.'³⁷ Indeed, some argued at the time that men's colleges wanted to accept women purely to improve their own academic standards and social environment. For example, during the debate over the scheme for mixed-sex colleges in Congregation in May 1972, Kathleen Kenyon, the Principal of St Hugh's College, argued against the scheme in the same terms as those who challenged New College's initial plan. She argued that the men's colleges' plan would simply see the brightest female candidates 'creamed'³⁸ from the women's colleges which regularly topped the University academic league tables. Wadham's 'Coeducational Report' also demonstrated how far colleges' motivation to accept women was linked to their own interest, stating that women would help to end the 'hooliganism and rowdy behaviour'³⁹ of the men in their college. Thus, while some suggested their belief in mixed-sex colleges reflected a concern for numerical equality within the University, in other ways colleges' desire to accept women was perceived, and in some cases, presented, as stemming from a gendered and self-interested view of women's potential contribution to the communities and cultures of previously male colleges.

³⁷ Keith McLauchlan, 'Hertford College Goes Co-educational' quoted in Weiss Malkiel, *The Struggle for Coeducation*, p. 556.

³⁸ Kathleen Kenyon, 'Co-Residence: Verbatim Report of Debate in Congregation', *Oxford University Gazette*, 3:3510, 7 June 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

³⁹ 'Report of the Wadham College Joint Sub-Committee of Coeducation', 12 March 1970, pp. 2-4, Wadham Co-Residence, Box 1, p. 2 quoted in Weiss Malkiel, *The Struggle for Coeducation*, p. 558.

During the debate over the proposal of the Jesus group, a number of different and conflicting arguments were made against the plan for co-education. Within the group that argued against the scheme proposed to Congregation in 1972, both during the debate itself and in wider reflections on the scheme, there were some who expressed their views in terms of an anti-women sentiment. Some attacked the plans out of a desire to protect the male exclusivity of institutions. For example, David Southern wrote to *The Times* in June 1972 stating that he believed that accepting women ‘would completely change the character of the college affected’, arguing that ‘I do not believe that the great majority of the present or past members of the existing colleges contemplate or desire such an alteration of character’ and that ‘nature did not ordain the sexes to be educated together.’⁴⁰ Others doubted whether there was a demand for more places for women in the University. For example, R. J. S. Hammer of Christ Church commented during the debate that ‘this whole scheme depends on the notion that there are vast untapped deposits of women more able than the less able men we at present take’⁴¹ suggesting that he did not believe this to be the case. Notably this view was also suggested by Kathleen Kenyon in her defence of the women’s colleges who, responding to the suggestion that there were able girls not attending Oxford because of the limitation in places, commented that ‘there are no reserves in depth.’⁴² This shows the complex ways in which those who were defending the women’s colleges could express a similar analysis and make similar arguments about the proposal of mixed-sex college to those who opposed the scheme on a misogynistic basis.

Others argued against the scheme in terms of a defence of women-only institutions, seeing mixed-sex colleges as posing a threat to their position within the University. Those making such points emphasised the historical status of the women’s colleges as being poorer than the men’s colleges to highlight the potential damage the scheme of co-education might cause. Furthermore, their arguments suggested the hypocrisy inherent in male colleges deciding to accept women, to the potential

⁴⁰ David Southern, ‘Women in Men’s Colleges’, *The Times*, 16 June 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁴¹ R J Hammer, ‘Co-Residence: Verbatim Report of Debate in Congregation’, *Oxford University Gazette*, 3:3510, 7 June 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁴² Kathleen Kenyon, ‘Co-Residence: Verbatim Report of Debate in Congregation’, *Oxford University Gazette*, 3:3510, 7 June 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

detriment of the women's colleges, when historically the University had continually placed limits on the numbers of students that the women's colleges could accept. Indeed, the quota which specified that the women's colleges could only accept up to a quarter of the number of male students that were accepted to the men's colleges was only removed in 1957. In a letter to the Vice Chancellor written in February 1972, Mary Bennett, Principal of St Hilda's College, emphasised that 'the higher education of women has not been a popular cause either in this University or outside it until the last twenty years or so,' suggesting the irony of the fact that male colleges were now intent on accepting women despite the concerns of the women's colleges. Bennett went on to explain that her concern about mixed-sex colleges was the potential negative financial impact that their popularity might have on the already poor women's colleges. She stated:

the general effect, I fear, of exposing a poor college, still is that the rich may become richer, and the eminent more eminent, while the poor become poorer... and if they become too poor they will be in danger of running down academically as well as financially.⁴³

This emphasises that female academics' concerns and frustrations over the proposal for mixed-sex colleges were rooted in an awareness of the longer history of inequality and restrictions that women had faced in Oxford as a direct result of the policies of the University.

A similar critique of the proposed scheme of mixed-sex colleges was made by Kathleen Kenyon during the Congregation debate. She argued that if a substantial number of colleges moved to accept women, 'the effect on the women's colleges may be very serious.' In her speech she also referred to the longer-term history of restriction that had been placed on the women's colleges by the University, suggesting a move to mixed-sex education would cause the women's colleges to lose their recently gained position within the University. She reminded Congregation that 'for very nearly a century women's colleges at Oxford have struggled up through the stages of mere existence to recognition, with full equality of status achieved only within the last twenty years. If all that is claimed for the new mixed colleges is achieved, there is a real risk that we shall drop back again into being second-class

⁴³ Letter from Mrs John Bennett to the Vice-Chancellor, 3 February 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Two.

citizens.’⁴⁴ Kenyon’s use of the phrase ‘second-class citizens’ suggests the extent to which in defending her own college she was asking wider questions of women’s position within the patriarchal hierarchy of Oxford University, especially in light of the previous history of resistance to women. Here, the way women such as Kenyon evaluated the potential impact of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges can be understood in relation to feminist critiques of the dynamics of patriarchy. For example, in her theory of the processes by which patriarchy has been sustained throughout history, Joan Kelly argues that ‘what emerges is a fairly regular pattern of relative loss of status for women precisely in those periods of so-called progressive change.’⁴⁵

A view of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges as likely to lead to a loss of status for women within the University was also expressed by Rachel Trickett, Principal of St Hugh’s from 1973, who similarly defended women’s colleges in a letter she wrote to the *Guardian* in March 1973. Here she responded to an article which had argued that the poor financial position of the women’s colleges limited their ability to educate women as thoroughly as the men’s colleges. Trickett wrote ‘how odd I find the Guardian, that staunch supporter of women’s equality, supplying ammunition... to those who naturally assume women’s institutions to be inferior to men’s’, writing that the article ‘was surely calculated to enrage even the mildest supporters of Women’s Lib who might well reply – out with the women’s colleges; in with mixed societies where women may yet again take their proper place.’⁴⁶ Such complex layers of arguments highlight that in their critique of co-education in the 1970s women academics and heads of college saw themselves as defending powerful female-led and focused institutions which, within the male-dominated environment of Oxford University, had only recently achieved status and credibility for women students and academics. In doing so, these women were not simply making self-interested arguments in defence of their own positions, but were making valid, in some ways radical, observations about the impact that mixed-sex colleges would have on the wider

⁴⁴ Kathleen Kenyon, ‘Co-Residence: Verbatim Report of Debate in Congregation’, *Oxford University Gazette*, 3:3510, 7 June 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁴⁵ Joan Kelly, ‘The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women’s History’, Joan Kelly, *History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Rachel Trickett, ‘Response to “Two Few Don”’, *Guardian*, 27 March 1973, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives UR6/W/12, File Four.

position of women students, women academics, and female-dominated institutions within the University. Indeed, one contemporary journalist recognised the strength of these women's arguments. Reflecting on the debates over the move to mixed-sex colleges in Oxford in the 1970s, Marguerite Alexander suggested that 'while the world in general offers women an unequal deal... they would be advised to hold onto their strongholds,'⁴⁷ seeing the women's colleges as representing these strongholds particularly in terms of positions for female academics. Therefore, the women in the women's colleges responded to the scheme of mixed-sex colleges with an awareness of the history of the precarious process through which women had achieved their position within the University, in the face of restrictions and limitations placed upon them by this institution. However, acknowledging the complex ideological relationship between the attitudes of women such as Trickett and the wider feminist movements of the time enables a more nuanced understanding of the various ways in which these women engaged with issues of equality. This reinforces the point that the debate over mixed-sex colleges was not one which had clearly marked feminist and anti-feminist sides. Instead, women had varying and complex views of what constituted social and educational equality and how best it would be achieved.

In expressing concern about the impact of mixed-sex colleges on women's position in the University, internal and external contributors to the debate did raise more direct questions of what women's position in individual mixed-sex colleges would be. For example, Dr C. A. Caine of St Peter's College stated that 'the scheme... has nothing to do with "women's liberation"; its motives are obscure and I doubt they arose from an honest concern for equality of the sexes.' He also showed concern over the extent to which a limited scheme of co-education would truly lead to greater equality for women, arguing 'nor if the scheme was implemented, would we see the creation of genuine, healthy mixed societies: rather we would see five separate societies, each reflecting the disparity between the sexes that exists in Oxford as a whole, but at a much more intimate level, and I cannot believe that this would be socially desirable.' Significantly, Caine began by stating that 'I would be saddened if, from

⁴⁷ Marguerite Alexander, 'Oxford's October Revolution', *Telegraph*, 3 February 1974, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archive UR6/W/12, File Four.

my maiden speech, you were to take me as an anti-feminist,⁴⁸ suggesting how far the debate drew out some of the complexities that were, and still are, involved in defining 'feminist' progress and change.

A similar assessment of mixed-sex colleges as likely to replicate the patriarchal social structures of the University and society more generally was made by Mary Warnock in a letter published in the *Oxford Magazine* in May 1972. Warnock was a fellow at St Hugh's College from 1949 to 1966 and a research fellow at Lady Margaret Hall from 1972 to 1976 and her husband Geoffrey Warnock was Principal of Hertford College when women were accepted into the college. She wrote that 'we should be far less sanguine about the prospect of mixed colleges,' arguing that, within a mixed-sex college women would simply be 'a minority group ... in what would continue to be predominantly a men's college.' Warnock considered that the issue of mixed-sex colleges should be seen in relation to the larger 'social problem' of inequality between the sexes for which 'a far more radical social revolution is needed.' For Warnock, her concern for the position of women in the women's colleges was coupled with a concern for the position of female academics within the University, which for many was protected by the existence of the women's colleges. For example, she stated that the validity of the concerns about mixed-sex colleges would be clearer if people 'thought instead about women in general, and their place in society as a whole, and above all their career opportunities.'⁴⁹ This demonstrates that concern for the position of the women's colleges and their academics, and concern for the position of women in the mixed colleges, were not mutually exclusive but bound up in women's analyses of the likely outcome of mixed-sex colleges. This was because at the crux of such concerns were questions of whether equality would be best achieved through women's entry into male spaces or by the sustaining of separate but powerful female-centric institutions. These concerns raised the wider theoretical question of whether women's entry into male spaces would lead to a

⁴⁸ C. A. Caine, 'Co-Residence: Verbatim Report of Debate in Congregation', *Oxford University Gazette*, 3:3510, 7 June 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁴⁹ Mary Warnock, 'Co-residence at Oxford?', *Oxford Magazine*, 6:1827, May 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Four.

deconstruction of their patriarchal nature or would involve women slotting into a subordinate position within their pre-existing male-dominated and focused communities and cultures.

Such concerns showed an insightful and, in many ways, valid prediction of the form that the community and culture of mixed-sex colleges would take, as the rest of this thesis will show.

However, as was the case when New College initially proposed to accept women, those who favoured a wider move to mixed-sex colleges interpreted the response of the women's colleges as an act of misguided self-interest that held the University back from progressing towards greater equality between men and women. For example, in June 1972 Brian Harrison, who was a Fellow of Corpus Christi College at the time, wrote in a letter to *The Times* that 'indeed one of the surprising things about Oxford's recent move towards co-residence is that the women's colleges have been so coy about encouraging the equal educational opportunities for women which they were founded to promote.'⁵⁰

Similarly, in May 1972 the *Oxford Mail* recorded a statement from a Student Representative Council member who, using highly gendered language which suggests how gender and status were bound up in critiques of the women's colleges, 'blames the women's colleges – "resting on the laurels of the struggle they had to establish women's education" – for the "emasculated" form of the proposal.'⁵¹

This suggests how far the women's colleges were presented as the collective scapegoat, whose apparent 'conservatism' prevented a wider move to mixed-sex colleges, despite both the fact that their concerns asked valid, arguably radical, questions about women's position in male-dominated and led societies, and the fact that there were some in the women's colleges who also desired a wider move to mixed-sex colleges. For example, during the Congregation debate Mrs M. E. Paul of Lady Margaret Hall commented that:

I should first like to welcome the fact that 100 more young women are going to be able to come to Oxford each year if the present scheme goes through, and to welcome their opportunity to go to old foundations which my generation lacked. My regret is the numbers

⁵⁰ Brian Harrison, 'Women Men's Colleges', *The Times*, 19 June 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁵¹ Call for Radical Change on Mixed Colleges', *Oxford Mail*, 29 May 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

are small. I would like to put it to you that the restrictions attached to the present council scheme are not really necessary.⁵²

Thus, the criticism loaded on to the women's colleges both failed to consider the validity of their arguments and misrepresented them as collectively taking a single stance in this debate.

Student opinion, at least during the 1970s, generally favoured a complete move to mixed-sex colleges. The University Student Representative Council published a memorandum arguing that the plan to admit one hundred women to five formerly male colleges was 'grossly over-cautious and insufficient' and stated the Council's 'belief that the Oxford colleges should cease their continuing discrimination of the admission of women, and that Oxford colleges should perform admissions solely on the basis of merit.'⁵³ Indeed, in May 1972 *The Times* reported that 'undergraduates will picket the Sheldonian Theatre as senior members of the University arrive to debate the proposals in Congregation' in order to 'attack the "cautious coeducation plan".'⁵⁴ Reporting on the same story, the *Oxford Mail* stated that students 'will distribute leaflets explaining the SRC's point of view and are expected to be joined by an Oxford Women's Lib group,'⁵⁵ indicating how far organised feminist groups considered themselves to stand in opposition to those who did not want a mass movement to mixed-sex colleges, such as some women in the women's colleges.

Moreover, despite the concern of senior members of the women's colleges about the move to co-education, generally junior members of the women's colleges welcomed the move and called for all colleges to adopt this system more quickly than the planned five-year limited experiment of co-education at the initial five colleges. For example, as Laura Schwartz argues, in the 1970s 'women students tended to support co-residency' and in 1974 the St Hugh's JCR voted to 're-affirm their

⁵² M. E. Paul, 'Co-Residence: Verbatim Report of Debate in Congregation', *Oxford University Gazette*, 3:3510, 7 June 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁵³ Oxford University Students Council Memorandum, 29 May 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁵⁴ 'Oxford Students Attack 'Cautious Coeducation Plan'', *The Times*, 30 May 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁵⁵ 'Call for Radical Change on Mixed Colleges', *Oxford Mail*, 29 May 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

support for co-residence.’⁵⁶ Similarly, Margaret Rayner notes that ‘in 1969, the JCR and MCR at St Hilda’s presented to the governing body a joint resolution in favour of co-education in Oxford colleges, urging the women’s colleges to take the initiative.’⁵⁷

Similarly, the central body representing students within the University, the Oxford University Student Representative Council until 1974 when it became the Oxford University Student Union (O.U.S.U), continually called for the University to remove any restrictions on colleges accepting women. For example, following their petition during the Congregation debates in 1972, in 1977 when the initial scheme of mixed-sex colleges was being submitted to the five year review that had been stipulated in the proposal that had been accepted by Congregation, O.U.S.U submitted a statement to the University’s Committee to Review Co-residence in which they stated their wish ‘to see the University lift all restrictions on Colleges which wish to change their statutes to admit women.’ In this statement O.U.S.U referred to claims made by the Jesus College JCR that ‘the introduction of co-residence in that college has led to a “lifestyle that more accurately reflects that of the population as a whole rather than that of a monastery or an army camp”.’⁵⁸ Here, the reference to male institutions in which male sexual activity is restricted, such as monasteries, is significant. It suggests that the presence of women in a male-dominated college could be evaluated in terms of the contribution this presence made to the sexual culture of colleges. Therefore, the way different groups of students articulated their views, further shows the complex ways in which the matter of mixed-sex colleges involved asking questions of women’s position within male-dominated communities and cultures.

Indeed, this perception of the motivation for male students desiring more mixed-sex colleges was argued by a separate group who also called for a wider move to mixed-sex colleges in the years after the initial scheme was proposed. This group was called ‘Women Against the Quota’ and argued that the restrictions on the numbers of colleges that could accept women in the initial scheme amounted to

⁵⁶ Laura Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour: Gender, Education and Community at St Hugh’s, 1886-2011*, (London, 2011), p. 97.

⁵⁷ Margaret Rayner, *The Centenary History of St Hilda’s College, Oxford*, (Oxford, 1993), p. 91.

⁵⁸ Submission from the Oxford University Student Union to the University’s Committee to Review Co-residence, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Four.

a 'quota' which 'emphasised the position of women as a minority group in this university.' However, this group separated themselves from other student bodies calling for the removal of limits on colleges accepting women, arguing that, unlike previous student movements for mixed-sex colleges, which they described as having been 'run largely by men,' their group 'are not campaigning for more sex or more firsts, we are fighting for equal opportunities for women.' Significantly, as their name suggests, this group led a 'women's campaign' and they argued this was necessary because women 'can and must fight for ourselves, organise together, and not let ourselves be organised.'⁵⁹ Therefore, student statements and campaigns calling for an extension of the scheme of male colleges accepting women, further demonstrate the complex and conflicting ideas that underpinned arguments for mixed-sex colleges. In their manifesto, 'Women Against the Quota' exposed the fact that many of the arguments for mixed-sex colleges were not feminist in their motivation. However, they also, somewhat ironically, made a claim for the importance of female-only, female-led organisations that mirrored the arguments made by many in the women's colleges in opposition to the move to mixed-sex colleges. Thus, while student opinion may have often presented the women's colleges as conservative in their response to the proposal of mixed-sex colleges, and standing in the way of progress, in some circles their views were implicitly validated, but articulated in terms of support for mixed-sex colleges.

Within the debates over the proposed scheme of mixed-sex colleges which took place inside and outside the University, complex, valid, arguably radical questions about what women's position would be within a male-dominated and led institution were raised. These questions had implications beyond just the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in that they engaged with wider theoretical discussions over whether women could gain equality within patriarchal societies and systems, and, if so, what constituted equality within them. However, throughout the discussions and debates over mixed-sex colleges throughout the 1970s, the focus of the various committees considering the proposals was to consider the impact of the scheme on the wider University, particularly the women's colleges. For example, the cross-college group who initially proposed the scheme of mixed-sex

⁵⁹ 'Women Against the Quota', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Four.

colleges to the University commented that ‘over the past year a number of men’s colleges have been carrying out discussions with the women’s colleges to see whether a common view on the admission of women to these men’s colleges could be achieved.’⁶⁰ Here the focus on the ‘admission’ of women is significant as it highlights how far the formal discussions between the mixed-sex colleges and the women’s colleges were designed to address the procedures involved in admitting women students in a way that did not pose a threat to the women’s colleges. Indeed, in the final report made by this group to the Hebdomadal Council, the points that were laid out in terms of how the scheme of mixed-sex colleges would be implemented all refer to the formal administrative process of women being admitted as students into mixed-sex colleges.⁶¹ Similarly, the University Committee on Co-residence explained that its role was ‘to consider the implications for the University at large’ if such a scheme was implemented.⁶² This meant that in the formal committees examining the impact of mixed-sex colleges, consideration of the likely daily experiences of women who would enter these colleges, and how colleges could best ensure that these were positive, were not central areas of discussion and did not factor in their final reports, which ultimately laid down the proposal which Congregation debated and voted on in May 1974.

The lack of attention that these committees paid to the potential experiences of the first women at mixed-sex colleges was emphasised by members of the University who participated in and followed the debates over coeducation. Prior to the Congregation debate, O.U.S.U argued that the committees assessing the implications of the proposed scheme had not ‘considered the position of the twenty female guinea pigs who will enter their respective colleges in October 1974.’⁶³ Similarly, one contributor to the Congregation debate commented that:

the general merits and demerits of co-residence – social, sexual, psychological, educational, administrative, economic – have never really even been discussed in Council Council has throughout sought to encourage as far as possible an agreed arrangement between the

⁶⁰ ‘Coresidence’, Hebdomadal Council, 20 March 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File 2.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² ‘Report of the Committee on Co-residence’, Hebdomadal Council, 14 December 1971, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Two.

⁶³ Oxford University Students Council, 29 May 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

interested men's colleges and the women's colleges, and at the same time to protect what it believes to be interests of the university.⁶⁴

Thus, while the evidence cited above demonstrates that those who contributed to the debate were concerned about the position of a minority group of women in male-dominated institutions, the fact that the driving focus of the committees considering mixed-sex colleges was on the impact for the University rather than the impact on the women who would matriculate, and the fact that this informed the nature of the proposal which Congregation debated in May 1972, meant that these concerns were not discussed in a University-wide context in relation to the way the scheme should be implemented after it was given assent.

The Scheme is Implemented

After the motion passed through Congregation, the question of how colleges should go about preparing to welcome women became a college concern and was not considered in the context of university-wide discussions in the way the proposal of the scheme had been. Indeed, after the proposed scheme for mixed-sex colleges had been accepted by Congregation, O.U.S.U set up its own Co-residence Committee 'because it was thought that it would have a permanent role in liaising with the university on co-residence.' However, in a report from January 1974, the O.U.S.U committee asked why the Hebdomadal Council had 'chosen to ignore its existence, for example in the final stages of the practical arrangements required to implement the "Jesus Plan".'⁶⁵ In response, the Hebdomadal Council told O.U.S.U that 'the arrangements for admitting women to the mixed colleges were matters for the colleges concerned not the University.'⁶⁶ Thus, when it came to considering the actual process by which colleges would prepare for admitting women, those who had expressed concerns over how minority groups of women would fare within the male-dominated communities

⁶⁴ 'Congregation, 30 May 1972', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁶⁵ 'Questions formulated by the Chairman of the O.U.S.U's Co-residence Committee', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Four.

⁶⁶ Minutes, 'Joint Committee of Council with Junior Members, *Oxford University Gazette*, No. 3510, 29 Jan 1974, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Four.

and cultures of their colleges were not participants in discussions in the way they had been in the initial discussions over the scheme of mixed-sex colleges.

The way in which women from the women's colleges experienced the debates over mixed-sex colleges, in which they were often demonised as the conservative, anti-woman faction, arguably contributed to the fact that their valid concerns over the implications of the scheme for women's position within the University were not actually applied to the longer-term process of colleges becoming co-educational. Indeed, as Schwartz has argued, women in the women's colleges experienced 'fatigue' after the initial debates over mixed-sex colleges and then the subsequent discussions over whether the women's colleges should accept men which, as many had predicted, gained momentum after the first male colleges accepted women. Schwartz suggests that this weariness was a reason why 'those who had argued so strongly against the pitfalls of co-education did not put an equal opportunities policy in place,'⁶⁷ even when their own institutions became mixed-sex from the late-1970s.

When it came to the practical process of preparing for the arrival of the first cohort of women, decisions were made by governing bodies of the male colleges that were going mixed or by individual members of these bodies. When women entered mixed-sex colleges the senior fellowship of these colleges was exclusively male except for one newly elected female fellow at St Catherine's College. As Brockliss points out, it was Balliol College, not one of the first five to accept women undergraduates, that 'in 1973 elected the first female fellow of a male college.'⁶⁸ The fact that the governing bodies of mixed-sex colleges remained male-dominated was itself a result of the way the scheme of mixed-sex colleges had been discussed and introduced by the University. When the scheme of mixed-sex colleges was raised in the 1960s and early-1970s, some suggested that these colleges might require women to be admitted as senior members of colleges to ensure the welfare of the new

⁶⁷ Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour*, p. 105.

⁶⁸ Brockliss, *The University of Oxford: A History*, p. 572.

female students. For example, a report of the University's committee on co-residence to the Hebdomadal Council from 1971 records that:

the working party considers that any men's colleges going mixed ought to include in its governing body at least one woman before women are admitted as junior members. The working party recommends that the woman elected should not be designated as 'dean of women', that the election should be on an academic basis.⁶⁹

In response to this suggestion the Principal of Lady Margaret Hall stated that the governing body of her college was not willing to 'press' this suggestion, arguing that members of her college were 'not in favour of token representation.'⁷⁰ Therefore, while this idea was suggested, it did not come to fruition when mixed-sex colleges were established. The arguments for and against such an approach to colleges accepting women, which make equally valid points, demonstrate the complexities that were involved in an overtly, historically male community moving to accept women. However, on a practical level this meant that the decisions that were made about how a college should prepare for the arrival of women were taken by male-dominated committees. As the thesis will show, this led to a lack of effective consideration of the actual needs of women students, causing them difficulties while living and learning in mixed-sex colleges.

When preparing for their first female undergraduates, the major focus of colleges was on considering how women would be physically accommodated within mixed-sex colleges. As Weiss Malkiel argues, by the time women entered newly mixed-sex colleges in 1974 'some modest preparations had been made for the women' in terms of bathroom facilities.⁷¹ It was reported in the *Oxford Times* that 'the five Oxford men's colleges which go co-educational when the University term opens on October 13 have spent nearly £50,000 this summer on modernisation,' noting that 'changes have been made to the bathrooms, showers, lavatories and bedrooms and extra equipment particularly mirrors fitted.'⁷²

⁶⁹ 'Admission of Women to Men's Colleges', Hebdomadal Council Agenda, 8 November 1971, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

⁷⁰ 'Observations of the Admission of Women the Mixed Colleges', Letter from the Principal of Lady Margaret Hall to the Master of Pembroke College Oxford, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

⁷¹ Weiss Malkiel, *The Struggle for Coeducation*, p. 582.

⁷² 'More Mirrors to Welcome the Ladies', *Oxford Times*, 4 October 1974, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Four.

Indeed, the same article reported a comment from the Bursar of St Catherine's that 'the rooms have been redecorated and smartened up with full length mirrors.'⁷³ This indicates how far such adjustments reflected gendered perceptions of the requirements of women students, a point which will be discussed further in chapter three.

Decisions about the steps that should be taken to accommodate women suitably and on an equal basis to men within the physical space of colleges were often taken by individual members of college governing bodies. As the article above suggests, domestic bursars were often the ones who made these decisions. Indeed, James Lunt, domestic bursar at Wadham College who, unlike his equivalent at St Catherine's, thought that 'in the age of equality of the sexes we feel there should be equal and equivalent accommodation for men and women,'⁷⁴ commented that, 'eventually I gave it up and contented myself with putting locks on all the lavatories' and 'scattered the women all over the College and waited for the storm to burst.' Indeed, throughout his description of the way his college went about making arrangements for the incoming women, Lunt often emphasised that he was the one who made the final decisions. These decisions were focused on making minor physical adjustments to colleges to accommodate women with a basic level of privacy. For example, Lunt stated that 'where the bathrooms had only head-high partitions between the baths, I raised them to the ceiling, ensuring thereby that only someone on stilts would be able to satisfy his natural curiosity.'⁷⁵ This shows that while senior members of colleges were aware of the kinds of behaviour and sensibilities that might be expected from male students when women entered their college, they did not make major physical adjustments to increase women's privacy. Furthermore, Lunt's comment suggests that, while he may have arranged for some physical adjustments to dissuade such behaviour, the presence of such attitudes to women students and the implications of them for women's position within the college community and culture was not considered to be an issue that needed to be addressed.

⁷³ Tony Gye quoted in 'More Mirrors to Welcome the Ladies', *Oxford Times*, 4 October 1974, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Four.

⁷⁴ James Lunt quoted in 'More Mirrors to Welcome the Ladies', *Oxford Times*, 4 October 1974 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Four.

⁷⁵ James Lunt, 'I Remember, I Remember,' *Wadham College Gazette*, New Series 3, no. 9 (Jan. 1994), p. 62.

These comments suggest that, to some extent, those involved in planning for women's arrival in newly mixed-sex colleges had an awareness of some of the complexities involved in creating equality for women within a mixed-sex institution. Indeed, as women's accounts will show, the question of whether equality for women within mixed-sex colleges was more likely to be achieved through similarity of treatment or through consideration of their different needs, was a complex one that women themselves responded to in different ways. However, while college authorities may have considered how women would be physically accommodated within colleges, and showed awareness of the implications of this for the formation of an institution in which men and women were treated equally, there appeared to be less consideration of the issues that may be involved in women entering a male-dominated community in which the normative student identity and culture was overtly male. This suggests that those in formerly male colleges who wanted their institutions to become mixed-sex may have wanted women to become members of their institution, but they did not necessarily want, or see it as necessary, to bring about significant changes to their institutions as part of this process. Questions of women's likely experience in these institutions had been raised at earlier stages of the debate but were not effectively applied to the process of women actually entering mixed-sex colleges. The validity of such questions is demonstrated by the complex ways in which women experienced the spaces, communities and cultures of mixed-sex colleges, which this thesis will go on to examine.

Conclusion

Throughout the discussions and debates that took place both within and beyond Oxford University over the introduction of mixed-sex colleges, questions were raised over whether this would be a positive change for women at Oxford. While the women who expressed such views cannot easily be described as holding a feminist position in the debate, the concerns raised by some in the women's colleges showed valid and nuanced consideration of the likely negative impacts of mixed-sex colleges on the position of their own colleges and the female academics within them. They also showed valid concerns for the likely experience of the women in mixed-sex colleges, which would initially remain male-dominated. To see their arguments as simply self-interested attempts to defend their own

position is to fail to recognise the wider and longer-term context of inequality which lay behind their concerns. As the rest of this thesis will show, in many ways those who expressed concern about mixed-sex colleges were often accurate in their predictions of what women's position within a formerly male college might be.

However, while the debates over the introduction of mixed-sex colleges raised significant and valid ideological questions about women's position within male-dominated spaces, communities and cultures, the nature of the debate meant these questions were not asked in terms of the actual process by which mixed-sex colleges were established. When it came to the process of formerly male colleges preparing to accept women, decisions were made by individual colleges, and often by individuals within them. The fact that the governing bodies of these colleges remained male-dominated, itself a result of the way these historically male-led institutions became 'mixed-sex', meant that the practical decisions about how colleges would prepare for their first cohort of women were made and implemented by men. Those who had raised concerns over women's position within mixed-sex colleges did not contribute at this point in the way they had done to the ideological discussions and debates over whether mixed-sex colleges should be introduced to Oxford at all. As the rest of the thesis will show, a lack of careful consideration of the specific needs of women students and of forethought about whether all members of college communities would be accepting and welcoming of women students, meant that the first women students faced difficulties living and learning within these institutions. Therefore, the process by which mixed-sex colleges were introduced into Oxford shaped the experiences that women had when they entered these male spaces, communities and cultures.

Chapter Two

Women's Attitudes Towards and Reasons for Attending Mixed-Sex Colleges

Women's view of the desirability of attending a mixed-sex college at Oxford was informed by their rejection of stereotypes of femininity, female-dominated social and academic environments, and female-led institutions. Therefore, the male environment of mixed-sex colleges is part of what made them attractive to the first women who entered them as undergraduates in 1974.

Women's rejection of female institutions was shaped by their family, school and social life as girls and teenagers from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, and by the ideas about sex, gender, sexuality and education that were conveyed to them in this period. This context was one in which conservative and progressive attitudes towards women's lives were both present and both shaped women's views of femininity, womanhood, female sexuality and education. The process of navigating these different influences contributed to women in this cohort valuing male institutions over female ones, and shaped the way they approached being a member of these institutions.

Women entered mixed-sex colleges in 1974 during a period in which wider social and cultural shifts were increasing women's opportunities, as well as changing their attitudes to and expectations of their own lives. Pat Thane describes the 1970s as a period when 'new possibilities seemed to be opening' for a generation of women (and men) who were 'more confident and less deferential than older generations' and therefore 'challenged established values in diverse ways.'¹ Social and educational shifts that occurred in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s all shaped women's attitudes towards and expectations of education. These included the gradual movement away from the post-war 'tripartite' system of education, which saw comprehensive, co-educational schools become more common; changing attitudes towards femininity and the assumed domestic role of women; the introduction of the Pill and changing mores regarding women's sexuality; the lowering of the age of majority to eighteen by the Family Reform Act in 1969; and changing employment expectations for women. Janet

¹ Pat Thane, *Divided Kingdom: A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present*, (Cambridge, 2018), p. 345

Howarth argues that it was in the context of such wider social change in terms of women's lives that a 'vogue for coeducation' developed among women students, within both Oxford and Britain more widely.² Indeed, as noted in chapter one, at the time that mixed-sex colleges were established in Oxford, women students who attended the women's colleges also saw co-education as a more desirable system.

However, the accounts of women in this cohort suggest that the period in which they grew up was one in which conservative attitudes and mores had a continuing influence on their educational and social experiences. Historians are in disagreement about how far the period from the early-1950s to the mid-1970s was one in which women's lives were restricted by conservative outlooks and limited opportunities. Thane argues that the reputation of the period of 1951 to 1964 as being one of 'dull cultural conservatism, dominated by "family values" and sexual repression, when a "male breadwinner" culture confined women to the home' is a questionable interpretation.³ In contrast, Stephanie Spencer argues that 'the domestic ideal remained of paramount importance' to conceptualisations of women's role in the 1950s.⁴ This chapter argues that, for women in the first cohort to attend mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, both conservative and liberal attitudes towards femininity, womanhood and female sexuality were present in their familial, school and social lives and both could shape their attitudes and ambitions. While opportunities were opening for women, traditional views of femininity and female intelligence, conservative attitudes towards female sexuality, and gendered perceptions of female life patterns continued to influence women's lives and outlooks in complex ways. Eve Worth, focusing on women born between the late-1930s and early-1950s, who 'grew into young adulthood' through the 'long-1960s,' argues that the period from 1957 to 1973 'should be understood as a historical moment when young women were negotiating the competing influences of liberation and constraint.'⁵ Similarly, Helena Mills, focusing on the social

² Janet Howarth, 'Women', Brian Harrison (ed), *The History of the University of Oxford. Vol. VIII, The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 374.

³ Thane, *Divided Kingdom*, p. 221.

⁴ Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s*, (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 6.

⁵ Eve Worth, *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain since 1945*, (London, 2022), p. 41.

experiences of ‘women who were young adults in the 1960s’ argues that the ‘experience of youth in 1960s Britain was characterised by an uneasy and uneven mix of both new, more liberal and older, more conservative values and behaviours.’⁶ Lynn Abrams argues that women who were born in the 1940s had to navigate ‘contradictory discourses’⁷ about womanhood as they grew into adulthood through the 1950s and 1960s. The experiences of women who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 suggest that these competing influences were similarly influential on their social and school experiences as girls and teenagers from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s.

This chapter argues that the process of navigating these influences contributed to women’s view of the superiority of male behaviours, identities and institutions over female ones. This was because none of these competing discourses offered women a model of womanhood that was simultaneously educationally, socially and sexually liberated, while also being overtly feminine and associated with an all-female educational institution. The life model that did offer women these freedoms was a ‘male’ one and therefore male institutions which offered women access to this model came to be seen as liberating and desirable. In contrast, feminine, female-only institutions were seen as conservative, restrictive and undesirable.

Historians who have examined Oxford’s move to mixed-sex colleges have not considered the personal reasons why women who entered these institutions saw them as desirable. Some historians have considered the general social and educational factors that led to co-education coming to be seen as ‘normal’⁸ for higher educational institutions in Britain by the late-1970s. Phillida Bunkle suggests that the increase in co-educational state secondary schools contributed to female school leavers seeing women’s colleges as ‘anachronistic.’⁹ Scholars who have specifically examined Oxford’s move to co-education suggest that a growing feminist mentality among young, educated women and a belief in

⁶ Helena Mills, ‘Using the Personal to Critique the Popular: Women’s Memories of 1960s Youth’, *Contemporary British History*, 30:4, p. 1.

⁷ Lynn Abrams, ‘Mothers and Daughters: Negotiating the Discourse on the ‘Good Woman’ in 1950s and 1960s Britain’, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (eds), *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*, (Toronto, 2013), p. 66.

⁸ Carol Dyhouse, *Students A Gendered History*, (Abingdon, 2006), p. 107.

⁹ Phillida Bunkle, ‘The 1944 Education Act and Second Wave Feminism’, *Women’s History Review*, 25:5 (2016), p. 804.

equality encouraged both institutions and female students to see it as important that men and women had access to the same educational institutions. For example, Nancy Weiss Malkiel argues that ‘transformative social and political movements’ of 1960s and 1970s America and Britain ‘set an important context for the flood of decisions for coeducation,’¹⁰ emphasising that ‘the women’s movement, the antiwar movement, and the student movement were felt powerfully in Europe, affecting expectations at Cambridge and Oxford about the ways men and women should be educated.’¹¹ Carol Dyhouse argues that women students at Oxford and Cambridge came to see mixed-sex colleges as desirable because they resented the inequality of treatment that men and women received in their different colleges. She argues that through the 1960s ‘student resentment’¹² of the disciplinary procedures of the women’s colleges grew and by the 1970s ‘radical students, both men and women, were pretty much united in favour of coeducation,’¹³ and that, for women students, this view was informed by their ‘unwillingness to accept traditional forms of discrimination.’¹⁴ Where she does comment on the reasons why women actively chose to attend a mixed-sex college, Dyhouse focuses on the fears of the women who led and defended the women’s colleges through the debates over mixed-sex colleges that they would ‘lose their best students to the wealthy and prestigious male foundations.’¹⁵ Therefore, the actual reasons why individual women saw it as desirable to attend one of the first mixed-sex colleges in 1974 have not been examined by the literature on Oxford’s move to mixed-sex colleges. This chapter fills this gap, arguing that women’s desire to attend a newly mixed-sex college involved a rejection of a stereotype of femininity, and the institutions, behaviours and life paths that were associated with it. Significantly, this view was in part shaped by experiences of girls-only schools, which the majority of women in this sample attended. Women’s familial, school and social experiences had reinforced a view that it was through following male life patterns, emulating

¹⁰ Nancy Weiss Malkiel, *"Keep the Damned Women Out": The Struggle for Coeducation*, (Princeton, 2016), p. 7.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 24-25.

¹² Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 128.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 128-129.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 206.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 165.

male behaviours and entering male institutions that they would be able to have the educational and social experiences they desired.

Family, Femininity and Education

The messages women received from their families about femininity, women's status compared to men's, and women's educational abilities were influential on their desire to reject female identities and environments. For some, this rejection was motivated by their family's conservative attitudes. For example, Georgia stated that 'my mother wanted me to wear dresses and I wanted to wear trousers.' Georgia purposely rejected this form of femininity and the middle-class identity she associated with it, stating 'I was quite deliberately ultra-working class. I taught myself to speak in a very working-class local accent. I got into fights. I used to play with the boys more than with the girls and I was fairly rough-tough.' For Georgia, equality meant entering and participating in male social circles. She felt that 'all my life I had in effect been a feminist, because I mean, when I was a very small girl, I liked to play football and cricket I got myself a football for one birthday and a pair of football boots. And I used to play football and cricket with the boys all the time.' Georgia would not have applied for a women's college as she could not face 'living in an all-female environment.'¹⁶ Rachel's family similarly had conservative views of the value of men over women. She 'was the fourth daughter, my mother had felt a lot of pressure on her to produce a son.' She felt that these views 'contributed a lot to my determination to prove that a girl could do as well as a boy.' For Rachel, attending a mixed-sex college and choosing not to study English was a way that she proved this; 'expectations of women were so sort of, the only thing you were expected to study was English and anything else was thought to be a bit too challenging for the female brain. I decided I'd be a rebel' and so she applied for a different subject. Like Georgia, Rachel reflected that she 'might not have gone (to Oxford) if there hadn't been the option of co-education.'¹⁷ Abrams argues that young women in the 1950s and 1960s experienced a 'clash of values'¹⁸ with their mothers as they developed new attitudes towards

¹⁶ Interview with Georgia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 June 2020.

¹⁷ Interview with Rachel, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 July 2020

¹⁸ Abrams, 'Mothers and Daughters', p. 61.

womanhood and expectations of their own lives that were ‘a far cry from the home-based respectability of the previous decade.’¹⁹ The examples above suggest that some women in the 1974 cohort experienced a similar clash with their mothers’ attitudes towards femininity and women’s status. For these women, the conservative attitudes of families contributed to their desire to reject stereotypes of female behaviour and seek out male social and educational environments and experiences.

In contrast, some women suggested their parents had a greater belief in the equality of men and women and these views contributed to them deciding to apply to a mixed-sex college. Jessica recalled that ‘I’d always been brought up to feel that a girl was just ... as good as a little boy,’ stating that her parents ‘instilled in me a belief that I was just as good as any ... bloke.’ Jessica’s family were very encouraging of her attending a mixed-sex college. She stated that ‘it was really from my family’ that the initial motivation for this came.²⁰ Similarly, Eloise remembered that her father ‘very much had the view that men and women were of equal educational ability’ and this shaped her own view of her entitlement and ability to gain whatever educational opportunities she wished. She stated that ‘I came from a household where my father didn’t in any way feel that me being a girl meant I was less important or less entitled to higher education.’²¹ Alice similarly stated that ‘I think my family is very keen on fairness’, commenting that her ‘family was very keen for me to apply to a mixed college’ because they saw co-education as a more ‘healthy’ system.²² Such examples suggest that ‘a clash’ of attitudes between parents and daughters was not experienced in all families during this period.

Historians have noted the role that families had in shaping their children’s relationship to higher education through the twentieth century. For example, Dyhouse has emphasised that, before the introduction of student grants from 1962, ‘the individual attitudes of families’ could be ‘powerful

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 78.

²⁰ Interview with Jessica, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 2 July 2020.

²¹ Interview with Eloise, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 3 September 2020.

²² Interview with Alice, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 3 August 2020.

determinants of entry into higher education'²³ for both men and women. The accounts of women in the 1974 cohort suggest that, even after the introduction of student grants, familial outlooks on femininity and women's roles were significant in shaping women's attitudes towards higher education and their preferences about the kind of institution they wanted to attend. For some, familial belief in the equal abilities of men and women, and familial support for women's educational ambitions, could lead women to see educational equality between men and women as the norm. For these women their family's complete assumption of the equality of men and women, as well as familial belief in the system of co-education, led them to perceive attending a mixed-sex college as more desirable than attending a women-only college.

However, as some of these examples suggest, where families believed in the equality of men and women there continued to be a preoccupation with seeing equality in terms of women's successful emulation of behaviours that were continued to be perceived as stereotypically masculine. As Jessica's comment above, that she felt 'that a girl was just... as good as a little boy'²⁴ suggests, the male educational stereotype remained the ideal which women who were educationally ambitious should aspire to. Jayne commented that she felt she had been able to achieve academically in part because 'I had a daddy who wanted me to learn and thought it was quite normal for girls to learn.' Jayne stated that she thought that the belief of her family, particularly of her father, in the academic equality of men and women meant she became 'completely unafraid to take on a man at an intellectual level – and it never occurs to me that I should be,' going on to comment that 'sometimes I see other women who are more tentative.'²⁵ This suggests that while Jayne's family's belief in the equal ability of boys and girls may have provided her with intellectual confidence, to some extent she continued to perceive intellectualism as a masculine trait that some, but not all women, were able to acquire, particularly through the influence of their fathers. Thus, for women in this cohort, whether encouraged by their parents or not, rejecting conservative stereotypes of femininity that, for some women, had

²³ Carol Dyhouse, 'Graduates, Mothers and Graduate Mothers: Family Investment in Higher Education in Twentieth-Century England', *Gender and Education*, 14:4, (2002), p. 325.

²⁴ Interview with Jessica.

²⁵ Interview with Jayne conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 October 2020.

shaped their own home experiences as girls and young women, could involve a reinforcement of the perception that intellectualism and academicism were not stereotypically feminine characteristics. This view was influential on women valuing male educational environments over female ones. Indeed, Laura Schwartz suggests such views of academic equality as something that women achieved through a rejection of femininity were shared by some younger female academics who were members of Oxford's women's colleges in the 1960s. She argues that for some of these women 'femininity was associated with a lack of status, and in seeking to succeed as men's equals, they preferred to ignore their sex altogether';²⁶ one for example suggesting that, although she was a fellow at a women's college, she preferred working in all male environments.²⁷

Women's view of Oxford's women's colleges as institutions that encouraged their students to conform to the female stereotypes that they had rejected as young women then contributed to their view of them as being undesirable institutions. As will be discussed later in the chapter, a number of women had their initial Oxford interviews at women's colleges. These experiences gave women an impression of the conservative, feminine atmosphere of these institutions. Caroline described the women's college where she interviewed as a place for 'nice girls and tea parties,'²⁸ while Maia recalled feeling 'unnerved' by the atmosphere of the women's college she attended for her initial interview, describing 'all these rather dismal women in dressing gowns at breakfast.' Maia similarly suggested the women's colleges were perceived to encourage conformity to particular codes of respectable behaviour, recalling being told by a student they were being watched 'to see if we eat our peas off our knives.' The experience of interviewing at a women's college made Maia think that 'whatever happens, I'm definitely not going to come here.'²⁹ For Louise, the female identity of the social culture of the women's colleges was infused with a middle-class identity. Louise stated that, 'it was hideous when I turned up there for interviews... they were all so posh and they're all black Alice bands and talking

²⁶ Laura Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour Gender, Education and Community at St Hugh's 1886-2011*, (London, 2011) p. 87

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 88.

²⁸ Interview with Caroline, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 July 2020.

²⁹ Interview with Maia, conducted by Florence Smith, in Oxford, 8 October 2022.

about having been chalet maids and stuff like that in their year out. And I was just this working-class girl.’ Louise’s account emphasises how far it was women’s perception of women’s colleges as offering an unenjoyable, distinctly feminine, social environment that led them to see mixed-sex colleges as desirable. She recalled of the women’s college where she interviewed, ‘everyone seemed to be sort of cold and bossy.’ She found the all-female environment unattractive and one that felt at odds with her working-class background, stating that, having consequently decided against going to Oxford at all, she was very happy when she was requested to return to interview for one of the co-educational colleges.³⁰ Therefore, women’s view of the desirability of attending a mixed-sex college involved a rejection of what they saw as overtly feminine institutions. Women felt these institutions promoted a conservative form of middle-class feminine behaviour that they did not wish to conform to.

The feminine nature of the women’s colleges that women in the 1974 cohort reacted against has been acknowledged by historians who see it as having been created in the context of restriction in which these institutions developed. Katherine Eccles and Martha Vicinus have argued that those who were at the forefront of the establishment of women’s colleges within elite universities, consciously conformed to and promoted a form of ‘respectable’ femininity in order that their educational ambitions would be considered permissible by male powers within universities.³¹ For example, Eccles argues that as women’s colleges were established, the women who led them promoted ‘a carefully constructed image of femininity’³² and ‘lady-like behaviour at all times.’³³ However, such an institutional identity continued to shape the culture of the women’s colleges in the mid-twentieth century. For example, Schwartz argues that in the 1950s younger female dons found the atmosphere in St Hugh’s College to be one of ‘intellectual and social conservatism’ which they associated with a ‘cloying femininity.’³⁴ Indeed, one of these dons, Susan Wood, recalled that her first impression of the college ‘was of an almost suffocating cosiness. Conversation was ladylike: concerned at its most

³⁰ Interview with Louise, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 September 2020.

³¹ Kathryn Eccles, ‘Women Students at the University of Oxford, 1914-1939: Image, Identity, and Experience’, (University of Oxford, DPhil History, 2007), Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women: 1850-1920*, (London, 1985).

³² Eccles, ‘Women Students’, p. 5.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 7.

³⁴ Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour*, p. 87.

intellectual with Jane Austen or the best detective fiction, otherwise largely with gardening or ornithology.’³⁵ The fact that this view of the women’s colleges was shared by women who were applying to and attending university in the 1970s, suggests how far such perceptions of the women’s colleges persisted. The 1974 cohort saw this form of femininity as conservative and archaic, and for some, it was associated with the ideals of their parents which they had rejected or a middle-class identity which did not reflect their own class background. They therefore saw institutions which appeared to promote adherence to this model, as restrictive. Thus, a combination of persisting conservative views of femininity and appropriate feminine behaviour, with a desire on the part of younger women to challenge such considerations, was influential on women’s idealisation of male educational spaces over female ones.

Women’s Aspirations and Male Educational Experience and Support

Women in this cohort grew up during a period when state support for education increased through the provision of free universal secondary education by the 1944 Education Act, the introduction of means-tested student grants following the 1960 Anderson Report, and the expansion of higher education in Britain following the 1963 Robbins Report. However, despite this, historians of women’s education have noted the continued role that families had in shaping and supporting their children’s educational ambitions. For example, Bethany White argues, for her sample of working-class graduates who entered higher education between 1965 and 1978, that ‘family aspirations and parents’ attitudes had a significant influence on women’s educational experiences and ambitions.’³⁶ For women who attended the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, the educational experiences of male members of their families influenced women’s aspirations the most and fathers most encouraged these ambitions.

Some women wanted to attend a formerly male college because male members of their family had attended these institutions and they wanted to emulate this. When asked about her choice of college

³⁵ Susan Wood, ‘The Senior Common Room in the 1950s’, ‘Reminiscences of St Hugh’s’ quoted in Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour*, p. 86.

³⁶ Bethany White, ‘Working-Class Women’s Experiences of Higher Education in Post-War Britain’, (DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2019), p. 32.

Harriet commented that ‘my original decision was (made) when I was about three or maybe four,’ recalling that when people asked her about her educational ambitions she would tell them ‘I want to go to daddy’s college.’³⁷ Jessica also stated that ‘it was a very easy decision’ to apply to her chosen college ‘because my father had been to (the college) many years before.’ Jessica recalled her father’s encouragement of her attending his former college and her own happiness at the fact the college were accepting women in her year; ‘my dad was very keen for me to go there and I was keen as well. And it was the first year of women. So it seemed almost as though it was just set up so that I could apply to it.’³⁸ Susanna chose her college because her brother had gone there, so as soon as she heard that her brother’s college was accepting women ‘that was it as far as I was concerned.’ Susanna emphasised that her educational ambitions were shaped by her desire to emulate her brother’s achievements, commenting that ‘I always wanted to do what (he) did ... he achieved’.³⁹ In the sample three other women had a male relative who had attended or was still at the college they went to, and a further ten women had a male relative who had attended a different college at Oxford or Cambridge. Therefore, over a third of women in the sample followed the educational trajectory taken by male members of their families. For them, educational achievement meant entering the same or similar institutions as male members of their families.

Even where fathers had not attended Oxford or Cambridge, for women in this sample, fathers were the major influence shaping and encouraging their educational ambitions. As noted previously, women in this sample were more likely than average to have a father who had attended university. However, women whose parents had not attended university similarly suggested that their father was a key figure of encouragement. Eloise described herself as ‘coming from an academic household’ and saw her father’s profession as a university professor as influential on her perception of the inevitability of going to university.⁴⁰ Similarly, Emma reflected that ‘my father was an academic’ and

³⁷ Interview with Harriet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 24 July 2020.

³⁸ Interview with Jessica.

³⁹ Interview with Susanna, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 2 October 2020.

⁴⁰ Interview with Eloise.

therefore going to university was a ‘natural expectation.’⁴¹ Violet stated that going to university ‘was just absolutely to be expected’ and similarly saw her father’s background as the basis of this: ‘there’s a strong history of tertiary education and training... particularly in my father’s family.’⁴² Jennie, neither of whose parents attended university, remembered ‘my father particularly was very ambitious for me’ and wanted her to go to university.⁴³ Similarly, Louise, who came from a working-class background and whose parents had not gone to university, remembered ‘my dad had always been quite hard on me to be the best, he really really wanted me to go to university.’⁴⁴ Therefore, for women in this cohort their educational ambitions were overwhelmingly shaped in relation to male experiences and male ambitions.

This picture of fathers of both middle-class and working-class women being the primary supporter of their educational ambitions contrasts to that found by other historians. For example, Selina Todd argues that, particularly for working-class children born up to the mid-1950s, ‘mothers’ aspirations’ were important in encouraging and supporting their children to gain greater educational opportunities than they had accessed as they ‘wanted their children to escape the hardship and limited horizons they themselves had experienced.’⁴⁵ Similarly, Dyhouse argues that, through the mid-twentieth century ‘maternal support for higher education’⁴⁶ was a key factor that shaped the educational ambitions and trajectories of both young men and young women of working-class and middle-class backgrounds. However, the cohort of women who attended mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 were more likely to see their fathers as the primary parent who was ambitious for their daughters’ education. This was the case for both women from a working-class background and for women from a middle-class background. This suggests a particular connection between attending a formerly male college in the mid-1970s and increased paternal support.

⁴¹ Interview with Emma, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 8 October 2020.

⁴² Interview with Violet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 October 2020.

⁴³ Interview with Jennie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 4 August 2020.

⁴⁴ Interview with Louise.

⁴⁵ Selina Todd, *Snakes and Ladders: The Great British Social Mobility Myth*, (London, 2021), p. 92.

⁴⁶ Dyhouse, ‘Graduates, Mothers and Graduate Mothers’, p. 331.

For some women, their father's support and ambition was important to the process of them applying to Oxford. Significantly, fathers' support was often contrasted to the lack of support women received from their headmistresses, a point which will be discussed in the next section. Ava stated that it was her dad 'who suggested I applied to Oxford' and recalled 'being in my headmistress's office with my dad when he insisted that I be allowed to do the entrance exam.' Ava emphasised the central role that her father played in her applying to Oxford throughout her narrative; she later emphasised that 'it was my dad' who was the main motivator for her educational ambitions. For Ava, these ambitions involved rejecting a women-only college, commenting that she 'certainly wasn't going to go to an all-female one, if there was the option of going to a mixed one.'⁴⁷ Similarly, Hannah's father was the major figure that supported her in applying; she stated 'my father was very encouraging and very keen that I should have a go,'⁴⁸ seeing his support as having been particularly important as her girls' private boarding school did not encourage her to apply or support the process. Lucy's father's encouragement of her applying to Oxford was also important as she felt unsupported by her girls' comprehensive school; 'the headmistress was very discouraging, but my father's an academic and he said "insist".'⁴⁹ Therefore, fathers' encouragement and desire for their daughters to attend Oxford was an important factor in women applying to the University. In this way women's views of and relationship to higher education were formed in terms of male support and ambition and female lack of ambition and discouragement.

To some extent, the support that women in this cohort had from their fathers could be seen as representing a progressive shift in the importance with which girls' education was regarded by families and in the role that fathers took in supporting their daughters during this period. Indeed, Laura King argues that, as educational opportunities expanded in Britain after the Second World War, the role of the father in the family changed and they became more invested in their children's education, with a growing expectation 'that fathers should be taking care of both sons' and daughters'

⁴⁷ Interview with Ava, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 October 2020.

⁴⁸ Interview with Hannah, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 5 November 2020.

⁴⁹ Interview with Lucy, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 June 2020.

educations and futures.⁵⁰ King argues that by the 1950s many fathers of all classes encouraged their children's ambitions by 'teaching their offspring directly, as well as more general encouragement.'⁵¹

However, while fathers could be supportive of their own daughter's ambitions and were encouraging of them to apply to Oxford, fathers could also continue to perceive these aspirations as replicating male life patterns. In this way, fathers could reinforce to their daughters that in being educationally ambitious they were conforming to a male stereotype and rejecting a female stereotype. Nadia recalled her father was supportive of her educational and career ambitions, stating 'he always expected me to do... what I want.' However, she suggested her father continued to associate such an approach to life as essentially male, stating 'my father always slightly, I think, looked on me as, in those days, sort of like the boy, the one that you encouraged to do stuff.'⁵² Hannah remembered that her father 'didn't approve of women in medicine, originally' and 'had a slightly more Victorian view of things until both his daughters wanted to do medicine.'⁵³ Jennie commented that her father 'himself was very sexist... I remember once saying to him why do you want me to get educated when you don't think women should be educated.' Jennie recounted her father's reply as "'that's because you're my daughter not my wife'".⁵⁴ Bunkle argues that the writings of women such as Ann Oakley, who experienced increased educational opportunities in post-war Britain, suggest that fathers came to 'prefer these clever, bright successful girls' seeing them as 'the people their mothers might have been.'⁵⁵ However, these men continued to depend on the domestication of their wives, Oakley described how her intelligent mother had 'deteriorated into the over-medicated, depressed housekeeper, and unpaid PA/editor/secretary servicing her father's burgeoning career.'⁵⁶ As Jennie's example suggests, in perceiving their daughters and wives in terms of two distinct female identities, fathers could invest in and support their daughters' education and career ambitions, which they came

⁵⁰ Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960*, (Oxford, 2015), p. 32.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 39.

⁵² Interview with Nadia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 8 October 2022.

⁵³ Interview with Hannah.

⁵⁴ Interview with Jennie.

⁵⁵ Phillida Bunkle, 'The 1944 Education Act and Second Wave Feminism', *Women's History Review*, 25:5 (2016), p. 794.

⁵⁶ Ann Oakley, *Man and Wife: Richard and Kay Titmuss: My Parents' Early Years*, (Harmondsworth, 1996), p. 299.

to see as a desirable trait for women, without challenging conservative expectations of women's domestic role in the family. While fathers may have desired life experiences for their daughters that were closer to their own, their support continued to present these life paths as essentially male. Therefore, women's fulfilment of their fathers' ambitions required them to reject a distinctly female life-path and follow the educational example that had been set and encouraged by male members of their families.

Mothers' Educational Experiences and their Daughters Ambitions

The relationship that the mothers of the women in this cohort had to higher education shaped their ambitions in complex ways. While their mothers had different relationships to higher education, a sense of the restrictions their mothers faced reinforced women's desire to follow male experiences and enter mixed-sex colleges at Oxford.

For the majority of women in this sample, their mothers had not gone to university. This made the experiences of male members of their families and the ambitions of their fathers even more relevant to their educational choices. For example, Harriet's mother did not go to university and therefore Harriet felt that applying to Oxford 'was a little bit outside her world' whereas, due to her father's experience, 'it was very much in his world,'⁵⁷ meaning that he was the parent that supported her most in the process. Similarly, Violet commented that while her father's family had a strong relationship to higher education, in her mother's family 'there was nothing against it, but they don't have quite that sort of strong history';⁵⁸ her mother had not attended university but had trained as a nurse. Violet saw her father's background and attitudes as having made it inevitable that she went to university.

Where mothers had not gone to university, women's sense of the educational limitations their mothers faced could contribute to their desire to take up such opportunities themselves. Susanna reflected that her mother was 'very bright' and 'she should have gone to university, but obviously far fewer women

⁵⁷ Interview with Harriet.

⁵⁸ Interview with Violet.

did in those days.’ Susanna similarly described herself as ‘bright’ and ‘competitive’ and therefore was motivated to apply to Oxford and to attend a mixed-sex college to demonstrate her equal educational ability to male members of her family.⁵⁹ Rachel recalled with some indignation that ‘my mother was very bright, her side of the family were very bright, but they were all girls, so nobody thought of educating them.’ This motivated Rachel to demonstrate her equal intelligence to men, stating ‘by the time I went to Oxford I was very determined that I could be... as good as a boy.’⁶⁰ For her, attending a formerly male college allowed her to do this. Thus, the restrictions their mothers had faced on account of their sex, and a desire to prove the equal educational ability of men and women, could motivate women to attend a formerly male college. Significantly, these women demonstrated their intelligence by entering and achieving within a male institution.

In contrast, just over a fifth of women in the sample said their mother had moved from secondary school to university. Two women said their mothers went to university as mature students. On the one hand, this suggests that women in this cohort were more likely than the general population to have a familial example of a woman going to university available to them as young women. A. H. Halsey records that between 1924 and 1955 the proportion of young people in Britain of their age group entering higher education rose from 1.5 per cent to 3.4 per cent.⁶¹ Furthermore, as Dyhouse notes, women ‘still represented only 24 per cent of the university population in 1958: the same proportion as in 1920,’⁶² indicating that women’s participation in higher education during the period that mothers of women in this cohort would have attended university remained consistently lower than the percentage of women in this sample whose mothers attended university. This suggests that the mothers of women who attended mixed-sex colleges were more likely than average to have attended university themselves.

⁵⁹ Interview with Susanna.

⁶⁰ Interview with Rachel.

⁶¹ Statistics in A.H. Halsey, ‘Further and Higher Education’, A. H. Halsey and Josephine Webb (eds), *Twentieth Century British Social Trends*, (Oxford, 2000), p. 226.

⁶² Statistics in Carol Dyhouse, ‘Education’, Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*, (London, 2014), p. 124.

However, where women's mothers had attended university, their fathers remained the principal figure of support to their own ambitions. Furthermore, women noted the restrictions their mothers had faced through their lives, despite their education. Ava's and Hannah's mothers both went to university but, as noted earlier, they saw their father as the more active parent encouraging and supporting their ambitions. Ava saw her mother as a 'pioneer' educationally but emphasised the restrictions her mother had faced after university; 'although she had qualified as a vet, extraordinarily, and had worked, when she got married she stopped work because that's what you did.' Ava reflected that 'for someone like her who was clever, it was really dreadful.' Her mother's experience contributed to Ava's belief that young women should be educationally and occupationally ambitious, describing this mentality as 'go get your education and make something of yourself.' As noted earlier, for Ava this ambition was always connected to attending a mixed-sex college as she would not have considered going to a women's college 'because the world is not sexually segregated.'⁶³ Eleanor described her mother as 'quite a special person' who had 'broken quite a lot of barriers' as she had attended university in the 1930s. However, she similarly emphasised the restrictions her mother had faced during her life; 'she had to give up work when she had her first baby because those were the rules back then.' Eleanor's father had not attended university but significantly he was the parent who gave Eleanor advice about university and her post-university decisions. As a young woman, Eleanor was committed to not following the trajectory of her mother's life; she told her father 'I'm not going to get married and I'm not going to work part time. I'm going to be a career woman.'⁶⁴ Bethany felt that her mother faced restrictions while at university in a women's college, commenting on 'all these ridiculous rules and regulations' that her mother experienced at Girton College Cambridge. Her mother's ambitions were then further limited by her post-university experience. Bethany's mother 'did all the child raising' while also working as a doctor, and Bethany evaluated her mother's life path in terms of unrealised ambition; 'she'd done a lot of things that were designed to make her future better and then that future never quite arrived in the way that she'd imagined.' Bethany stated that the fact that her mother found

⁶³ Interview with Ava.

⁶⁴ Interview with Eleanor, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 June 2020.

Girton ‘pretty sort of severe,’⁶⁵ and then had not achieved everything she had wanted to in her career, contributed to her desire to attend a mixed-sex college, seeing such an institution as allowing her to have a student experience that was free from such restriction.

Sociologists who studied the experiences of graduate women in the 1950s and 1960s emphasised the significance that women’s expected role of wife and mother continued to have in these women’s lives. For example, in her study *Wives Who Went to College*, published in 1957, Judith Hubback argued that graduate women who had families ‘are more or less forced to spend a large part of their time in domestic work,’⁶⁶ despite their educational achievements and intellectual capabilities. As Helen McCarthy argues, ‘the frustrations felt by housewives who had trained brains but no outlet for their use’ was a key focus of Hubback’s study.⁶⁷ Similarly, in their 1972 study *Graduates: The Sociology of an Elite*, R.K. Kelsall, A. Poole and A. Kuhn similarly emphasised that the careers of graduate women continued to be shaped and limited by expectation of ‘their domestic duties.’⁶⁸ The accounts above suggest that the daughters of such graduate women could feel a similar sense of frustration that their mothers had not been able to fully realise their intellectual potential or ambitions because of their domestic role. This frustration then influenced their own educational and employment ambitions.

The fact that mothers of women in this sample who had attended university faced restrictions in their university and post-university lives meant that women perceived them in terms of experiences they did not wish to emulate, seeing a female life path as involving limitation and thwarted ambition. In this way, the accounts of women who entered the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford show a different picture to that presented by Bunkle who argues that ‘the mothers of the girls born after 1950 had lived less gender-segregated lives and were more likely to continue in employment after marriage. Differences from their daughters were less dramatic.’⁶⁹ Women in this cohort recognised the educational opportunities that their mothers had had, but this was understood in the context of an

⁶⁵ Interview with Bethany, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2022.

⁶⁶ Judith Hubback, *Wives Who Went to College*, (London, 1957), p. 54.

⁶⁷ Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives A History of Working Motherhood*, (London, 2020), p. 261.

⁶⁸ R. K. Kelsall, A. Poole, and A. Kuhn, *Graduates: The Sociology of an Elite*, (London, 1972), p. 151.

⁶⁹ Bunkle, ‘The Education Act’, p. 803.

acknowledgement of limitations and hardships they faced despite their education. This meant women did not look to their mothers' lives as an example to be followed. For these women, attending a mixed-sex college and specifically not attending a women's only college, was seen as a way in which women could have educational and employment experiences that were free from such restrictions. The examples available to them as young women reinforced their view of the male life model as less restrictive than the female one and therefore it was these experiences that they wished to emulate.

School Experiences and the Rejection of the Women's Colleges

School experiences were significant in influencing women's evaluation of the desirability of mixed-sex colleges over women-only colleges. As Peter Mandler argues, educational settings are 'one of the principal sites of socialization'⁷⁰ and women's recollections of their secondary schools indicate how far their social experiences made them see an all-female environment as undesirable. Bunkle argues that it was following the gradual move to co-educational schooling from the late-1960s that 'the culture of women's institutions began to seem anachronistic'⁷¹ to female school leavers as 'girls born after 1950 were increasingly likely not to have experienced single-sex institutions.'⁷² However, the accounts of women in this cohort demonstrate that it was more often experiences of girls' schools that motivated their desire to attend a mixed-sex college. Their choice of a mixed-sex college was therefore a rejection of female-dominated and led educational institutions.

The women who entered mixed-sex colleges were educated in a period when girls' state education was shaped both by the continuing influence of the post-war tripartite system of education and the developing system of comprehensive schooling. As Stephen Ball argues, during the late-1960s and early-1970s, Britain moved in a 'slow and piecemeal'⁷³ way from one system to the other, meaning that both were present when women in this cohort were experiencing their secondary education. In the

⁷⁰ Peter Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education since the Second World War*, (Oxford, 2020), p. 3.

⁷¹ Bunkle, 'The 1944 Education Act and Second Wave Feminism', p. 803.

⁷² Ibid, p. 804.

⁷³ Stephen J Bell, *The Education Debate*, (Bristol, 2017), p. 80.

former system, state secondary education was stratified by school type and state grammar schools were generally divided by sex, both in terms of institutions and subjects. In the latter, co-education became a more normalised system of schooling. As Bunkle argues, ‘from the late 1960s, co-educational comprehensives combining grammar, technical and secondary modern educations became increasingly common.’⁷⁴ In the private sector, single-sex education remained the norm. However, despite the gradual increase of co-educational comprehensive schools, the majority of women in the 1974 cohort attended a girls’ school for at least a period of their secondary education. Thus, their educational experiences were shaped both by previous approaches to girls’ education and by a wider context in which co-educational schools were becoming more common. It was the combination of these influences that in complex ways developed these women’s evaluation of the desirability of male institutions over female ones.

Women’s school experiences were rooted in the gradual movement between these two state systems, alongside the private sector which the 1944 Education Act did not attempt to alter or dismantle. In terms of the school that they attended before going to university, ten women attended independent schools; five attended Girls Public Day School Trust schools; four attended direct grant schools; for sixteen their education was structured by the post-war tripartite system, with these women attending state grammar schools; for two their schooling was in the comprehensive system; and four attended specialist or non-British schools. However, for many women, their schooling moved between these many systems, as they moved schools, or their schools switched between systems. For example, Mary’s school switched from being a girls’ grammar school to a co-educational comprehensive school the year after she joined, so, as she stated, the ‘children underneath my year were boys and girls and it was a comprehensive intake, but my year and above it was all girls’ grammar school types.’⁷⁵ Jessica similarly originally attended a girls’ grammar school before moving to a co-educational grammar school which became a comprehensive school while she was in her final year.⁷⁶ Therefore, a number

⁷⁴ Bunkle, ‘The 1944 Education Act and Second Wave Feminism’, p. 803.

⁷⁵ Interview with Mary, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 25 June 2020.

⁷⁶ Interview with Jessica.

of women who attended state schools experienced both girls-only and co-educational schooling. Their experiences of these different types of schooling contributed to their view of the undesirability of attending a women's college.

For those who attended a co-educational school at some point in their schooling, a mixed-sex system of education came to be seen as the norm and as a result single-sex education was interpreted by these women as a conservative approach to women's education. For example, Violet who spent the final three years of her schooling at a co-educational school, having previously attended a girls' school, said that 'given that I was at a mixed school it felt much more natural to be in a mixed college.'⁷⁷

Sandra commented that 'I'd been at a mixed school until the age of thirteen' and therefore when she moved to a girls' grammar school, she 'didn't feel it was normal' and 'didn't like being in a single-sex environment.' This influenced Sandra's decision to apply to a mixed-sex college; as she stated 'the last thing I wanted to do was go to a single sex college.'⁷⁸ Similarly, Rachel said that she had 'been in co-education all my life so I definitely wanted to go to a (mixed-sex college).' Rachel commented that because of her schooling she came to see female-only education as 'a really silly system.'⁷⁹ Jennifer Shaw, writing in the 1980s, argued that, because the move to comprehensive education – which she states represented 'major attempts to secure better educational opportunities for the socially disadvantaged' – included a wide move to co-education, the move to co-education in schools was also 'assumed to be progressive.'⁸⁰ Shaw challenged this latter point, reflecting on the 'dangers of attempting progressive reform within a fundamentally unprogressive society.'⁸¹ This suggests that, while by the 1980s feminist educational sociologists may have questioned the benefits of co-education for women, the women who were the first to attend mixed-sex Oxford colleges experienced their

⁷⁷ Interview with Violet.

⁷⁸ Interview with Sandra, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 October 2023.

⁷⁹ Interview with Rachel.

⁸⁰ Jennifer Shaw, 'Education and the Individual Schooling for Girls, or Mixed Schooling - a Mixed Blessing?', Rosemary Deem (ed), *Schooling for Women's Work*, (London, 2012), p. 67.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 70.

secondary schooling during a period where co-education was becoming more common and was considered to represent progressive educational policy.

However, more often it was women's experience of having attended a girls-only school that made them not want to attend a women-only college. In the sample only six of the women attended co-educational institutions for their whole schooling careers, while twelve moved to university from a co-educational school. Therefore, the majority of women who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 had experienced single-sex education for at least a period of their lives and most of them entered a formerly male college from a girls-only school. For some women, it was the social atmosphere of their school that caused them to develop negative views of women-only educational institutions. Lucy described her girls' comprehensive school as 'dull.'⁸² Jessica emphasised how much she preferred her co-educational school to the girls' school she originally attended. She stated 'I was miserable at the girls' school. I didn't want to be at that place because the girls just talked about the next disco all the time,'⁸³ suggesting she perceived the social atmosphere of her girls' school to be unintellectual. Harriet recalled her bad experience at a girls' boarding school, stating that 'I was bullied at school, so on all sorts of levels, I didn't really like women as a collective.' Harriet's negative school experience was a recurring theme throughout her narrative and she stated that 'it took me a long time to recover from my school experience.'⁸⁴ Similarly, Georgia recalled how her experience at her girls' boarding school 'gave me a fairly horrendous experience of communal living with lots of women.' She stated that at her school 'it wasn't considered acceptable to be clever ... you had to be pretty;' remembering the bullying she experienced, she felt she 'was too academic and not pretty enough.' For Georgia this experience, which framed her narrative, made her certain that she wanted to attend a mixed-sex college and not a women's college. She stated she 'absolutely didn't want to go back into that all-girls environment'⁸⁵ and emphasised that had Oxford not introduced mixed-sex colleges she would not have applied to the University. This indicates that the social

⁸² Interview with Lucy.

⁸³ Interview with Jessica.

⁸⁴ Interview with Harriet.

⁸⁵ Interview with Georgia.

experience of girls' schools could lead to both an association of female educational spaces with unhappiness, and a view of academicism as being in opposition to a particular stereotype of femininity that was seen to be the ideal promoted by the culture at girls' schools. This could be highly influential on women's rejection of the women's colleges and on their desire to go to a mixed-sex college.

Girls' Education and Stereotypes of Femininity

The extent to which women felt their schools reinforced conservative expectations of femininity also led to an association between all-female educational institutions and a lack of intellectualism. Women felt their own educational ambitions were not supported or encouraged, because of their schools' focus on traditionally feminine subjects and codes of behaviour. This further contributed to women's view of the undesirability of women-only colleges. Martha, who had decided she wanted to study medicine while at school, commented that the poor way that maths and science was taught at her girls' grammar school was 'absolutely disastrous for all of us who wanted to do anything scientific.' When it came to applying to Oxford, Martha was sure she wanted to go to a mixed-sex college as 'it just seemed time for a change' from an all-female institution.⁸⁶ Georgia recalled that her girls' boarding school focused on 'turning you into a young lady. It was about wearing white gloves and boater hats, it wasn't about academicism at all.' Georgia was explicit about how far her schooling experiences influenced her general view of female educational institutions, stating that her boarding school informed her 'impression of what the women's colleges would have been like.'⁸⁷ Similarly, Jennie, who won a scholarship to a girls' boarding school, stated 'they were just raising girls to marry squires ... they would have liked me to have done Latin and French, stuff like that' which contrasted with her desire to focus on the sciences and maths and her ambition to become a doctor. When asked if she enjoyed her boarding school, Jennie commented that 'I was very unhappy there for five years' and therefore was 'pleased to go to a men's college.'⁸⁸ This comment emphasises that it was the fact that

⁸⁶ Interview with Martha, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 26 January 2023.

⁸⁷ Interview with Georgia.

⁸⁸ Interview with Jennie.

the newly 'mixed' colleges had been 'men's' colleges that made them desirable to women in the 1974 cohort.

It should be noted that some women found that their education could similarly follow gendered patterns at co-educational schools. For example, Georgia remembered that when she moved to a co-educational school in the middle of her O levels 'the timetable required all the girls to do... either cookery or needlework,'⁸⁹ although she was able to negotiate her way out of doing such subjects. Violet commented that 'doing sciences one tends to be in the minority ... although (the school) was mixed, the science classes were definitely majority male and when I did my maths I was the only girl in the maths class.' This experience contributed to Violet's view that it was natural for her to attend a majority male college, stating 'I was well used to operating in an environment where the majority of people are male.'⁹⁰ While indicating that co-educational schools could also reinforce gendered views of education, Violet's recollections also suggest that continued gendered divisions in subject choice within co-educational schools could reinforce to those women who did break general patterns of subject choice that it was within male-dominated spaces that women could achieve their academic ambitions.

The post-war education system was one in which gendered and conservative attitudes towards femininity and women's domestic role influenced the education that girls received. Indeed, Penny Tinkler argues that this focus on domestic education for girls became stronger after the war 'amid pressure to restore prewar gender relations.'⁹¹ Therefore, in the late 1940s and 1950s girls' education was structured in a way that promoted conservative ideals of feminine domestication. Despite developments in girls' education and the movement away from the post-war system through the 1960s and 1970s, gendered approaches continued to influence girls' experience of education in both the state and private sector. Indeed, in 1975 a DES *Survey on Curricular Differences for Boys and Girls* found

⁸⁹ Interview with Georgia.

⁹⁰ Interview with Violet.

⁹¹ Penny Tinkler, 'Girlhood and Growing up' in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed) *Women in Twentieth Century Britain: Social, Cultural and Political Change*, (London, 2014), p. 40.

that gendered divisions in subjects continued to be present within secondary schools.⁹² As Tinkler argues it was still the case that ‘girls frequently took traditionally feminine subjects like cookery... they also tended to congregate in the arts disciplines while boys gravitated towards practical, technical, mathematical and scientific subjects.’⁹³ The accounts above from the women in this cohort suggest that when they were individually able to divert from such trends they came to see male-dominated educational environments as destinations where they would be intellectually fulfilled. Therefore, a continuation of gendered patterns in schooling, in terms of both the social and the academic culture of schools, that had shaped girls’ education in the post-war period, contributed to a view of female academic environments as academically unambitious, unsupportive and uninspiring. School experiences could also reinforce a view of intellectualism and femininity as standing in opposition to each other. This contributed to women’s view of the desirability of mixed-sex, indeed specifically majority male, colleges over women’s ones.

School Experiences and Negative Views of Female Educators

The way girls’ schools and the women who led them approached teaching and advising their students on higher education could also contribute to women’s views of women-only, and women-led, educational institutions as being conservative in their outlook and approach to girls and women’s education. Jayne, who attended a Girls Public Day School Trust school, felt that the school encouraged a culture of hard work and perfectionism, stating that her teachers’ focus was on distilling into girls the importance of ‘doing it well and getting it right.’⁹⁴ Eloise commented that the female teachers at her girls’ school ‘were far too focused on just pushing you through the exams, pushing you through the syllabus.’ Eloise did not enjoy what she described as the ‘very stifling women’s environment’ of her school and saw the approach of her teachers as the cause of her preference for male teachers and a male educational environment; ‘I didn’t like the women teachers... I actually

⁹² *DES Survey on Curricular Differences for Boys and Girls* (1975) referenced in Tinkler, ‘Girlhood and Growing up’, p. 41.

⁹³ Tinkler, ‘Girlhood and Growing up’, p. 41.

⁹⁴ Interview with Jayne.

thought I prefer men teachers, and that was a definite conclusion,' which contributed to her view that it 'would have seemed very odd to me going to an all-women's college.'⁹⁵ In comparison, Jayne commented that she 'dimly recognised' that the approach of her teachers supported her well through school. However, she emphasised that 'after eighteen I'd had enough of it' and she chose a mixed-sex college because she perceived that the male tutors in the men's colleges offered an approach to education that was 'more relaxed' and different to what she had experienced at school.⁹⁶

In women's written accounts of their school experiences during the period, and in the recollections of the 1974 cohort, women suggest they felt that their female teachers' focus on hard work was due to the fact that they were of a generation of women for whom educational opportunities had been limited. Writing of her time spent at a girls' grammar school in the late-1950s and early-1960s, Mary Evans commented that her female teachers 'had been taught by women and taught that the education they were receiving was a privilege and, above all, a matter of great seriousness.'⁹⁷ She felt this view shaped the education she received at her school. Indeed, some in the 1974 cohort reflected on the historical context that influenced the women's colleges' perceived heightened focus on hard work and academic achievement. For example, Jayne commented that 'because of their foundation I think there was a feeling they (the women's colleges) had to prove themselves'⁹⁸ and thus were determined that their students would achieve academically.

In contrast, for the majority in the 1974 cohort higher education was perceived as a natural, normal and expected route that they would take. For example, Violet recalled that her attending university 'was just absolutely to be expected, the norm'⁹⁹ while Louise reflected that 'it was almost everyone's ambition'¹⁰⁰ to go to university. While these statements are likely to have been shaped by their educational backgrounds and did not necessarily represent general trends in attitudes at the time, they

⁹⁵ Interview with Eloise.

⁹⁶ Interview with Jayne.

⁹⁷ Mary Evans, *A Good School Life at a Girls' Grammar School in the 1950s*, (London, 1991), p. 81.

⁹⁸ Interview with Jayne.

⁹⁹ Interview with Violet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 October 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Louise.

nonetheless suggest how far women could perceive attending university as an expectation rather than an exceptional privilege. This suggests that the trend of increased numbers of women attending university could be influential on women's perception of what constituted a desirable university experience. For many in the 1974 cohort, their view of university as a natural and expected occurrence in women's lives, meant they perceived close academic monitoring and intense academic work as unnecessary and undesirable.

For those in the cohort who had attended girls' schools, this style of education came to be associated with female-led institutions and thus contributed to a view of the undesirability of the women's colleges. Women perceived the women's colleges of Oxford as being intensely academic institutions with a focus on perfectionism and hard work. For example, Jayne suggested that, from her school experience, she 'had a gut feeling' that 'there was something slightly hysterical about the women's colleges.' She suggested that this feeling 'was confirmed by being at Oxford', as she perceived that the women in these colleges 'were absolutely pushed to do all their essays ...there was almost a punitive feeling... they were nervous about writing their essays... there was kind of a pressure on them that I just never felt.' Here, Jayne's use of the word 'hysterical' indicates how far women's perception of the academic culture in the women's colleges could reflect gendered attitudes towards female sensibility. In comparison, Jayne described her own tutor's more relaxed attitude to her work, stating that, if she was unable to complete the final essay of term 'my tutor kind of shrugged it off. Basically, if you don't do one of your essays, that's your funeral, you know, have a cup of tea, have a sherry... let's chat for a bit.'¹⁰¹ Georgia had a similar impression of the women tutors in the women's colleges. She described two female tutors who taught her as 'very much old-school female women's college academics, and quite formidable, quite scary, very school mistress.' Georgia thought that was where she 'picked up my image of the women's colleges as being much more kind of supervisory and much more schoolmarmy about you academically.' She compared this to the style of teaching she received in her mixed-sex college, stating 'you were treated as another academic mind and another

¹⁰¹ Interview with Jayne.

intellectual mind and you weren't so much taught as encouraged to develop your own ideas.'¹⁰² For Georgia, the latter approach was preferable. Therefore, women's desire to attend a mixed-sex college was motivated by their desire to avoid the particular academic culture that they associated with female-led institutions.

Therefore, women's view of the desirability of mixed-sex colleges was not specifically motivated by a view of these institutions as academically superior. Instead, it was based on their rejection of a particular approach to a university experience that prioritised hard academic work, which they associated with the women's colleges. Harriet emphasised 'I hadn't gone for the academic experience'¹⁰³ and Lily similarly stated, realising that the Oxford course she had chosen did not really match her interests, that 'you didn't go for the syllabus, you went for the experience.'¹⁰⁴ Indeed, during this period the women's colleges were known to be highly academically successful institutions. As Howarth argues, after the Second World War the women's colleges continually outperformed the men's colleges 'achieving a steadily higher proportion of second-class degrees than the men's colleges, and in five years between 1959 and 1973 a higher proportion of firsts.'¹⁰⁵ However, it should be noted that as the women's colleges were more restricted in the numbers of students that they could accept, they had to be more selective in their intake. It was at the point that the first women who entered mixed-sex colleges started to take final exams in 1977 that the women's colleges' position in the academic league tables started to decline, with men's overall performance in finals overtaking women that year. However, Daniel I. Greenstein argues, to a large extent this reflected the fact that 'women were recruited into the former men's colleges at the expense of less promising male applicants' rather than a trend of mixed-sex colleges offering women a superior education than the women's colleges.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, it is noteworthy that, by an overwhelming majority, women in the sample interviewed for this thesis achieved second class degrees. This suggests women's perception

¹⁰² Interview Georgia.

¹⁰³ Interview with Harriet.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Lily, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 20 July 2020.

¹⁰⁵ Janet Howarth, 'Women', Brian Harrison (ed), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 374.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel I. Greenstein, 'The Junior Members, 1900–1990: A Profile', Brian Harrison (ed), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 63.

of the academic rigour of the women's colleges compared to the men's colleges at this time was accurate. Significantly, this did not change their perception of the latter as more desirable, primarily because they were rejecting a particular form of education and university experience that they associated with female-led institutions.

However, the comments noted above also indicate how far women's evaluation of the academic approach of women's colleges could reflect gendered perceptions of feminine behaviours and academic styles. Women associated the women's colleges firstly with the academic culture of schools, secondly with the stereotypical feminine characteristics of diligence and perfectionism, and thirdly with historically gendered ideas of women's emotional instability and immaturity. Thus, women's rejection of women-led and focused academic institutions was bound up with their rejection of a form of education that they associated with their schools, which they perceived as restrictive and conservative. However, these views were also infused with gendered attitudes to women's mind-sets and behaviours, and were influenced by gendered stereotypes which associated them with emotional and intellectual immaturity. Therefore, women saw mixed-sex colleges as desirable because they saw male academic institutions and educational approaches as offering a more liberating, more adult academic university experience.

School Experience, Unsupportive Teachers and Negative Views of Female-Led Institutions

Women's perception of the undesirability of attending a female-led institution should also be understood in the context of them having negative experiences with female headteachers at their schools. Many women found their headmistresses, and their schools generally, showed a lack of belief in their potential and were not supportive of their educational ambitions. Hannah, who attended a prestigious private girls' boarding school, recalled a lack of encouragement or support for her application to Oxford. She stated that 'I was not identified by my school as an obvious Oxbridge candidate.' Indeed, Hannah emphasised her headmistress' lack of belief in her educational ability stating that, when she got called for interview, 'I got a summons to go and see the headmistress, which

I thought meant I'd done something bad actually, and she wanted to know how I'd managed it.'¹⁰⁷

Emily applied for a mixed-sex college because a teacher told her she would be unlikely to get a place at a women's college.¹⁰⁸ Eleanor commented that her girls' school had a tradition of sending girls to St Anne's College but that 'they weren't prepared to let more than one girl apply to St Anne's and sort of use the school connection.' Eleanor remembered with some indignation that 'there were two of us that wanted to do (her subject) and so I think they thought the other girl was the stronger candidate ... so they encouraged her to apply to St Anne's.' Eleanor, who stated that she 'couldn't stand the headmistress,'¹⁰⁹ found support in a teacher who recommended that she try for a mixed-sex college. She was then very glad she had applied to a mixed-sex college. Thus, the lack of encouragement that women received from their headmistresses could give them a negative impression of female-led institutions as well as directly leading them to apply to a mixed-sex college.

The lack of support that women felt from their schools, and specifically their headmistresses, made the support they received from their fathers and their families more significant to their achievement of their educational ambitions. Lucy stated that her 'comprehensive school wasn't really geared up to Oxbridge entry,' recalling 'the headmistress was very discouraging... and she actually sent my entry in past the closing date but Oxford kindly still accepted it.'¹¹⁰ It was Lucy's father who had pushed her to send in the application. Ava, who attended a fee-paying girls' day school similarly recalled her headmistress' reaction to her applying to Oxford: 'my headmistress was strongly against it. She thought it was ridiculous ... I do recall being in my headmistress' office with my dad when he insisted that I be allowed to do the entrance exam so I was alright, I did the entrance exam by myself in the school office with no prep because nobody knew anything about it.' The lack of support Ava received from her school, particularly her headmistress, is suggested further by Ava's comment that after receiving her place at Oxford, 'my headmistress said nothing. I think she was really pissed-off.'¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Hannah.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Emily, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 9 July 2020.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Eleanor.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Lucy.

¹¹¹ Interview with Ava.

Freya, who attended a girls' direct grant grammar school remembered her headmistress' outrage when she realised Freya was planning to do seventh term Oxford entry: 'my headmistress, who didn't like me, rang my family and said, "if she thinks she's going to do Oxbridge, she's got another think coming".' For Freya and her family it was her headmistress' lack of belief in Freya's ability that was the motivation to go on and do the entrance exam. As Freya stated, 'my family and me being the people that we were, I said, "Oh, really?" So, I found some teachers who liked me and who were prepared to teach me. And I went back to that school to what was called the seventh form, which was the Oxbridge term.' Freya later recalled her headmistress' unkind reaction to Freya's success at achieving her place at Oxford; 'when I went to see my headmistress ... she said to me "I always knew, if you got an interview, you'd talk your way in. Do you know you're depriving your friend... of a place at Oxford by getting in yourself"... (she) was just really out of order.'¹¹² Therefore, women experienced a lack of support from the women who led their schools. The figures that were most encouraging of their ambitions were members of their families, and usually specifically their fathers.

The particularities of oral history methodology mean that we cannot gauge how far women's negative accounts of headmistresses as standing in the way of their aspirations and sometimes exhibiting personal hostility to them reflect the reality of their attitudes towards their students. However, the frequent occurrence of the figure of the unsupportive girls' school headmistress in women's narratives indicates, and possibly explains, the more general attitudes women had to female educators and female-led educational institutions. As Lynn Abrams argues, 'the oral historian ... is looking to detect the emotional responses and the very subjectivity of experience.'¹¹³ Accounts offered in an oral history interview are constructions of memories which offer a partial and subjective account of the past; the details that interviewees, consciously or subconsciously, choose to focus on are revealing of their wider attitudes and emotions. Thus, women's accounts of their poor relationships with their headmistresses suggests a perception of female educational leaders and institutions as preventing women from achieving their individual academic ambitions. This reinforces the point that the

¹¹² Interview with Freya, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 July 2020.

¹¹³ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, (New York, 2016), p. 22.

women's view of the undesirability of the women's colleges was a reflection of their wider perception of the restrictive, conservative nature of female-led and focused educational institutions.

The fact that women at both private and state schools felt unsupported in their educational ambitions by their schools suggests that, for women who attended school during this period, increased educational opportunities at secondary level did not necessarily mean that they were encouraged in their personal post-school educational ambitions. Indeed, Mary Evans similarly described her girls' grammar school in the 1950s and 60s as being 'controlled, and controlling'¹¹⁴ and not encouraging or supporting students' individuality when it appeared at odds with the focus and philosophy of the school. Indeed, in her preface to Evans' work, Tessa Blackstone similarly stated that 'in my opinion the greatest failure of these schools ... was that their expectations for their pupils post-school destinations were too low.'¹¹⁵ In contrast, Sarah Aiston argues that for girls who were educated in the 1950s and 1960s, 'the grammar school offered a world of possibilities'¹¹⁶ particularly in terms of their progression to higher education. However, women's accounts of their school experience suggests that while selective grammar schools, and indeed private girls' schools, may have increasingly offered women the opportunity to apply for university in general, they did not necessarily support or encourage women's ambitions that appeared to be outside the traditional expectations of the institution. Stephanie Spencer argues that 'oral history may provide one way into widening our perception of the struggles that were played out in the secondary schools in the England of the late 1950s.'¹¹⁷ The accounts of women who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 show that women continued to face struggles and complexities in state and private secondary schools into the 1960s and early 1970s and these struggles shaped their attitudes towards higher education. It was within the context of girls' schools offering women opportunities, but within a limited framework and

¹¹⁴ Mary Evans, *A Good School*, p. 81.

¹¹⁵ Tessa Blackstone, 'Preface', in Mary Evans, *A Good School*, p. xv.

¹¹⁶ Aiston, 'The Life Experiences of University-Educated Women', p. 44.

¹¹⁷ Stephanie Spencer, 'Reflections on the 'Site of Struggle': Girls' Experience of Secondary Education in the Late 1950s', *History of Education*, 3:34, (2004), p. 438.

with a restrictive perspective on education, that women in the 1974 cohort who attended these schools came to see male-led, male-dominated colleges as more desirable than women's colleges.

Girls' Schools Promotion of the Women's Colleges

Where women felt their schools were more involved in the process of them applying to Oxford, they suggested their school teachers encouraged or pushed them to apply to a women's college. Women saw this as reflecting the traditionalism of their schools and the conservatism of their view of women's education. Therefore, this conservatism came to be associated with the colleges they recommended. Caroline, who attended a girl's grammar school, recalled that 'my headmistress was very anti the mixed colleges.' Caroline believed this was because of her headteacher's social conservatism in her views of femininity and female sexuality; 'she felt that having boys around would be a distraction to her girls. And so therefore you apply to somewhere like St Hugh's. That was a much more refined place for her girls to apply to.'¹¹⁸ Anna commented that she applied to St Hugh's because her girls' direct grant school 'told me to' as the school had a tradition of sending girls to St Hugh's.¹¹⁹ Amy similarly recalled that her 'headmistress said "you can't apply to a men's college"' emphasising that she saw this as reflecting her misguided traditionalism; 'not that she knew anything, she was ancient. I never had a rapport with her.'¹²⁰ Therefore, these women associated attending a women's college with the outlook of their schools, which they perceived as outdated. This reinforced the idea that attending one of these institutions would involve them following a conservative educational path. Indeed, of the women in the 1974 cohort who initially applied to women's colleges, only Nadia did so because she specifically wanted to attend Somerville. However, significantly, this was because she thought 'it was associated' with the college that her father went to.¹²¹ This shows again how far fathers' educational experiences were significant in forming women's own ambitions

¹¹⁸ Interview with Caroline.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Anna, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 10 September 2020.

¹²⁰ Interview with Amy, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 September 2022.

¹²¹ Interview with Nadia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 8 October 2022.

and emphasises that it was not specifically the fact that it was an all-female environment that attracted her to it.

While women whose schools encouraged them to apply to a women's college, and not to a formerly male college, generally followed the advice of their schools, their experience of interviewing at these colleges reinforced their perception of these institutions as being academically conservative and school-like in their atmosphere. Caroline described that the women's college where she interviewed as feeling 'quiet, very studious, very female' and stated that in her interview she was 'quizzed' on 'unsurprising content.' In comparison Caroline described her interview for a mixed-sex college as 'a very different interview experience' which involved 'difficult questions' and 'a good conversation.' Caroline was 'delighted' when she was offered a place at a formerly male college, describing it as 'much more exciting.'¹²² When Amy had her interview at a women's college 'it felt like going back to see the headmistress at the high school' and she felt 'a huge sense of relief' when she was accepted by a mixed-sex college instead.¹²³ Anna recalled that her interview at a women's college was 'very much more formal,' stating she felt they were 'only interested in your academic ability.' In comparison, Anna recalled the interview for the mixed-sex college she eventually attended being 'much more interesting,' stating 'I seem to remember sitting cross legged on the floor, looking at a goat skull, and we talked about this goat's skull.' She recalled thinking 'this is much better, it was much more fun.' Anna assessed that the interviewers at the men's college 'seemed much more interested in "could I think" rather than on answering questions correctly.'¹²⁴ Therefore, academic experience at interviews at women's colleges could contribute to women's view of them as undesirable institutions. Women's sense that the intellectual culture of women's colleges mirrored their school experience to too great an extent meant women saw them as academically conservative, immature and restrictive institutions. This was also reinforced by the fact that the women who led their schools, who they saw as having conservative expectations of women's educational trajectories, favoured these institutions. Formerly

¹²² Interview with Caroline.

¹²³ Interview with Amy.

¹²⁴ Interview with Anna.

male colleges were therefore seen as offering a more stimulating, liberating academic experience that enabled women to move on from the experiences and expectations of their schools.

Higher Education, Womanhood and Sexuality

A generational shift in attitudes to sexuality and womanhood, and their relationship to higher education, further contributed to women's view of mixed-sex colleges as being liberating and women-only colleges as being restrictive. Women in this cohort expected that sex and relationships and the social freedom of adulthood would be part of their university experience. Their view of the women's colleges as institutions in which women's sexual and social behaviour was controlled meant they saw them as undesirable institutions. Thus, again the view of the desirability of male-dominated institutions over female-only ones developed in the context of competing views of womanhood and women's expectations of higher education.

Changes in legal definitions of adulthood were significant in women's evaluation of the desirability of mixed-sex colleges over women-only colleges as it gave legal justification for the expectation of a diminished role for college authorities in the regulating of women students' social and sexual lives. The lowering of the age of majority to eighteen by the 1969 Family Reform Act meant that students who entered university at the normal age of eighteen or above were legally considered to be adults. University and college authorities therefore no longer stood *in loco parentis* for their students and no longer had the legal responsibility to govern their non-academic behaviour. Dyhouse argues that this act 'both reflected and reinforced changing standards of sexual morality, easing the way to acceptance of mixed colleges,' as college authorities were no longer legally responsible for repercussions of the sexual activities of their students.¹²⁵ This context impacted women's views of what kind of university experience they wanted and what kind of institution they wanted to attend; as Laura commented,

¹²⁵ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 178.

when it came to applying to university, she thought that ‘we were all grown-up by then and I didn’t see why one would separate the men from the women.’¹²⁶

Women in the 1974 cohort considered that the women’s colleges had not adjusted far enough to accommodate this change in the legal definition of adulthood, and therefore these institutions were associated with both the restrictions of girlhood and with the sexual conservatism of previous generations. For example, Rosie commented that the women’s college where she had her initial interview ‘felt more immature’ than the mixed-sex college she eventually attended, describing the women’s college as ‘girly’ and comparing it to a school.¹²⁷ In comparison women commented on how they found mixed-sex colleges to offer a greater level of independence, which reflected their legal status as adults to a greater extent. For example, linking the way her college treated its students specifically to the lowering of the age of majority, Alice described ‘the transition of the colleges from the role of “in loco parentis” to utter freedom’ that occurred in the years just previous to her arrival at her mixed-sex college. Emphasising this ‘freedom’ she stated that, ‘I think we were among the first to be given a key to the college gate to get in after hours.’¹²⁸ Similarly, Georgia found that ‘the senior dons’ who ran her mixed-sex college ‘weren’t interventionists’ commenting that ‘it wasn’t like a school.’ She had the impression that ‘it would have been far less interventionist I think than one of the women’s colleges.’¹²⁹ This emphasises that women perceived the mixed-sex colleges to have adjusted to students’ new legal status as adults to a greater extent than the women’s colleges. Thus, changes in legal definitions of adulthood and the way educational institutions were perceived to adjust to this wider social, political change, contributed to women’s view of the desirability of mixed-sex colleges over women-only ones. Indeed, Margaret Rayner argues that the lowering of the age of majority contributed to the way female students in the women’s colleges perceived both their own college experiences, and how they compared to those of students in the men’s colleges. She argues, with reference to St Hilda’s, that ‘once the age of majority was reduced ... it was impossible for the

¹²⁶ Interview with Laura, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 8 June 2022.

¹²⁷ Interview with Rosie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 August 2020.

¹²⁸ Email from ‘Alice’ to Florence Smith, 8 August 2020.

¹²⁹ Interview with Georgia.

College to keep its status of “loco parentis”,’ but that the authorities were slow to change the way they responded to their students who, by the 1970s ‘looked to the men’s colleges for a model of college life.’¹³⁰

A generational shift in young women’s attitudes to sex and its role in their lives also contributed to their view of the desirability of mixed-sex colleges over women-only colleges. Women entering university in the mid-1970s had grown up in the context of changing attitudes towards women’s sexual morality and increased access to the contraceptive pill. As Cate Haste argues, through the late-1960s ‘moral norms were shifting rapidly, especially among the young’¹³¹ and sex came to be seen as a more normal, pleasurable experience for unmarried young women. Indeed, as one female student commented in an article in the *Sunday Telegraph* in 1969: ‘we’re not hung up on sex like our parents were. Sex used to be a dishonest activity that one indulged in with stealth. Now it is considered a normal part of a relationship.’¹³² This change in attitude was also reflected and reinforced by the growing availability of the contraceptive pill, first made available to single women through Family Planning Clinics following the 1967 Family Planning Act and then through NHS GPs through the 1974 NHS (reorganisation) Bill, with prescription charges being removed in April 1974. Thus, it was at the precise moment that women entered mixed-sex colleges that, as Haste describes it, a ‘free and fully comprehensive service integrated into the NHS’ was formed.¹³³ As Hera Cook argues, the increased availability of the Pill meant that ‘it became possible for women to lead lives in which they could engage in sexual activity without lifelong economic and social consequences, as only men had previously done’ as the availability of highly effective, female-controlled contraception finally broke the ‘chain that had led women from the start of sexual activity to marriage and from there to

¹³⁰ Margaret Ryner, *The Centenary History of St Hilda’s*, (Oxford, 1993), p. 141.

¹³¹ Cate Haste, *Rules of Desire Sex in Britain, World War One to the Present*, (London, 2002), p. 183.

¹³² ‘Girl Student Interviews’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 Nov 1969.

¹³³ Haste, *Rules of Desire*, p. 237.

childbearing.’ Therefore, the women who experienced adolescence in the late-1960s and early-1970s were able to lead a life ‘that was without historical precedent’ if they wished to.¹³⁴

For women who entered mixed-sex colleges in 1974, relationships and sex, without any thought of marriage, were a normal part of their adolescence. For example, Eloise had ‘had boyfriends who were older’¹³⁵ while she was at school, and Isabella commented she had ‘been on the Pill since I was thirteen’ and ‘had quite a lot of boyfriends’ before she went to university. Isabella suggested that, within her social circle, being sexually active was considered as a normal part of a young woman’s life, commenting that ‘it wasn’t frowned upon... there was no sense of, “oh, she’s a slag for sleeping around” or anything – that just was not in that culture.’¹³⁶ Similarly, Georgia commented that ‘I did have a boyfriend before I went to college,’ emphasising both that this was a sexually active relationship and one she knew would not be permanent stating that ‘I wasn’t committed to that relationship.’ Indeed, Georgia emphasised that she had a similar view of people she was sexually active with while at college, emphasising that ‘I was also quite clear (that) none of them were people I was going to spend the rest of my life with or anything.’¹³⁷ Jayne emphasised that she felt that the first group of women at her college arrived already possessing a good knowledge and understanding of contraception. Describing an incident where the college doctor spoke to the women about safe sex, an episode which will be discussed further in chapter four, Jayne stated that ‘the last people that you needed to give a pep talk to were the women who were all hyper-conscious, they didn’t want to get pregnant.’¹³⁸ Thus, these women entered university already having had sexual experiences and having learnt about and used contraception.

This contrasts to accounts of women who had entered university in the preceding decades, who had lived the majority of their teenage years before the widespread availability of the Pill and more open

¹³⁴ Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800-1975*, (Oxford, 2004), p. 337.

¹³⁵ Interview with Eloise.

¹³⁶ Interview with Isabella, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2020.

¹³⁷ Interview with Georgia.

¹³⁸ Interview with Jayne.

discussion of contraception and sex. For example, in her account of entering Somerville College Oxford in the mid-1950s Margaret Forster wrote that ‘the best thing about arriving in Oxford was being in touch with girls who knew about birth control and abortion’ as before this she had been ‘so ignorant’ of these matters. Forster was prescribed a ‘dutch cap’ by a Family Planning Clinic, commenting that her increased awareness of contraception came at a fortunate time as it was after she had arrived at university that ‘the lure of love and sex... began to tempt me.’¹³⁹ Thus for Forster attending a women’s college benefitted her as she was able to gain knowledge about contraception through female networks.

To some extent, Forster’s account reflects class and geographical divides in terms of women’s knowledge and use of contraception; she was from Carlisle and a working-class background. Indeed, Cook notes in relation to both the Pill and other female controlled contraception such as the diaphragm, that while some GPs and a limited number of Family Planning Clinics started to provide these to married women in the early-1960s, regional differences in the extent and existence of doctors willing to do so meant that ‘the options for working-class women and girls and those outside major cities were even more limited.’¹⁴⁰ However, in her oral history study of women who were born between 1939 and 1948, Lynn Abrams found that middle-class women in this sample who had entered university in the mid-1960s ‘made a point of emphasizing the sexual ignorance of students,’ noting that one interviewee commented that she ‘was “a complete innocent” when she arrived at her new university.’¹⁴¹ Indeed, while she had had sexual experiences before arriving at St Hilda’s College in the early-1960s, in her autobiography, Sheila Rowbotham emphasises that, despite this, she also had a high degree of ignorance of sexual matters and particularly contraception. Describing an early sexual encounter, she stated that ‘I remained as ignorant as ever about sex... it was sheer luck that I didn’t get pregnant.’¹⁴² Similarly, later recounting her experiences of being a student at St Hilda’s College,

¹³⁹ Margaet Forster, *Hidden Lives: A Family Memoir*, (London, 1996), p. 247.

¹⁴⁰ Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, p. 273.

¹⁴¹ Lynn Abrams, ‘Mothers and Daughters’ Negotiating the Discourse on the ‘Good Woman’ in 1950s and 1960s Britain’, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (eds), *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*, (Toronto, 2013), p. 77.

¹⁴² Sheila Rowbotham, *The Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties*, (London, 2001), p. 38.

she commented that she and her fellow female students were ‘all ignorant about contraception.’¹⁴³ This suggests middle-class women could similarly have had a lack of sexual experience and gained only limited knowledge of contraception by the time they entered university in the 1960s. Therefore, for these women, it was the process of attending university, and for some, being among other female students, that provided them with the opportunity to have sexual experiences and gain knowledge about sex and contraception. In contrast, many women in the cohort who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 had already had such experiences and gained such knowledge as teenagers. This was because they had been teenagers during a period in which sex and contraception had been discussed with greater openness and the Pill had become increasingly available to young single women.

For women who had become used to a climate of sexual freedom, sex and relationships came to be seen as an important element of a university experience. This contributed to a view of the desirability of mixed-sex colleges over women-only ones. Isabella stated that one of the main reasons she wanted to go to a mixed-sex college was because she wanted ‘to meet boys,’ stating that because of her pre-university sexual experiences she ‘couldn’t really imagine going into an all-girls college.’¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Evie commented that while she was at school she and her female friends had ‘had early relationships’ and therefore, for her, being around men was ‘taken for granted as being the norm and therefore you want to replicate the norm.’¹⁴⁵ Other women saw attending a mixed-sex college as desirable because they believed it offered them the opportunities to have the relationships which they desired, but which they felt that they had missed out on by attending girls’ schools. For example, Claire commented that having attended a girls’ school ‘I hadn’t seen any chaps since I started (school) when I was eleven.’ Therefore, when she heard that colleges were going mixed-sex she decided she ‘was going to take the advantage of this situation,’ despite the fact that the headmistress at her girls’ school encouraged her to apply to a women’s college.¹⁴⁶ Jennie, who similarly attended a girls’ school, commented that when

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 48.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Isabella.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Evie, conducted by Florence Smith, in Oxford, 8 September 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Claire, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 August 2020.

she was applying to university she ‘was looking for a boyfriend at the time and I didn’t really want to just be stuck with girls.’¹⁴⁷ While these examples suggest that not all women had been sexually active before attending university, the fact that women pinpoint the single-sex nature of their school, rather than sexual ignorance or lack of interest, as the reason for this suggests they had a similar perception of the desirability and acceptability of these experiences for adolescent women. Thus, women’s desire to have sexual and romantic experiences while at university meant they specifically rejected an all-female institution.

The view that mixed-sex colleges offered women greater opportunities to have sex, and form casual and serious relationships with men, was enhanced by the perception of women’s colleges as being more restrictive, policing and conservative when it came to female sexuality. For example, Georgia said she had the impression that ‘women at the women’s colleges were monitored’ socially as well as academically. She felt the mixed-sex college she attended was ‘far less interventionist I think than one of the women’s colleges.’¹⁴⁸ Indeed, a number of women compared the women’s colleges to institutions where women’s sexuality was restricted. For example, Jessica recalled that one of the women’s colleges that she socialised at ‘felt a bit like a nunnery’¹⁴⁹ and Catherine stated that a mixed-sex college was a more natural space to live in because ‘you can’t be single-sex for your whole life unless you’re a nun.’¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Sandra described a women’s college where she had a second interview as feeling ‘cloistered.’ Sandra emphasised that it was in part due to this feeling that she ‘just couldn’t imagine ... spending three years in that kind of environment.’¹⁵¹

It could be argued that such views of the women’s colleges are to be expected by those who specifically chose to avoid them. However, written recollections of women who did attend women’s colleges in the 1960s and 1970s suggest the degree to which the women’s colleges were interventionist in terms of their students’ sexual activity. For example, Sheila Rowbotham recalled in

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Jennie.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Georgia.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Jessica.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Catherine, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 13 July 2020.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Sandra.

her autobiography how far women's sexuality was policed in women's colleges in the 1960s to a greater extent than for men in the men's colleges. She recalled that one girl who 'was found in bed with her boyfriend in St Hilda's by a don... was kicked out of college, lost her grant and could not get into any other university. He was just sent away from college for two weeks.'¹⁵² Indeed, Dyhouse argues that, 'guest hours ('men's hours') were a constant source of friction' between students and fellows at the women's colleges.¹⁵³ Schwartz argues that by the late-1960s 'the views of the St Hugh's authorities were far behind those of the students' as the women's colleges 'can hardly be said to have embraced the sexual revolution.' Indeed, at St Hugh's it was only following the campaigning of students that 'men's hours' came to be gradually extended.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, as Rayner argues of St Hilda's, by the 1970s, among the students there was 'a growing unrest with the rules which college imposed upon its own undergraduates, in terms of the hours during which they could entertain visitors and the time of their return to college.' However, the college authorities continued to show a reluctance to adjust to the views of their students and 'modification of the rules were won slowly by the JCR, on the basis of an hour each application and as an "experiment".'¹⁵⁵ This suggests that even in the 1970s there continued to be women in positions of authority in the women's colleges who perceived sex as something that was somewhat incompatible with, or threatening to, women achieving educationally, a view which contributed to women students' perception of these colleges as undesirable institutions.

Indeed, for women who had started and developed their student and academic careers before contraception was easily available and before notions regarding female sexuality had liberalised, sex and the heightened risk of pregnancy that came with it were seen as potentially dangerous for women students wishing to gain a degree. As Schwartz argues, from their inception, 'the spectre of sexuality loomed large within the women's colleges' and, while the 'obsession with chaperone rules'¹⁵⁶ may

¹⁵² Rowbotham, *The Promise of a Dream*, p. 187.

¹⁵³ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 128.

¹⁵⁴ Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour*, p. 93.

¹⁵⁵ Rayner, *The Centenary History of St Hilda's College*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁶ Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour*, p. 69.

have transformed into focus on guest hours by the 1970s, the continued existence of such rules suggest that a concern for how women students behaved sexually continued to shape the way the women's colleges viewed and interacted with their students. As Bunkle notes of women-only halls and colleges, 'the rules surrounding women were stricter and more actively policed' and these rules were particularly concerned with 'their social and sexual activities.'¹⁵⁷ This conservative approach to women's sexuality stood in opposition to the outlook of women students in the 1970s and, for women in the 1974 cohort, this divergence in views made the women's colleges seem unattractive environments. In contrast, men's colleges seemed liberating, allowing women to enjoy the same sexual freedom as male students if they wished to.

Some of the women in the 1974 cohort recognised why, in a society where women did not have access to contraception, academic women would have perceived sex and education to be incompatible. Georgia reflected on the extent to which the accessibility of the Pill had enabled her to enjoy both an intellectually and sexually active life, stating that she was not surprised that intellectual women 'went off to be nuns'¹⁵⁸ before the advent of contraception. However, with the reality of highly effective, female controlled contraception, which enabled those women who wanted to to have sexual experiences outside long-term relationships or marriage, without risking pregnancy, these once arguably rational views came to be seen as conservative. Therefore, women and institutions that appeared to promote such views similarly came to be seen as conservative and not offering women the educational experience they desired. Indeed, Mary Evans, recalling her experience at a girls' grammar school from 1956 to 1964, claimed that women of her generation actively chose not to apply to Oxford or Cambridge because 'women's colleges held no attraction for us' because they limited women from forming relationships with men.¹⁵⁹ Considering the extent to which, compared to women of previous generations, women of her generation who came of age in the 1960s came to see sex as a

¹⁵⁷ Bunkle, 'The 1944 Education Act and Second Wave Feminism', p. 801.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Georgia.

¹⁵⁹ Evans, *A Good School*, p. 61.

desirable part of going to university, Evans wrote that ‘here, in a generation, was a major shift in the history of women’s education (and the attitude of women to education).’¹⁶⁰

The sexual freedom that women felt that a mixed-sex college offered them confirmed their view of them as more desirable institutions. Some women suggested that there continued to be rules in mixed-sex colleges that were similar to those in the women’s colleges. For example, Georgia commented that at her college the rule was that ‘all guests must leave college by a certain time.’ However, significantly this rule was not adjusted as the college became co-educational. Therefore, as Georgia noted, while the rules were similar to the women’s colleges ‘they made absolutely no reference to people from within college. So that meant technically, if you were sleeping with somebody from college, you weren’t breaking the rules.’¹⁶¹ This suggests that in some cases it was the specific situation of colleges being co-educational, and men and women living in these colleges together, that enabled women to have the sexual freedom they desired. However, other women suggested that, even if these rules were in place, they were not implemented and did not impinge on women’s lives. For example, Jessica recalled living in a shared double set with another woman in her first year, whose ‘boyfriend moved in’ during the first year and ‘he and her lived in the little bedroom’ despite him not attending the college.¹⁶² Similarly, Claire emphasised the freedom she felt students were given at her college, commenting that ‘you could come and go as you pleased, it wasn’t sort of like locked up - well it was locked up at night, but we all had keys. So it wasn’t strict at all.’¹⁶³ Thus, the fact that mixed-sex colleges did not implement rules concerning overnight guests in the way the women’s colleges did reinforced women’s view of them as more desirable institutions.

Therefore, changing definitions of adult womanhood and of views of how far sex and relationships were a desirable, important part of women students’ university experience contributed to women’s view of the desirability of mixed-sex colleges. This was particularly the case because of a generational

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 59.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Georgia.

¹⁶² Interview with Jessica.

¹⁶³ Interview with Claire.

shift in women's views of the compatibility of sexual and formal educational experiences which meant that the attitudes of the women's colleges did not align with those of potential students. Thus, again it was the co-existence of 'progressive' and 'conservative' attitudes towards female sexuality during the mid-1970s, through which women negotiated their own definitions of womanhood, that contributed to the idealising of mixed-sex institutions over women-only ones.

Conclusion

This chapter offers the first examination of the attitudes and motivations that made women want to attend a formerly male college at Oxford in 1974. It shows that these women came to see these institutions as desirable because they did not want to attend a female-led, female-dominated institution that appeared to encourage women to conform to conservative stereotypes of female social, educational and sexual behaviour. It was the fact that mixed-sex colleges were male-led, male-dominated institutions that appeared to foster an academic and social culture that differed from that associated with girls' schools that made them desirable to the women who entered them in 1974. This provides an important context for understanding the ways in which women interacted with and responded to the male spaces, communities and cultures of their colleges.

Women's view of the desirability of male institutions over female ones was developed in the context of their pre-university familial, educational and social experiences through 1950s, 60s and 70s Britain. This context was one in which women faced competing attitudes towards education, femininity, female sexuality, definitions of womanhood and the intersection between them. On the one hand, women in the cohort formed their views of higher education in the context of the continuation of conservative attitudes to girls' and women's lives, and assumptions that education should reinforce and be structured around these ideals. On the other hand, they experienced their adolescence during a period in which post-war systems of education were gradually being dismantled, traditional definitions of femininity and expectations of women's lives were being challenged, opportunities for women were expanding, and attitudes towards and technology regarding women's sexuality were evolving.

However, significantly, none of these attitudes offered a model of womanhood that was simultaneously educated, intellectually ambitious, sexually liberated and stereotypically feminine. Therefore, women came to associate such stereotypes of femininity with restriction and conservative attitudes to the role of women. It was because the women's colleges appeared to conform to and reinforce these conservative expectations of women's academic and social behaviour that women came to see them as similarly conservative, restrictive and undesirable. For women in the 1974 cohort, liberation from conservative educational and social stereotypes of women and femininity was achieved through emulating stereotypically male experiences and life paths, and through accessing male-led and dominated institutions.

Chapter Three

Women's Experiences in Mixed-Sex Colleges: Spaces

The architectural style and structure of the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford contributed to women's view of these colleges as desirable institutions to attend. However, as physical spaces, these colleges were not fully accommodating of women students. This was because these buildings had been initially designed to be used by male students and limited physical adjustments were made to these colleges when they became mixed-sex institutions. Therefore, the physical space of the first mixed-sex colleges did not fully cater for women's physical needs. Women could face various difficulties living within these spaces that shaped their social and academic lives.

When colleges became mixed-sex, individual male members of college governing bodies made decisions about how women should be accommodated on an ad hoc basis. This meant that the physical adjustments were made in response to gendered assumptions of female requirements rather than a careful consideration of the physical requirements of women.

When interacting with the physical spaces of their colleges the first women developed strategies to deal with the barriers they came across. It was these strategies and the ways that women interacted with the physical spaces of their colleges, rather than proactive thought and action on the part of college governing bodies, that brought about required changes to make colleges more hospitable for women. However, generally, when forming strategies to overcome the physical barriers they faced, women acted as individuals, dealing with issues as they came across them to make their student lives easier rather than taking collective, feminist action to highlight and address the inequalities that women faced while living in mixed-sex colleges.

All of the first mixed-sex colleges had been designed and built to accommodate men. Four of the first five colleges had been established in the medieval and early modern periods, and key elements of their infrastructure were erected across these periods. For example, Brasenose College developed out of Brasenose Hall which occupied the college site from at least 1279, the college absorbing the

original medieval buildings and expanding on them from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Jesus College was initially founded in 1571 and its major buildings were erected in the seventeenth century. Wadham College was similarly established in the seventeenth century, while major elements of Hertford College, then called Hart Hall, were developed from the sixteenth century.¹ However, the structure of these three colleges replicated the characteristic layout and architectural styles of the medieval colleges. Thus, these colleges had been designed and built in a temporal and social context where it was assumed that the students who would be living and studying in them would be men and with reference back to older social and architectural models. As Alan Cobban argues, ‘the undergraduate experience in medieval English universities was intended to be exclusively male,’² and so in their physical nature they were structured and designed to accommodate male life-patterns and a male ‘communal form of living,’ associated with the ‘monastic legacy’ of the colleges.³

In contrast, St Catherine’s College building was designed and built in the early 1960s at a time when it was conceivable that college students might be women. However, having been opened in 1962, for the first decade of its existence the building only had to accommodate men and was originally developed for this purpose. As Dyhouse notes, while there were suggestions that the new St Catherine’s College might be built to accommodate both men and women students, these were ‘quickly dismissed as likely to foment too much controversy.’⁴ In her study of Oxford college architecture Diane Kay notes that the Danish architect of St Catherine’s, Arne Jacobsen, ‘took a selective approach to the Oxford tradition,’ using the pattern of organising college buildings around quads but in such a way that ‘these were not fully enclosed in the traditional manner.’⁵ Therefore, while St Catherine’s was not built fully in the image of the medieval colleges, its design was closer to that of the men’s colleges, which

¹ See John Newnham, ‘The Architectural Setting’, Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume IV: Seventeenth-Century Oxford*, (Oxford, 1997).

² Alan Cobban, *English University Life in the Middle Ages*, (London, 1999), p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴ Carol Dyhouse, ‘Troubled Identities: Gender and Status in the History of the Mixed College in English Universities since 1945’, *Women's History Review*, 12:2, (2003), p. 173.

⁵ Diana Kay, ‘Architecture’, Brian Harrison, (ed) *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 513.

tended to have staircases coming off quads, rather than having corridors connecting rooms in a single building, which, as Kay argues was ‘the norm for women’s colleges.’⁶

Women’s daily experiences of interacting with the physical spaces of formerly male colleges have not been explored extensively by scholars of women’s higher education in Britain. Dyhouse argues that ‘the admission of male students to former women’s colleges provoked, if anything, more elaborate preparations’ than when men’s colleges at Oxford and Cambridge accepted women.⁷ However, she does not offer a close examination of how women lived in and interacted with the physical space of formerly male colleges, focusing to a greater extent on the form that student culture took in these institutions. Sarah Aiston’s study of women who attended Liverpool University from 1947-1979 explores the experiences of women who lived in single-sex halls or lived at home during their studies. Where she comments on the lives of women who lived in mixed-sex halls she argues that the continuation of ‘regulations made life difficult and intolerable’⁸ for women who lived in these institutions but offers no insight into the physical process of these institutions becoming mixed-sex and how far this process was one which led to the establishment of accessible spaces for women students. Similarly, when considering the residential lives of working-class women who attended university in post-war Britain, Bethany White focuses on changes in the rules that were in place in different forms of accommodation, arguing that through the 1960s and 1970s there was a ‘shift towards a relaxation of the rules on residence, but this shift was not decisive, and many rules and regulations remained’ in mixed-sex halls.⁹ In contrast to Aiston and White’s studies, this chapter argues that women’s experiences of the first mixed-sex colleges were shaped as much by the lack of change in the physical structure of institutions as by the rules by which they were run.

⁶ Ibid, p. 506.

⁷ Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History*, (Abingdon, 2006), p. 179.

⁸ Sarah Aiston, ‘The Life Experiences of University-Educated Women: Graduates of the University of Liverpool, 1947-1979’, (PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, 2000), p. 180.

⁹ Bethany White, ‘Working-Class Women’s Experiences of Higher Education in Post-War Britain’, (DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2019), p. 134.

The value of approaching the history of education through the lenses of both social and architectural history has been demonstrated by William Whyte. He argues that British universities developed physically with ‘the notion that a university’s identity could be embodied in its architecture’ and that those who were involved with this development ‘sought to provide buildings which ... gave physical expression to an institution’s ideals.’¹⁰ Therefore, understanding an institution’s architectural history contributes to analysis of the extent to which the essential identity of educational institutions did and did not adapt in preparation for and in response to changes in the demographic of their students.

However, Whyte’s active choice not to focus on Oxbridge colleges means that his valuable approach has yet to be applied to analysis of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford. While Whyte’s history shows some consideration of the way changes in the demographic of the student body in higher education institutions in Britain led to shifts in the physical structure and layout of institutions,¹¹ this does not extend to an analysis of how far elite educational spaces remained primarily ones which catered for male behaviours, or how this impacted on women’s day-to-day experiences of them, limiting the achievement of equality within them. In contrast, through a close examination of women’s day-to-day experiences living in newly mixed-sex colleges, this chapter shows that the physical nature of these colleges continued to reflect and reinforce their essential ‘male’ institutional identity. This chapter uses the idea that an institution’s identity is bound up with its architectural structure to highlight the fact that a lack of change in colleges’ infrastructure limited the extent to which these institutions changed their identity from being essentially male-focused institutions.

The extent to which buildings that were designed by men for men fail to accommodate women’s physical needs has been argued by feminist geographers, urban planners and architects, such as those who formed the feminist design group Matrix in the 1970s. This collective argues that buildings and spaces are designed and developed ‘with a set of ideas about how society works, who does what and

¹⁰ William Whyte, *Redbrick*, (Oxford, 2015), p. 13.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 293.

who goes where.’¹² In the case of formerly male Oxford colleges, the assumption that only men would be accepted into these spaces as academic members of the colleges was therefore expressed materially in their physical structure. These structures were designed to accommodate male students and academics and male life-patterns; they were not only ‘man-made’ but ‘man-focused’ and remained so after the men who ran these institutions decided to admit women.

Approaching the history of women’s entry into elite male institutions through their experiences of space has been utilised by researchers to highlight the various barriers that women face in this process. For example, Karen Ross uses the personal testimonies of female members of the British, Australian and South African parliaments to highlight the difficulties that women faced working in these institutions in the 1990s. She argues that, in their day-to-day working lives, female MPs were conscious of ‘the myriad ways in which life in Parliament is physically difficult for women.’¹³ Ross notes that the lack of extensive and suitable hygiene facilities for women in parliamentary buildings and the style of parliamentary chambers and seating, ‘where the original design only envisaged men’ as members, ‘comprise small but crucial signifiers of the way in which women’s presence in parliamentary-life is “tolerated” rather than embraced.’¹⁴ Ross’s use of personal testimonies of female politicians about their daily experiences at work thus illustrates the complexities involved in women entering elite, male-dominated spaces. This chapter offers the first examination of women’s daily experience of living within the physical space of Oxford’s first mixed-sex colleges. In doing so it contributes further insights into the process of women entering such institutions, indicating the difficulties women faced and the ways they responded to them.

¹² Jos Boys, Frances Bradshaw, Jane Danke et al, ‘Introduction’, Matrix (eds). *Making Space Women and the Man Made Environment*, (London, 1984), p. 1.

¹³ Karen Ross, ‘Women's Place in ‘Male’ Space: Gender and Effect in Parliamentary Contexts’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 55.1, (2002), p. 193.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 194.

Space and the Desirability of the First Mixed-Sex Colleges

The design, physical structure and layout of formerly male colleges was part of what made them appealing to the first women who attended them. This was particularly true of the four older colleges in the group that accepted women in 1974. Women were attracted to the historic design and appearance of the older formerly all-male colleges, seeing this as evidence of the historic academic and social status of these institutions and thus as fully representing the Oxford 'ideal'. Hannah stated that it was in part 'the historical background to the university and the colleges'¹⁵ that motivated her to apply to her college, while Georgia commented that she 'loved all things medieval' and this in part inspired her decision to apply to Oxford and to her chosen college. Georgia also decided to list one of the older colleges of the five mixed-sex colleges as her second choice because it was a 'central, medieval, proper quad college.'¹⁶ Claire similarly stated that the architecture of the college she applied to made her certain that she wanted to go there. She stated that while she was in the college for her interview she was 'enchanted ... by the old quadrangle.'¹⁷ Here the references to college quads emphasise how far the medieval style of the layout of these colleges made them attractive to women.

Those women who attended St Catherine's considered the college buildings and their appearance in complex ways. For some, the fact that the college buildings were not fully representative of the older, medieval style of Oxford colleges made the college less appealing to them. Indeed, these women had not actively chosen to apply to the college. For example, Amy recalled that when she first saw the college, she 'kind of accepted it for what it was, to be honest, I sort of shrugged my shoulders and said, "well, it's not stone built and it's not covered in ivy and it's not got gargoyles and pinnacles".'¹⁸ One woman (participant z), who also did not apply to St Catherine's, described the college as a 'grey sort of place' and stated that 'I did not totally like the look of Catz.' She recalled that this was in part because 'it wasn't my idea of Oxford.' This woman had a tutorial in Magdalen college which, in

¹⁵ Interview with Hannah, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 5 November 2020.

¹⁶ Interview with Georgia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 June 2020.

¹⁷ Interview with Claire, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 August 2020.

¹⁸ Interview with Amy, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 September 2022.

contrast, she described as ‘really pretty’, remembering that these tutorials left her ‘wanting to be in Magdalen’, which at this point was still a male-only college.¹⁹

In contrast, some women actively applied to St Catherine’s because they wanted to live in a modern building that was less associated with the traditional identity and atmosphere of the older Oxford colleges. For example, one woman (participant y) stated that St Catherine’s was the ‘only college I was interested in going to’ because ‘I didn’t actually want to go to Oxford.’ She stated that ‘I didn’t really like the idea of some stuffy Oxford and Cambridge kind of environment’²⁰ and therefore applied to St Catherine’s because she saw it as offering an alternative, less traditional Oxford experience. Similarly, Kristina said that she applied to St Catherine’s specifically because the atmosphere of the college felt ‘more egalitarian’ stating that ‘I’m from a working-class background, and St Catz seemed more welcoming of people from my background than some of the older, rather more stuffy colleges.’ Kristina emphasised how far this atmosphere was in part created by the physical layout and design of the college, stating it was ‘very fresh and modern’ and ‘didn’t feel stuffy, that was the key thing.’²¹

The different attitudes that women who attended St Catherine’s had to the college building emphasises again how far the identities of colleges were seen to be represented in their physical structure.

Furthermore, they suggest how far the identities and traditions of the University were associated with the design, appearance and structure of the older medieval colleges. Some women were somewhat unimpressed with the appearance of St Catherine’s because it did not represent their ‘ideal’ of the University. Other women specifically chose St Catherine’s because architecturally it did not conform to this ideal which they nevertheless associated with the essential character of ‘Oxford’.

¹⁹ Interview with participant z, conducted by Florence Smith, online, date not given to protect participant’s identity.

²⁰ Interview with participant y, conducted by Florence Smith, online, date not given to protect participant’s identity.

²¹ Interview with Kristina, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 28 October 2022.

Women's association of an authentic Oxford college with the layout and style of the older, male-only colleges was emphasised further by their reaction against the physical structure and appearance of the women's colleges. Women drew associations between the spaces of the women's colleges and schools, domesticity, and an old-fashioned form of femininity and therefore saw them as less desirable academic and social institutions, without the status of a tertiary educational space. When interviewing at one of the women's colleges Rosie recalled 'having a bath and there's this massive sort of room of baths with a sort of frosted glass between them so you were having a bath with another woman next to you. It was really weird.' Rosie recalled that, to her, the women's colleges 'felt more immature' and 'girly' stating, just after her description of the bath that 'I kind of got turned off from it.'²² Caroline described the women's college where she had her initial interview as feeling 'quite fusty and fuddy-duddy.' She recalled the domestic atmosphere of the interview, describing sitting in 'one of these sort of armchairs and I sort of disappeared into it so my knees were almost at the same height as my nose.'²³ Eleanor expressed candidly how far the appearance of colleges informed her desire to attend a newly mixed-sex college rather than a women's college. She stated that when she came up to look around the colleges before applying, she 'just fell in love' with the formerly male college she applied to, recalling that 'I looked at the other women's colleges I could have applied for when I thought, why would I want to go to one of those dull, boring colleges...when there's this beautiful looking college' she could attend.²⁴

Howarth argues that, in their physical layout, the women's colleges 'had evolved from school and domestic models.'²⁵ Some women in the 1974 cohort suggested that this domestic appearance and feeling of the women's colleges meant they did not consider them as 'proper' Oxford colleges or see them as sharing in the elite tertiary academic status of the University. For example, while describing the bathroom in the women's college, Rosie stated that 'it was just so sort of like a boarding school.'²⁶

²² Interview with Rosie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 August 2020.

²³ Interview with Caroline, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 July 2020.

²⁴ Interview with Eleanor, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 June 2020.

²⁵ Janet Howarth, 'Women', Brian Harrison (ed) *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 266.

²⁶ Interview with Rosie.

Similarly, Alice, using language that associates the women's colleges with a conservative model of polite femininity, stated that one of the reasons she did not want to go to a woman's college was because 'the ladies' – women's – colleges, in those days were a bit like girls boarding schools. And I didn't want to go to a girls' boarding school, I wanted to go to Oxford.'²⁷ This comment emphasises the association the 1974 cohort could form between the women's colleges, an immature, conservative stereotype of femininity, and a lower status of academic institution. Alice suggested she saw the feminine characteristic of the women's colleges as removing them from her ideal concept of 'the University of Oxford'. For Alice, and other women in the 1974 cohort, this ideal was represented by the male colleges and their architecture, and therefore these institutions were associated with greater academic maturity and a higher status.

Therefore, the physical structure and appearance of colleges was a significant factor that attracted women to formerly male colleges. Similarly, the appearance of the women's colleges and the gender stereotypes that women associated with the style of these colleges, contributed to women's perception of them as undesirable. Women saw the historic buildings of male-only colleges as symbolic of the elite, historic identity of the University generally, and for many women this was something that they wished to share in. For women who saw the older colleges as desirable, it was the physical elements of colleges that were most representative of colleges' male-focused historic identity, that attracted women to them.

Traditional Elements of Colleges Causing Difficulties for Women

However, while traditional elements of colleges may have attracted women to them, these elements of mixed-sex colleges also caused women difficulties while living in these institutions. This was because these elements were those most tied to the colleges' historic identity of being institutions of exclusive communal male use. The restrictions imposed by the University on the first male colleges to accept women, which limited them to only accepting up to one hundred women students between the five

²⁷ Interview with Alice, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 3 August 2020.

colleges, meant that the women who entered these institutions were in the minority. It was in the traditional areas of their colleges, such as in college quads and college dining halls, that women became most aware of their status as a minority.

Many women felt conspicuous when moving around their college and particularly walking across college quads. Rosie recalled that when she first arrived at her college she remembered ‘sort of walking around this quad to get to my room and being quite conscious of eyes looking at me.’²⁸ Similarly, Eloise found it ‘awful’ living in and interacting with the central physical space of her college, feeling very conscious of her sex; she ‘felt like a strange species, you know, in a zoo, every time you walked out of your staircase over to the JCR to buy some milk or something, you felt all these pairs of eyes were watching you.’²⁹ The way colleges utilised spaces around this central structure of quads could also exacerbate women’s feelings of discomfort. For example, Emily commented on how far the use of rooms off the college quad for medical appointments with the college doctor contributed to her feeling of being conspicuous in college. She stated that ‘the doctor used to come to a surgery in college... one of the tutor’s rooms was adopted for the day.’ Emily did not like this system stating ‘I didn’t like the fact that people could see me going to the doctor.’ She reflected that ‘it may be when it was an all-male environment it wasn’t so prominent, such an odd thing to do as soon as the women were in.’³⁰ For these women, the traditional architectural pattern of older colleges, with rooms off staircases that were laid out around quads, and the way in which these spaces were used, emphasised the women’s position as part of a minority group in their college and led to feelings of discomfort.

Despite the fact that it was a modern building, women who attended St Catherine’s College could similarly feel conspicuous in their college. For example, Olivia stated that this feeling was caused by the plate glass windows which students’ rooms had.³¹ Similarly, Maia stated that ‘the architecture of

²⁸ Interview with Rosie.

²⁹ Interview with Eloise, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 3 September 2020.

³⁰ Interview with Emily, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 9 July 2020.

³¹ Interview with Olivia conducted by Florence Smith, online 14 October 2022.

(St Catherine's) made you so visible.' She remembered the 'huge great windows with those rather sort of thin curtains,' stating that 'you knew perfectly well when you were getting undressed at night, if they weren't drawn properly and you faced the quad, probably everybody could see you.'³² Here, the fact that St Catherine's was structured in the tradition of the medieval colleges, with a central quad, but had modern design features exacerbated women's sense of being conspicuous.

The communal spaces around which traditional Oxford college life was structured could also be areas in which women felt conspicuous and uncomfortable. For some women this was how they felt in the Junior Common Rooms (JCRs) of their colleges, which were the central student social areas in Oxford colleges. Amy 'didn't particularly enjoy the JCR. Didn't find that a safe space for me,'³³ while Catherine recalled that she 'didn't go into the JCR until at least Fourth week, it might have been Sixth week,' stating this was because this space was 'unadulterated by any females' and 'was obviously full of young men and, on the whole, they did not want to make eye contact with you.' This made Catherine feel uncomfortable and conscious of her sex and her status as a minority in college. She stated, 'it gave you a glimpse into what minorities feel all over the world.'³⁴

College dining halls could also be areas where women faced difficulties while living in colleges. As Cobban argues, 'Oxford and Cambridge had inherited a remnant of the monastic ethos' which 'found its expression in the communal mode of living prescribed for ... the colleges of both universities.'³⁵ An important feature of this communal form of life was the practice of college members eating together in their college dining halls and attending formal college dinners. While by the 1970s some of the formalities of college life were decreasing – for example Thomas argues that 'ties ceased to be worn at dinner in hall in some colleges'³⁶ – the practice of eating communally in hall itself continued, and does to this day. Bethany suggested that she felt uncomfortable eating in the main dining hall, as

³² Interview with Maia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 8 October 2022.

³³ Interview with Amy.

³⁴ Interview with Catherine, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 13 July 2020.

³⁵ Cobban, *English University Life*, p. 2.

³⁶ Keith Thomas, 'College Life, 1945–1970', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 206.

this traditional form of communal eating made the minority status of the women highly conspicuous. She remembered that when she went ‘into hall to eat, everybody just stopped and looked ...I felt so self-conscious.’³⁷ Similarly, Natasha stated that she ‘found hall utterly terrifying. I never ate in hall. I couldn’t cope with it,’ seeing the male and masculine nature of the space as unappealing.³⁸ For these women, the most traditional physical spaces of their colleges, and the areas most tied to the communal form of living characteristic of these institutions, were where they felt the most uncomfortable. This was because, due to their status as a minority in their colleges, this communal form of living continued to be a male-dominated one.

Material objects that were involved in the traditional patterns of college life could also cause women difficulties living in colleges, particularly when women conformed to stereotypically feminine behaviours. Eating in college dining halls at all of the first five mixed-sex colleges required women to sit on benches which women found difficult to use while they were wearing skirts and dresses.

Catherine recalled that she found eating in hall ‘all weird’ in part because ‘there were benches. You had a skirt on, first problem,’³⁹ suggesting that it was hard to climb over the hall benches to sit down while wearing a skirt. Kristina similarly stated that the benches in her dining hall ‘were not made for women,’ commenting that ‘it was the seventies, we were all wearing full length Laura Ashley dresses, quite big dresses, and getting over a bench in one of those was not easy.’⁴⁰ Claire found that ‘eating in hall was a bit of a problem because we had to wear dresses.’ Claire emphasised that the expectation that women should wear skirts to dinner was reinforced by her college after women had become undergraduate members. She stated that ‘my mum had bought me a pair of culottes that she said, “well, you can wear those, nobody will know it’s not a dress”.’ However, people realised Claire was not wearing a dress and she was told that she ‘couldn’t wear them, I was told they were having none of that.’⁴¹ Therefore the traditional material components of colleges, the systems by which they were

³⁷ Interview with Bethany, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2022.

³⁸ Interview with Natasha, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 September 2022.

³⁹ Interview with Catherine.

⁴⁰ Interview with Kristina.

⁴¹ Interview with Claire.

used, and the continued gendered expectations of women's behaviour at formal occasions in colleges, all worked to make it more difficult for women to exist within these spaces. Furthermore, these factors reinforced the underlying perception that the normative gender identity of a fully accepted member of these colleges was male, as it was this gender identity that colleges were physically most accommodating of.

Women also suggested that men could exploit the furniture in dining halls to make it more difficult for women to eat comfortably. Caroline stated that 'we had a hall where there were three lines of tables and the tables on the outside had bench seating and the only way you could get into the seating on the other side of the table was by climbing over the table.' She stated that male students 'would sit on the benches that were easily accessible to make the women climb over the table to get to the other side of the table.'⁴² Here an already male-focused space was further manipulated by men to assert their ownership of that space and add further barriers to women using that space as easily as them, exacerbating women's discomfort. Ren Pepitone argues, in reference to the experiences of the first women barristers who entered the Inns of Court in Britain from 1919, that, in these institutions, 'the customary use of dining halls, offices, and even lavatories... served as both excuses and devices for marginalizing women.'⁴³ Indeed, in many ways, the physical and social structure of the Inns of Court mirrored that of an Oxford College in that members ate communally in central dining halls. As Pepitone argues, it was through women's exclusion from such central social areas of the Inns, and therefore the rituals of communal dining that happened within them, that 'male members of the legal profession manipulated the built environment and its ties to tradition to maintain resolutely masculine institutions.'⁴⁴ While the first women at Oxford's mixed-sex colleges were permitted to eat with male members of their colleges in dining halls, the ways in which these environments were structured, and

⁴² Interview with Caroline.

⁴³ Ren Pepitone, 'Gender, Space, and Ritual: Women Barristers, the Inns of Court, and the Interwar Press', *Journal of Women's History*, 28.1, (2016), p. 61.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 77.

in some cases, manipulated by male students, could both reinforce the essential masculine identity of these environments and make it harder for women to interact with them.

The extent to which traditional areas and elements of Oxford's first mixed-sex colleges did not accommodate women when they conformed to stereotypes of feminine dress, reflects the way the physical spaces of other elite male institutions have posed difficulties for women who have gained access to them. In her research into women's experiences working in parliamentary buildings, Ross similarly found that women MPs could face difficulties existing in physical spaces that had been designed to accommodate men, particularly while meeting the feminine dress codes that were expected of them. She quotes former UK Labour MP, Fiona Mactaggart, who, commenting on the hard stone floors of Westminster, stated, "“since I've become an MP I wear rubber-soled shoes all the time because this place makes your feet hurt instantly, but women are supposed to [look feminine] and wear heeled shoes with thin leather soles.”"⁴⁵ As Ross argues, in the case of parliamentary buildings 'such things are important because they materially affect the way in which women ... are enabled to do their job by working in uncomfortable surroundings.'⁴⁶ Therefore, the traditional elements and material objects of elite male spaces, which ironically often attracted women to such institutions, could limit women's ability to have equal experiences to the male members of such institutions, particularly where women did not conform to the masculine behaviours of these members. These elements physically reinforced the continued male institutional identity of the first mixed-sex colleges.

Inadequate and Inappropriate Hygiene Facilities for Women

Women also faced physical difficulties living in their colleges as these institutions did not have appropriate or sufficient hygiene facilities to accommodate women's needs. As noted in chapter one, policies regarding the accommodation of women in newly mixed-sex colleges were made on an ad

⁴⁵ Fiona Mactaggart quoted in Karen Ross, 'Women's Place in 'Male' Space: Gender and Effect in Parliamentary Contexts', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 55:1, (2002), p. 194.

⁴⁶ Ross, 'Women's Place in 'Male' Space', p. 194.

hoc basis by male-dominated governing bodies or individual men who made up these bodies. This meant that women's specific requirements regarding hygiene and menstruation were not considered. Women recalled the lack of toilet facilities that were available to them from the point at which colleges started the process of admitting women. Isabella remembered that when she arrived at her college for her interview 'the college wasn't really set up to have these women staying overnight... there was absolutely no toilet with a woman's sign on it.' She emphasised the lack of attention she felt college had paid to the need to make such adjustments for the women, stating 'they just hadn't thought about it' and had not 'changed anything for us.'⁴⁷ Caroline, who attended a different college to Isabella, suggested a similar lack of facilities for women when they arrived in 1974, commenting that 'there weren't many ... toilets for women, that was a bit tricky and there weren't as many showers for women because a lot of the bathrooms and showers were for the men.'⁴⁸ Therefore, a lack of consideration of the physical needs of women on the part of men who implemented co-education in their colleges meant that women's needs were not fully met by the physical space of these institutions. In her study of the experiences of female MPs, Ross similarly argues that, into the late-twentieth century, parliamentary buildings did not provide for women's hygiene needs in a suitably organised, permanent way. As she notes, 'when I visited South Africa in 1999, there were lavatories in parliamentary buildings which still had a hand-written sign on them saying 'ladies'' despite the 'exponential increase' in the numbers of female MPs that had occurred in the five years prior to her visit. As Ross argues, such a lack of permanent change in the physical space of parliamentary buildings to accommodate women's needs, reflects 'real problems in the culture of elite politics which continues to perpetuate the myth that only men are and can be parliamentarians'.⁴⁹ While senior male members of formerly male colleges at Oxford may have wanted to accept women undergraduates, their failure to fully consider women's hygiene requirements suggests how far they continued to be male-focused in the way they considered their student members. The lack of appropriate facilities that were available to women therefore perpetuated the idea that the institutions they had entered were

⁴⁷ Interview with Isabella, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2020.

⁴⁸ Interview with Caroline, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 July 2020.

⁴⁹ Ross, 'Women's Place in 'Male' Space', p. 194.

essentially male ones that women could be members of, if they were willing to navigate around the physical difficulties that such institutions caused them.

When formerly male colleges opened to women, they were also often not set up to meet women's specific physical needs regarding menstruation. For example, Freya recalled critically 'the paucity of hygiene facilities for women' and the lack of 'disposable stuff' at her college, referring to sanitary products and bins.⁵⁰ Evie, who attended a different college, similarly suggested that issues such as 'providing tampons' had not been considered by the college's governing body before the arrival of women.⁵¹ This suggests how far senior male members of colleges failed to consider women's specific physical requirements when they approached preparing for the arrival of women. This lack of consideration meant women's needs were not fully met in newly mixed-sex colleges.

A lack of consideration of the physical adjustments that might be required in preparation for women arriving at a formerly male college could also lead to women feeling a lack of privacy when using the facilities that were available to them. For example, Amy stated that one of the only physical adjustments that St Catherine's made when women entered was that the college 'hung shower curtains over the entrance to the shower, which otherwise would've been completely open to the person visiting the toilet.' She explained that, while women and men lived on separate staircases, there was nothing to stop men, and indeed other women, from entering the shower room while someone was in the shower. Amy recalled the lack of privacy this gave stating, 'somebody could walk into that room and use the toilet in that room.' As she stated, 'strictly speaking, because the women lived on that staircase, it might be thought of as women-only, but the women had men visiting occasionally... so you just didn't know if a man was going to come in, it wasn't an area barred to men.' Amy reflected that 'I don't know how I coped with it.'⁵² As noted in chapter one, the bursar of Wadham College had decided to make few practical adjustments for the women, seeing this as representing equality of treatment. However, women who lived in this college suggested that in expecting women to use the

⁵⁰ Interview with Freya, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 July 2020.

⁵¹ Interview with Evie, conducted by Florence Smith, in Oxford, 8 September 2020.

⁵² Interview with Amy.

communal systems that were already in place in mixed-sex colleges, college authorities put women in a position where they had limited levels of privacy. For example, Jennie recalled that ‘we had mixed bathrooms’ stating ‘I do remember lying in the bath having a conversation with a boy in the next bath. I think all they did was lift the partitions, so they couldn’t get on a chair and peak over.’⁵³ Thus, in specifically not making extensive changes to college systems, those who planned for the arrival of women created a situation in which women’s privacy would be limited. This suggests a lack of awareness of the part of male authorities in formerly male colleges of women’s sensibilities and expectation regarding physical privacy – they incorrectly assumed the women would be appropriately accommodated through using the same systems as the men.

Such systems of communal bathing, which had been established in the context of colleges being male-only spaces, remained in place in other colleges. The continuation of such systems meant that certain facilities and areas of college were not accessible to women without their privacy being compromised. Some women recalled that the only showers in college were in a communal shower room that the men used. Georgia commented that ‘all the baths and showers and laundry facilities for the boys were down in the basement’ meaning that ‘the boys had to walk across (the college quad) to have a shower.’⁵⁴ Catherine similarly described this space as ‘a huge communal underground, kind of rugby oriented bath for twelve people kind of thing.’⁵⁵ Rachel also recalled that when women entered her college ‘the only showers were for the men’⁵⁶ and the women had to use baths that were not in communal areas. This demonstrates that because of a lack of change to the systems by which college facilities were used, which assumed the only people using these systems would be men, women did not have access to the hygiene facilities that men did. Thus, the previous male-only identity of colleges continued to structure the ways in which students lived in these institutions and meant that women could not access them in the same way that men did. This was the case because the men who had prepared their colleges for the arrival of women had not considered how far the male-focused

⁵³ Interview with Jennie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 4 August 2020.

⁵⁴ Interview with Georgia.

⁵⁵ Interview with Catherine, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 13 July 2020.

⁵⁶ Interview with Rachel, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 July 2020.

nature of these institutions would mean that, without adjustment, they would not be fully accommodating of women's physical needs.

Women's Staircases in Mixed-Sex Colleges

The fact that newly mixed-sex colleges were not fully accommodating of women and their physical requirements was acknowledged by colleges in the way they allocated rooms to their first female students. As chapter one showed, the Bursar of Wadham College suggested that he planned to 'scatter' the women around the college. However, women who attended Wadham College suggested that this was not the case. Women from all five colleges were accommodated separately in particular areas of the college sites, often in more modern buildings, because these areas were deemed to meet women's requirements to a greater degree than the historic areas of the colleges. Evie commented that women in her college were placed in 'more modern' areas of the college which had bathrooms close to the rooms so that 'you weren't going to have to walk across the quad to find a bathroom.' Evie emphasised that 'we weren't in the grander historic buildings.'⁵⁷ Georgia stated that her college, which was different to Evie's, 'had to delineate certain staircases as girls' staircases' and 'install bathrooms on the girls' staircases.'⁵⁸ Similarly, Alice, who attended a different college to both Evie and Georgia, commented that women 'had two staircases' which had 'reasonable facilities.'⁵⁹ Sandra, who attended a fourth college, also said that her college 'dedicated two staircases... for the girls.'⁶⁰ Therefore, an awareness that college buildings may not be entirely accommodating of women led to colleges introducing an element of segregation in the way women were housed. In some colleges this led to women not being accommodated in the historic areas of their colleges which had initially attracted women to these institutions.

The extent to which senior members of colleges who were involved in implementing the move to co-education were aware that colleges would not be fully accommodating of women is also suggested by

⁵⁷ Interview with Evie.

⁵⁸ Interview with Georgia.

⁵⁹ Interview with Alice.

⁶⁰ Interview with Sandra, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 October 2022.

a letter written by the Principal of Hertford College to the women before they arrived at this college. Geoffrey Warnock asked the incoming women whether they would rather be ‘grouped together on perhaps two “women’s” staircases or placed more or less at random round the college among other undergraduates.’ Warnock commented that some members of his college governing body were concerned that separating women from ‘other undergraduates’ – significantly using an ungendered term to refer to the men students – would be an ‘undesirable concession to discrimination.’ These comments suggest some awareness of the fact that the way women were accommodated in colleges had implications for the achievement of equality for women within these spaces. Furthermore, the fact that Warnock sent this letter to the first cohort suggests that, at least in one college, there was some attempt to consider how to accommodate women that took into account the women’s own opinions. However, the fact that Warnock also stated in this letter that ‘there would be some pretty obvious practical advantages’ in women being placed in separate staircases emphasises that the college governing body was not fully focused on ensuring the whole physical space of college was suitable to accommodate women students.⁶¹ Indeed, Louise’s comment that Hertford ‘clustered (the women) in different places’⁶² around the college suggests that the governing body at Hertford stuck to the view that it was more practical to accommodate women in specific areas of the colleges.

The fact that college governing bodies decided to accommodate women in separate areas of college rather than ensuring the whole physical space of their colleges was accessible to and hospitable for women meant that, when women did not follow colleges initial system of room allocation in their second year, difficulties arose and women could experience a lack of privacy. In her first year Miriam ‘was on a staircase... in new buildings’ but in her second year she ‘chose to be in old buildings on the ground floor.’ She went on to comment that:

what I possibly didn’t take fully into account was that the loo was downstairs into the basement there and more relevantly the changing rooms for rugby or whatever were also down there. So on a Saturday night or Saturday afternoon or something, it could be a bit loud and you might avoid going down there.⁶³

⁶¹ Geoffrey Warnock, ‘Letter from the Principal’, 4 February 1974, sent to Florence Smith by participant.

⁶² Interview with Louise, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 September 2020.

⁶³ Interview with Miriam, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 26 August 2020.

Here the fact that older parts of Miriam's college remained structured around the assumption of male exclusive use meant that, when she moved away from the accommodation designated for women into these older areas, she experienced a lack of privacy and felt her physical requirements were not fully met. Kristina moved out of her women-only staircase at the end of her first year and lived with another woman in rooms on another staircase over the summer as she stayed at college. Kristina and her friend 'liked the rooms we were in so we went along to the (college) office and said, "Could we stay in those rooms?"' The college agreed and so Kristina stayed in this staircase for her second year. However, this staircase was allocated as a 'men's' staircase so when term started Kristina and her friend were joined by two men. The fact that college had initially accommodated men and women separately meant that individual staircases had not been suitably adjusted to be mixed-sex residences offering appropriate levels of privacy. As Kristina commented 'we didn't have shower curtains, and we didn't have locks on our door.'⁶⁴ Thus, the fact colleges had approached becoming a mixed-sex college by accommodating women separately from men, rather than making adjustments to the entire college building and system, meant that when women, on their own initiative and due to their own preferences, decided not to follow this system, they faced difficulties. This demonstrates that the physical spaces of colleges as a whole were not fully accommodating of a mixed-sex cohort.

Changes that Colleges Did Make and Gendered Perceptions of Women Students

The physical adjustments that colleges did make for the arrival of women were based on gendered assumptions of the requirements of female students and how these differed from those of male students. The primary objects that colleges added to rooms for the first women students were mirrors. Women from four of the first five colleges suggested this was the case. Rosie spoke of 'the mirrors' that had been put into her room, stating that 'straightaway the person who had my room previously said "Oh they put that in, I didn't have this".'⁶⁵ Eleanor, who attended a different college to Rosie, similarly recalled that 'we all had a full-length mirror in our rooms which the men didn't' stating that

⁶⁴ Interview with Kristina.

⁶⁵ Interview with Rosie.

she perceived the college had assumed ‘that women would want full length mirrors.’⁶⁶ Women emphasised that these physical adjustments were the only things that were organised especially for the incoming women students. For example, Amy, who attended a different college to both Rosie and Eleanor, stated that there were ‘absolutely zero’ arrangements made particularly for the women, apart from ‘a long mirror in the bathroom. I think that was our welfare.’⁶⁷ This suggests that in preparing the physical space of college for the arrival of women, the male members of college governing bodies thought of women students primarily in terms of gendered stereotypes of feminine behaviour and concern for appearance. Furthermore, the fact that such objects were only provided to the women suggests they also perceived their male students in terms of normative codes of masculine behaviour and sensibilities. Significantly, women suggested that when the male students saw that women had mirrors, they felt envious. Eleanor remembered that men at her college would come to women’s rooms and ‘they’d sit there preening themselves in front of the mirror.’⁶⁸ Similarly, in a written account of the first year of women at St Catherine’s College, Harriet Sargent wrote that after women arrived ‘the male students promptly said that they wanted shower curtains and full-length mirrors too.’⁶⁹ This shows that colleges perceived both men and women students in terms of two distinct gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity and expressed this view in the way they accommodated their students. Therefore, while they may have accepted women as members of their colleges, in some ways they continued to see them as a group that was distinct from their male student members.

Colleges made other physical adjustments that reflected gendered stereotypes of feminine behaviour and sensibilities. Rosie remembered the ‘flowery curtains’ that had been put in her room, again recalling a male student saying they had not been there the year before. Rosie also mentioned that her college ‘put an ironing room upstairs for us.’⁷⁰ Indeed, at the time colleges were preparing for the

⁶⁶ Interview with Eleanor.

⁶⁷ Interview with Amy.

⁶⁸ Interview with Eleanor.

⁶⁹ Harriet Sargent, ‘Women in College—The First Intake,’ in Roger Ainsworth and Clare Howell (eds), *St. Catherine’s, Oxford: A Pen Portrait*, (London, 2012), p. 172.

⁷⁰ Interview with Rosie.

arrival of women the Bursar of St Catherine's told a reporter that 'there has been a gentle feminisation' of the college space while also commenting that, as at Rosie's college, 'an ironing room' had been installed for the arrival of women.⁷¹ This again demonstrates how far, in the way they approached physically preparing their colleges for the arrival of women, male members involved in this process saw differences between men and women students primarily in terms of stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. However, as earlier sections have demonstrated, they did not consider the actual different physical needs that women would have on account of their sexual difference to male students. Thus, the physical spaces of mixed-sex colleges were on the one hand not fully accommodating of women's physical requirements and could lead to women facing difficulties while living within them. On the other hand, the adjustments that college governing bodies did make to the physical space of their colleges demonstrate that senior members of these communities saw women students in terms of a stereotypically feminine gender identity that was distinct from the male identity associated with the male students that colleges had been established to cater for.

Women's Reactions to the Physical Difficulties they Faced

When faced with living within institutions that had not been designed or built to accommodate women students, and that had not been suitably adjusted to do so by the men who made the decision that their colleges should become co-educational, women developed personal strategies to make their undergraduate experience more easy. Some women found solutions by leaving the physical space of their colleges. Eloise left her accommodation at her college part way through her first year, stating 'from that point on ... I had very little to do with the college.' The way the women had been accommodated in her college was a major factor in this decision; she described living in college as 'awful'.⁷² Bethany, who was at a different college, also stopped living in college part way through her first year and also found this experience 'really pretty awful'.⁷³ For Bethany it was her sense of being

⁷¹ Tony Gye quoted in 'More Mirrors to Welcome the Ladies', *Oxford Times*, 4 October 1974, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archive, UR6/W/12, File Four.

⁷² Interview with Eloise.

⁷³ Interview with Bethany, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2022.

conspicuous within areas of college as well as the way members of college communities reacted to her that motivated her decision. Thus, a lack of suitable preparation for women, and a feeling that their needs were not met by their colleges, made some women feel the need to remove and disassociate themselves from these institutions. In taking such action women individually dealt with the challenges they personally faced. However, such individual strategies meant that, because colleges were not proactive in considering the needs of women, the issues that caused women such difficulties remained.

When women found that their physical needs were not accommodated by colleges, but still wanted to be part of their colleges and live within them, they developed personal strategies for meeting their needs. For example, when she was unable to find a women's toilet during her college interview Isabella 'went out of the college building and found a public toilet... so I just used that at night before I went to bed and then the next morning as well' just before her interview. Here the fact that her college was not prepared for women to stay in the college meant she faced extra barriers when preparing for her interview that potential male students would not have faced. Despite the lack of facilities for women, Isabella still decided to attend and live in this college, describing the incident as just a 'funny thing' about her interview experience.⁷⁴ When Kristina moved into a male staircase where privacy was limited she and her roommates 'just made up our own system, if we wanted to take a shower, we'd put a note on the door saying, "shower in use".'⁷⁵ Therefore, where systems established by colleges failed to fully accommodate women suitably it was through women's own individual planning and action that they ensured their needs were met. Significantly, in these cases, women did not see such issues as necessitating them to approach their college authorities, and such issues did not affect their desire to attend and remain living within their colleges.

It was only when women interacted with the physical spaces of their colleges and took action which demonstrated the ways that these spaces did not accommodate their needs, that senior members of

⁷⁴ Interview with Isabella.

⁷⁵ Interview with Kristina.

colleges made more effective and suitable changes to college sites. Rachel found that her college did not provide adequate showers for the women. Therefore, one day she ‘went down into the (men’s communal shower area) and said, “no I’ve got to come in because I’ve got to wash my hair and I can’t wash it properly in the bath”.’ Rachel emphasised that ‘very quickly after that they installed showers for girls.’⁷⁶ Thus, by using the communal hygiene facilities in the way that men in her college were able to, Rachel made her college recognise the fact that this system did not work in a mixed-sex college without students’ privacy being compromised. Dyhouse similarly suggests that women academics in co-educational universities in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century highlighted the ways in which their needs were not met by the physical spaces of their institutions through interacting with these spaces. She notes that when women at University College London were ‘given a “long narrow strip of a room”’ when they requested a common room, they ‘devised their own ruse to demonstrate the room’s inadequacies’ – inviting the Provost of the university to a social event to demonstrate that the room was too small for such occasions.⁷⁷ Such strategies brought about the change these women desired, indicating how far it was the way women physically responded to ‘mixed-sex’ universities and colleges that brought about effective change in the way these institutions accommodated women.

Other women who entered the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford suggested they brought about the physical changes they required by going directly to their college authorities. Freya recalled that when the women at her college realised the authorities had not made suitable arrangements for women’s menstruation needs it was the women who ‘had to educate the bursar’⁷⁸ on the need for the college to provide sanitary products and resources. Similarly, Maia stated that when the women found ‘there were no locks on the shower rooms, there were no shower curtains,’ a group of women eventually ‘went to the bursar’ to ask for such items to be added to women’s accommodation. The bursar at Maia’s college responded positively to this request and ‘that was all immediately done.’⁷⁹ However,

⁷⁶ Interview with Rachel.

⁷⁷ Carol Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex? Women In British Universities 1870-1939*, (London, 1995), p. 152.

⁷⁸ Interview with Freya.

⁷⁹ Interview with Maia

the onus had been on the women to approach members of their college governing body with such requests and it was only when they did so that changes that made colleges more hospitable for women were introduced. This indicates the fact that, because those who had made the decisions for colleges to accept women were men, who had previously only had to think about accommodating men in their institutions, women's specific needs had not been considered. As Maia suggested, there were not locks or shower curtains in bathrooms 'because men never wanted them' or at least had never suggested to college that they did.⁸⁰ Therefore, again it was the actions of the first women students, rather than those of the men who implemented the scheme to create the first mixed-sex colleges, that made these institutions more accommodating of women.

However, as the above examples suggest, where women went to college authorities it was in response to specific issues that they faced in their day-to-day lives rather than in terms of a collective feminist analysis of the way colleges viewed their first women students or the way they had gone about preparing college buildings for the arrival of women. Evie emphasised that issues at her college were not approached in terms of collective feminist concern among the women; 'issues about anything from, should the college be providing tampons to, are there ways of teaching and examining which would be more supportive for women... those things weren't discussed at all ... just because nobody really thought about it.' Evie felt that the women in her college 'just got on with whatever there was.'⁸¹ Indeed, Freya who had been among the women who called for sanitary products at her college commented that, while she had attended some feminist consciousness-raising groups she 'lost patience with it' because of her view that it was focused on the 'dissing of men.'⁸² Therefore, either women did not see it as necessary to challenge the way colleges responded to their first female intake, or when women did call for greater physical change in colleges to ensure women's physical needs were met, they did not associate this with collective feminist sentiment or a feminist critique of the way the men who ran these colleges responded to women joining their colleges.

⁸⁰ Interview with Maia.

⁸¹ Interview with Evie.

⁸² Interview with Freya.

While women emphasised that they had to make requests of colleges for certain physical adjustments to be made to make women feel more comfortable, they suggested that, in responding to women's requests, colleges were doing what they could to accommodate the first year of women. Caroline felt that the men who ran her college 'couldn't have been better at trying to make us feel welcomed'⁸³ seeing the quick response of her college to the women's requests for particular items in their rooms as evidence of this. Maia similarly stated that she felt her college 'were so anxious the experiment should succeed and that we should be happy'⁸⁴ and saw their swift response to women requesting shower curtains and locks on the doors as evidence of her college's commitment to making the 'experiment' work. These women did not see the fact that they had to raise issues with college authorities as representing the failure of colleges to effectively cater for women students. Where issues did arise women faced and overcame difficulties as they met them as individuals, and not in terms of a collective critique of the way in which colleges approached becoming a mixed-sex institution.

Conclusion

The women who were the first to enter newly mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 were partly attracted to these institutions because of their appearance and physical structure. However, as physical spaces the first mixed-sex colleges were not fully accommodating of women students. These spaces had been designed and built to serve the needs of men and it was the male governing bodies of these institutions that ran the process of them transforming into mixed-sex residential, social and academic institutions. These governing bodies showed a lack of consideration of the physical adjustments that would need to be made to the male focused spaces of colleges, and to the systems by which these spaces were used, in order to accommodate the physical needs of women. Where changes had been made, they reflected gendered assumptions of the needs of female students and how these differed from those of male students. Furthermore, where colleges did show awareness that their existing structures and systems would not accommodate women students fully or suitably, their focus was on

⁸³ Interview with Caroline.

⁸⁴ Interview with Maia

placing women students in particular areas of the college building in separation from male students. Therefore, where colleges did see their first women students in separation from their male students it was in terms of gendered stereotypes of the differences between male and female sensibilities and requirements, rather than in terms of an effective consideration of the sexual difference between men and women and their different physical needs. Furthermore, where there was an awareness that women's physical needs might not be fully catered for, college governing bodies focused on accommodating women in a way that did not necessitate extensive structural or systematic change to their colleges. A desire to accept women did not override a desire to preserve the traditional elements of colleges, that were tied to their historic identity of being male-only institutions. This meant women faced various difficulties living in these institutions, particularly when interacting with these older or more traditional spaces and elements of their colleges, despite the fact that often these were what attracted women to these institutions in the first place.

Therefore, women developed individual strategies to deal with the physical difficulties they faced while living in mixed-sex colleges. For some, these strategies involved them in removing themselves temporarily or permanently from college sites, for others they involved interacting with spaces in college or with college authorities in order to bring about greater physical change in their colleges for the benefit of women students. Where productive physical change came about in mixed-sex colleges it was the result of women's actions or requests rather than the policies or decisions of college governing bodies. Therefore, it was the women in the first cohort to attend these institutions, rather than the men who had decided to open their colleges to women, that made them more accommodating of a mixed-sex cohort

However, when women negotiated physical barriers and difficulties in their colleges they did so in a reactive, individual way. When they came across difficulties, they personally responded to them in order to make their student experience easier. This process did not involve collective, feminist discussions or action directed at addressing the general issue of colleges not effectively considering the physical needs of women students, and the attitude to women students that this reflected.

Furthermore, an awareness of the difficulties they faced did not lead to women forming a negative evaluation of the way colleges went about responding to the first cohort of women. Through responding to the issues they faced on an individual basis to bring about the specific changes they required in their daily lives, most women felt able to continue to participate in the male spaces, communities and cultures of which they had wanted to be members.

Chapter Four

Women's Experiences in Mixed-Sex Colleges: Communities

When they entered previously male-only colleges in 1974, women entered existing communities run largely by men, for the academic and non-academic needs of male students. As Keith Thomas notes, colleges were 'male societies'¹ that had been organised and structured around the understanding that their junior members would be exclusively men. In their official response to the first cohort of women, authorities in college communities focused on ignoring women's sex and treating them as they did male students. However, not all individual members of academic and non-academic staff who made up these committees were welcoming of women students and many responded to the first female cohort in discriminatory ways. This caused women difficulties while living and learning in the first mixed-sex colleges and could have a significant impact on their social and academic experience.

Women responded to such treatment in various ways. However, as with other difficulties they faced as members of mixed-sex colleges, their focus was on finding individual strategies to overcome barriers in order to improve their experiences of being a member of these communities. Again, women did not approach the discrimination they faced in terms of a collective feminist critique of the wider inequalities of which such treatment was symptomatic. Such a response enabled most women to continue to participate as members of the male-led institutions that they had desired to attend.

Previous accounts of Oxford's move to mixed-sex colleges that consider how women were treated by members of college communities have suggested that women faced few if any difficulties. Laurence Brockliss argues that when the first colleges decided to accept women 'the transition went as smoothly as could be expected, and for the most part the newcomers were welcomed.'² While in a later study Brockliss concedes that 'some of the first women in the old men's colleges were met with hostility and subjected to unwanted sexual attention' from male students, he nonetheless concludes

¹ Keith Thomas, 'College Life, 1945–1970', Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century, History of the University of Oxford*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 209.

² Laurence Brockliss, *The University of Oxford: A History*, (Oxford, 2016), p. 573.

that ‘by and large... women were made welcome’ by college communities.³ Weiss Malkiel describes the process of women entering mixed-sex college societies as ‘in many ways anticlimactic’⁴ and suggests that the first women students were unproblematically accepted by senior members of college communities. Using official college records and interviews with senior college members who were involved in implementing co-education into their colleges, she argues that soon after women arrived at college those who had been against the admission of women ‘either kept their counsel or admitted that they had been mistaken,’ suggesting that ‘there is no evidence of fellows and tutors treating women students as any less able and serious than men.’⁵ Unlike Brockliss and Weiss Malkiel, this chapter uses the personal testimonies of women who entered newly mixed-sex colleges to explore how the first female members of these institutions were treated by the academic and non-academic staff who were associated with these institutions. In doing so it demonstrates that Weiss Malkiel’s claim that ‘there are no sources that capture sexist behavior’⁶ on the part of members of the communities of mixed-sex colleges reflects her methodological choice to use archival sources rather than the reality of women’s experiences. While accounts of such behaviour may not be present in official records of women’s arrival at mixed-sex colleges, they are evidenced in women’s personal recollections of their experiences. These accounts indicate that not all members of these societies were welcoming of women and therefore women did face sexism while living and learning in the first mixed-sex colleges. Such treatment had the potential to shape women’s academic and social experience in their colleges and necessitated them developing personal strategies to navigate the difficulties they faced.

A growing body of literature focusing on women’s experiences of higher education in Britain during periods of increased participation by women through the twentieth century has considered how far women faced discrimination whilst at co-educational universities. However, generally historians focus

³ Laurence Brockliss, *The University of Oxford: A Brief History*, (Oxford, 2018), p. 133.

⁴ Nancy Weiss Malkiel, “Keep the Damned Women Out” *The Struggle for Coeducation*, (Princeton, 2016), p. 581.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 587.

⁶ *Ibid.*

on the sexism women faced from their male peers rather than from academic and non-academic staff at colleges and universities. For example, Dyhouse notes that when a greater number of Cambridge colleges decided to admit women in the late-1970s there were ‘last ditch displays of masculinity’⁷ from male students in these institutions to protest against the move. However, she does not examine women’s experiences interacting with the academic and non-academic staff that ran these institutions. Sarah Aiston similarly focuses on the negative way that male students reacted to women students in her assessment of how sex shaped the experiences of female students at Liverpool University. She argues that from the late-1940s to the late-1970s women students were depicted in terms of various derogatory stereotypes in the student press.⁸ However, when considering women’s academic experience with staff, Aiston argues that ‘women were generally very positive in regard to their coeducational academic experience, with only a minority of the respondents emphasising problems with male staff.’⁹ Therefore, this chapter makes a significant contribution to the history of women’s experiences of higher education in the 1970s by indicating that women could face discrimination from those that ran and led elite educational institutions as well as from their male peers. An institution’s decision to become ‘mixed-sex’ did not guarantee that the members of staff that made up these institutions were welcoming of women students or willing to respond to them in a non-discriminatory way. However, this was not considered by those in Oxford’s first mixed-sex colleges who wanted to accept women. Therefore, women’s experiences in seemingly ‘progressive’ institutions could involve them facing difficulties on account of the conservative, sexist attitudes of some of the individuals that ran or worked within these institutions.

⁷ Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History*, (Abingdon, 2006), p. 179.

⁸ Sarah Aiston, ‘The Life Experiences of University-Educated Women: Graduates of the University of Liverpool, 1947-1979’, (PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, 2000), pp. 65-103.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 162.

The Official Response of Colleges

In the way colleges officially responded to the first cohort of women little attention was paid to their sex or how this differentiated them from male students and there was little ceremony to mark the change in the student demographic of colleges. Evie noted that at the first formal dinner at her college after the arrival of women the ‘head of the college ... obviously welcomed everybody and he did a very shrewd thing which was not to mention the presence of women.’¹⁰ Thomas argues that heads of college ‘symbolized the college in the public eye’ but in some cases also ‘decisively shaped the character of the college.’¹¹ Thus, Evie’s recollection suggests that, in their official approach to the introduction of women, colleges wanted to appear to not acknowledge women’s sex and how this differentiated them from male students. Louise, who attended a different college to Evie, similarly remembered that ‘there was none of this stuff “we’d like to announce that we now have... ladies,” nothing’, recalling that ‘it was just a case of we turned up and were there and we were at college.’¹² Catherine similarly said that ‘I don’t think there was any formal welcome to women’¹³ at her college, while Harriet reflected that the arrival of women ‘was just treated as normal’ and was therefore not given any ceremony.¹⁴ Georgia also noted that ‘nobody came running up to you and said, “how wonderful to have a woman here”’.¹⁵ Therefore, in their official response to their first female cohort, colleges avoided emphasising a perception of sexual difference between men and women students.

Women could see this treatment as representing their acceptance into these institutions on equal terms to their male peers. For example, Evie thought that the approach of the head of her college was a good way to deal with the arrival of women, stating that she and her female peers thought it was ‘actually good because instead of saying, “look well done, women, women,” he just said, “you are... freshers, you know, you’ve got here... welcome”’.¹⁶ Similarly, Georgia interpreted the lack of occasion with

¹⁰ Interview with Evie, conducted by Florence Smith, in Oxford, 8 September 2020.

¹¹ Keith Thomas, *College Life, 1945–1970*, in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 199.

¹² Interview with Louise, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 September 2020.

¹³ Interview with Catherine, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 13 July 2020.

¹⁴ Interview with Harriet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 24 July 2020.

¹⁵ Interview with Georgia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 June 2020.

¹⁶ Interview with Evie.

which the first women were greeted at her college as making her feel that ‘you were just a college member, and that was that. You were just a person.’¹⁷ Therefore, women could see a lack of consideration of their sex in the way college formally responded to them as representing their college’s view of them as having equal status with the male students in mixed-sex colleges.

Nothing Different Prepared for the Women

A lack of consideration of sexual difference between men and women students was also present in the way college communities prepared for the incoming women. Women suggested that no arrangements, beyond those discussed in the previous chapter, were made in the ways these communities were run. For example, Rosie stated that ‘nothing at all’¹⁸ had been organised at her college for the women specifically. Harriet commented that she felt the authorities at her college ‘were focused on integrating and so they were focusing on similarity not difference’¹⁹ and therefore the college did not make extensive adjustments for the incoming women. Louise similarly emphasised that her college ‘made no changes for us.’²⁰ Therefore, after the arrival of women, mixed-sex colleges continued to run as they had done when these institutions had been male-only.

Women could feel that this lack of change in the way their colleges were run in response to the arrival of women was also a good thing that represented their entrance into their colleges on equal terms to the men. Georgia reflected that ‘I was never aware of being specifically treated as a woman rather than as a person’, seeing the lack of extra consideration paid to the women as a good thing.²¹ Catherine reflected that ‘what I wanted was to be treated like everybody else, I wanted to be treated like the men.’²² Lucy, recalling the lack of anything that was specifically organised for the incoming women, reflected that ‘I didn’t see myself as being particularly female, I was just another student’²³

¹⁷ Interview with Georgia.

¹⁸ Interview with Rosie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 August 2020.

¹⁹ Interview with Harriet.

²⁰ Interview with Louise.

²¹ Interview with Georgia.

²² Interview with Caroline, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 July 2020.

²³ Interview with Lucy, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 June 2020.

and stated that, even if there had been things organised specifically for women ‘I wouldn’t really have fastened on to it.’²⁴ As demonstrated in chapter two, women in this cohort had specifically wanted to attend male-dominated and led colleges because they did not identify with a stereotypical feminine identity and did not want to live or be treated in terms of this identity. Many women who came up to mixed-sex colleges in 1974 saw these institutions as desirable in part because they believed the way these colleges treated their male students was preferable to the way women were treated by the women’s colleges. Therefore, they welcomed a lack of consideration of women in separation from male students in the way their college community responded to them.

However, the fact that colleges did not make substantial adjustments for women could also be seen as representing the failure of these institutions to consider the implications of being a mixed-sex college. When describing the lack of arrangements that were made for women, Louise commented on the process of women entering her college as one where women ‘just kind of sneaked in there without anyone noticing.’²⁵ Here Louise’s use of the term ‘sneaked’ suggests a view of her college as not being fully proactive in the way they accepted women, and therefore not approaching this process in a way that acknowledged, and thought about the implications of, a change in the student body of her institution. Claire, who reflected that ‘they behaved as much as possible as if it was an entirely natural and normal thing for girls to go there,’ felt her college responded in this way because ‘they assumed there weren’t going to be any problems.’²⁶ This suggests that colleges considered that providing access for female students was enough to create accessible communities in which women would be treated equally. As the rest of the chapter will show this was not the case and women faced difficulties and discrimination when interacting with various members of their college communities.

²⁴ Interview with Lucy.

²⁵ Interview with Louise.

²⁶ Interview with Claire, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 August 2020.

Women's Experiences with College Doctors

While the examples above suggest women felt that they were easily accepted into mixed-sex college communities, examination of their day-to-day interactions with individuals in these communities indicates the various issues that women could face as members of mixed-sex colleges. While women felt they were treated as equals in the way colleges officially responded to them, seeing a lack of consideration of their sex as a good thing, many found that individuals in colleges, or the processes by which colleges communities worked, were not accommodating of the needs of women.

A lack of consideration of how college services, and individuals associated with colleges, would have to adapt to the incoming women was demonstrated by women's interactions with college medical staff. Oxford colleges provided health services to their students through specified GPs who were associated with these institutions. A number of women were highly critical of the way their college doctors treated them and reacted to gynaecological and sexual health issues. Women suggested that college doctors could be either unable or unprepared to respond to women's health issues, or they responded to women in conservative, gendered terms when it came to the provision of sexual health services. Rosie recalled that 'I stopped having my periods' while at college and therefore went to see her college doctor, stating 'he was a bit sort of, "Oh"', expressing the final word in a nonchalant tone. Rosie reflected that 'I could sense this wasn't something he dealt with very much.'²⁷ Emily, who attended a different college, found the college doctor not 'particularly sympathetic to women' recalling that 'I do remember having cystitis quite badly and going to see him. And I said, "I wonder if you could give me something"... he said, "have you had it before?" And I said, "yes." And he said, "well, now you've got it again."' Emily reinforced the significance with which she regarded this episode, stating 'see, look, I've remembered that after years. (He was) very dismissive.'²⁸ For Freya, her poor experience with her college doctor had a serious impact on her health and subsequently her academic progress. Freya recalled that she 'had a coil (put in) and the college doctor put it in wrongly

²⁷ Interview with Rosie.

²⁸ Interview with Emily, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 9 July 2020.

and somehow blamed me for it. But it was a result of that one way or another that I wound up in hospital.²⁹ This incident resulted in Freya being severely ill for her first term and thus losing the exhibition (a financial scholarship awarded to students by colleges) she had won, because of her understandably diminished academic performance. This shows that professionals associated with college communities, who had been used to only having to deal with male students, were not always suitable for a mixed-sex cohort and this had not been addressed by college authorities before colleges accepted women. This had the potential to significantly impact women's student experience.

When faced with such a lack of appropriate healthcare provision, women formed their own strategies to ensure their healthcare needs were met. Harriet remembered that when she approached her college doctor with a women's health issue he was 'not very helpful,' describing him as 'not very intelligent on the subject of women's health.' She therefore signed up to another GP surgery in the city that was known to 'cater for women' and 'were much more sympathetic.'³⁰ This suggests that there were medical professionals and organisations in the city that had a progressive approach to women's health. However, the accounts of women suggest that professionals connected to male-only colleges lacked this approach and therefore were unable or unwilling to effectively or suitably adjust to the presence of female students in the colleges they were connected to. While the examples of women using other healthcare providers suggest that they were not dependent on their college doctors, the fact that colleges had this system in place meant college doctors represented an initial point of contact with the health service for students; as Harriet commented 'he wasn't somebody that you would choose to go to, but he was the college doctor.'³¹

As noted previously, by 1974 Family Planning services had been brought under the remit of the NHS and GPs were a point of call for women to obtain free contraception. However, women at newly mixed-sex colleges could find the doctors associated with their colleges were unhelpful when it came to providing them with contraception, responding to women students in paternalistic, conservative,

²⁹ Interview with Freya, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 July 2020.

³⁰ Interview with Harriet.

³¹ Ibid.

gendered terms when it came to offering Family Planning advice. Rachel stated that when she went to the college doctor to get contraception ‘he obviously felt I should be waiting for a long-term relationship and marriage.’³² While the doctor did not refuse to provide Rachel with contraception, her comment suggests how far college doctors continued to respond to women in terms of conservative attitudes to women’s sexuality. Emily commented that ‘I had to go to my own doctor at home’ for contraception as she ‘felt strange’ going to her college doctor for such matters; she reflected ‘it’s conceivable that he was brought into a situation of having to treat women in the college, who he didn’t really feel particularly sympathetic towards.’³³ Thus, the fact that medical staff connected to newly mixed-sex colleges were not always comfortable offering women students the sexual health service they wanted, in a sympathetic manner, meant women’s needs were not fully met by mixed-sex college communities. When faced with these difficulties women developed individual strategies to meet their needs so they could access the level of sexual health services they required while continuing to be a member of their college.

To some extent, this could be seen simply as a reflection of the general continued conservatism of some male medical professionals to women’s sexuality and matters connected with sexual health. However, other micro-histories of women’s experiences of higher education during the period suggest that there were some universities and colleges where the doctors associated with them were willing to offer more progressive sexual health services and advice to their women students. For example, in her oral history study of women who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, Lynn Abrams found that, when one of her respondents fell pregnant while at university, ‘the university doctor told her that she could have an abortion – this was 1967, shortly after legalization of abortion in the same year.’³⁴ Similarly, Laura Schwartz has argued that at St Hugh’s College Oxford, ‘the college doctor began providing contraceptive advice in 1966.’³⁵ While Schwartz does not indicate how far this advice was delivered

³² Interview with Rachel, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 July 2020.

³³ Interview with Emily.

³⁴ Lynn Abrams, ‘Mothers and Daughters: Negotiating the Discourse on the ‘Good Woman’ in 1950s and 1960s Britain’, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (ed), *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*, (Toronto, 2013), p. 71.

³⁵ Laura Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour*, (London, 2011), p. 93.

in terms of a progressive attitude towards women's sexuality, these examples nonetheless suggest that there was at least some understanding within higher educational institutions in the 1960s and 1970s, including at women's colleges at Oxford, that the provision of gynaecological advice to women students would fall under their remit. Furthermore, in her study of motherhood in England from 1945-2000 Angela Davis argues that the city of Oxford had an 'advanced position in relation to birth control,' its first birth control clinic having been set up in 1935. As Davis points out, Oxford's progressive approach to birth control is suggested further through a comparison to nearby town Reading where 'the first clinic was set up in 1966.'³⁶ This suggests further that there were medical professionals in the city who had a more progressive approach to the provision of gynaecological services and advice. However, the newly mixed-sex colleges did not all ensure that the medical professionals connected with them shared this progressive approach to women's health and sexual health.

Women who attended one college found their college doctor was more willing to provide advice on contraception. However, they found that this advice was presented in a way that reinforced gendered ideas about women's responsibility for ensuring safe sex. As Jayne recalled on one occasion at the start of the women's first term, 'all the men were asked to withdraw and the women were given a pep talk by the doctor'³⁷ about contraception. Evie similarly remembered this event stating, 'they have various people who speak to you about various aspects of college life. And towards the end, there's a doctor attached to the college who then said various things, and then said, "if the gentleman would like to leave the room, I think we'd like to talk about contraception."³⁸ The women who remembered this event were generally critical of it. Jayne described it as 'absolutely outrageous' and a 'faux pas' in the way her college approached the introduction of women, questioning 'why should it be only the women' who have to think about contraception.'³⁹ Evie, who, as noted above, thought it was a good thing that her college made no official comment about the presence of women, believed that this

³⁶ Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, 1945-2000*, (Manchester, 2012), p. 8.

³⁷ Interview with Jayne, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 October 2020.

³⁸ Interview with Evie.

³⁹ Interview with Jayne.

approach was ‘blown by the college doctor,’⁴⁰ as he emphasised women’s separation from male students through physically dividing the cohort and suggesting they had different responsibilities in the practice of safe sex.

When colleges decided to accept women, those who were against the scheme of co-education used women’s sexuality, and the potential negative consequences of women’s sexual activity, in their opposition to colleges opening to women. For example, in an article in the *Daily Telegraph* published in March 1972 Marguerite Alexander wrote that a fellow of Balliol College ‘Maurice Keen voiced a view which perhaps more academics hold than will admit to: “one would like to think that the scheme will collapse in a rush of illegitimate babies and nervous break downs”.’⁴¹ Indeed, women in the first cohort suggested they felt this was a concern of colleges when they accepted women. For example, reflecting on the reason why her college doctor gave the women a talk on contraception, Jayne commented that ‘the college was obviously terrified... that we would become pregnant.’⁴² Similarly, reflecting on how her college had approached becoming a mixed-sex college, Catherine commented that ‘I think that the governing body had thought “what if these women that we’re asking into our college get hysterical or get pregnant.”’⁴³ Therefore, in providing women with contraceptive advice in conservative or gendered terms which either promoted chastity or put the burden for ensuring safe sex on the women, college communities reinforced the view that the ‘success’ of the scheme of co-education depended on women’s behaviour and actions rather than on men’s. It was female promiscuity and inattention to sexual safety rather than men’s that was seen as dangerous for the progress of co-education, and therefore it was women who had to be encouraged to take precautions. Therefore, women could face difficulties within mixed-sex college communities, in terms of healthcare, because medical professionals connected to colleges were not able or willing to

⁴⁰ Interview with Evie.

⁴¹ Marguerite Alexander, ‘Oxford’s October Revolution’, *Telegraph*, 3 February 1974, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Four.

⁴² Interview with Jayne.

⁴³ Interview with Catherine.

accommodate the needs of women students in a way that did not fall back on conservative or gendered assumptions about women's sexuality.

Male Academics as Figures of Welfare Support

The welfare support that was offered to students in mixed-sex colleges could also cause women difficulties in their colleges because, as a result of the way co-education was introduced into Oxford, this support was delivered to women by male academic staff. As noted previously, at the time women entered the first mixed-sex colleges in 1974, four of the five colleges had a senior fellowship that was exclusively male. Thomas argues that 'in the 1960s the University's Handbook declared that there was no formal student counselling service in Oxford because the tutorial system made it unnecessary.' He argues that the assumption was that students could turn to 'sympathetic fellows' in moments of crisis.⁴⁴ As noted in chapter two, by 1974, colleges no longer legally stood *in loco parentis* for their students and therefore there was no legal obligation for colleges to provide welfare support for their students. However, colleges offered a degree of formal support to their students in the figure of the 'moral tutor'.

Some women recalled having some interactions with moral tutors, generally suggesting that the extent of the support they offered was limited. Caroline remembered that when she met her moral tutor for the first time 'he said, "I've never had women as a moral tutee before and I don't expect to see you again".' Following this interaction Caroline 'never went to see him again.'⁴⁵ Rachel recalled that she found the way this welfare system was presented to students uncomfortable stating that, 'I think I had somebody called a moral tutor whose very title would have kept me away from him.'⁴⁶ Thus, the support system provided by mixed-sex colleges was one structured around the idea that male fellows would offer support to male students. Women suggested that the continuation of this system, and the fact that the fellowship of mixed-sex colleges remained male-dominated, meant they felt unsupported

⁴⁴ Thomas, 'College Life', p. 201.

⁴⁵ Interview with Caroline.

⁴⁶ Interview with Rachel.

by college communities when they did face difficulties. As Caroline reflected ‘of course we didn’t have female tutors’⁴⁷ so therefore, in a system in which tutors acted as a point of welfare support for students there was not a female welfare presence within mixed-sex colleges.

When faced with a lack of effective female-led or focused welfare support in their colleges women developed their own systems to deal with problems that they faced at colleges which were based on women finding other women to support them. Rosie reflected that, due to the lack of a female-focused welfare presence in her college, ‘if I’d really wanted help I’d probably have gone to somebody like the college secretary.’⁴⁸ Similarly, Violet remembered the wife of the head of her college ‘did make herself available to the women’ to offer them support.⁴⁹ Ava, who experienced serious menstrual complications during her studies and found her first year at college difficult, turned to her mother as a key figure of support; she stated ‘I would ring up my poor mother’ and ‘sob’ to her as ‘there was nobody else’⁵⁰ in her college who she could talk to about such issues. This suggests that when women faced difficulties in their colleges, particularly those specific to their experiences as women, they felt uncatered for by the support systems that were in place and therefore established their own individual systems which enabled them to address issues while remaining a member of their colleges.

The importance of female networks for women who entered elite male-dominated institutions through the twentieth century has been underlined by scholars who have studied the process of women entering and gaining positions within such environments. Dyhouse argues that at the beginning of the twentieth century informal networks and ‘women’s groups’ were ‘important’ for providing women academics in universities in Britain with ‘social and academic support’⁵¹ when faced with working in male-dominated environments. Exploring women’s experiences of entering international parliaments as MPs, Karen Ross argues that ‘the support of women colleagues, semi-formally through friendships or mentoring programmes’ have been important to enabling women to ‘survive ... in the male ordered

⁴⁷ Interview with Caroline

⁴⁸ Interview with Rosie.

⁴⁹ Interview with Violet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 October 2020.

⁵⁰ Interview with Ava, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 October 2020.

⁵¹ Carol Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities 1870-1939*, (London, 1995), p. 167.

world of parliamentary politics.’⁵² Similarly, Helen Glew argues that as the numbers of women Civil Servants and women MPs increased through the first half of the twentieth century, networks between women civil servants, women MPs and feminist organisations became important for ‘raising awareness of the disadvantages that women civil servants faced’⁵³ and creating positive change. As Glew emphasises, such networks were important to both groups of women as both were a ‘minority gender in their respective professions.’⁵⁴ In contrast, while the first women at mixed-sex colleges at Oxford may have relied on other women for support when facing difficulties, these individual strategies did not at this time evolve into a collective women’s network that aimed to bring about positive change for women as a group in mixed-sex colleges. As the above examples suggest, women generally turned to other individual women they could access for support rather than establishing women’s or feminist groups. Therefore, while women at mixed-sex colleges could see the value of women’s support in moments of crisis, such strategies were adopted to help them individually deal with difficulties they faced and build resilience rather than address the inequalities that women generally faced on account of their sex.

Indeed, while some women suggested they found it hard to cope while they were students and experienced periods of poor mental health, they did not feel at the time that their colleges should have done more to support them. For example, Louise experienced depression in her third year, describing this point of her student experience as ‘a terrible time’ and emphasising the lack of support offered by her college; ‘no handholding, you know. No, like, guiding us through things. They just drop you in there and sink or swim.’ However, Louise also commented that ‘it would never have occurred to me to expect that sort of special treatment at all,’⁵⁵ particularly in relation to welfare support or support for women’s health issues. Similarly, Laura, who was at a different college, commented that ‘there was no real sort of watching out for people... but I didn’t expect it either.’⁵⁶ Therefore, while women could be

⁵² Karen Ross, ‘Women's Place in ‘Male’ Space: Gender and Effect in Parliamentary Contexts,’ *Parliamentary Affairs* 55:1 (2002) p. 197.

⁵³ Helen Glew, ‘In a Minority in Male Spaces: The Networks, Relationships and Collaborations Between Women MPs and Women Civil Servants, 1919–1955,’ *Open Library of Humanities*, 6:2, (2020), p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Interview with Louise.

⁵⁶ Interview with Laura, conducted by Florence Smith, online 8 June 2022.

aware of the lack of support offered by their college, and could face difficulties through their student experience, this did not develop into a criticism of the way colleges dealt with their students or a call for them to make adjustments to their welfare systems.

The question of whether women students required support that was different to male students is a complex one and has been present throughout the history of women's education. Dyhouse points out that in the late-nineteenth century 'Lady Tutors,'⁵⁷ who were responsible for the welfare of women students at British universities, were seen as necessary because university authorities 'felt that women needed special protection and chaperonage that could only be discharged by a woman.'⁵⁸ Here, the extra provision provided for women students stemmed from sexist paternalistic views. Indeed, it is arguable that it is a sexist assumption that women would require greater support than male students. However, the accounts of women in the 1974 cohort illustrate how far colleges' systems and practices were structured on the assumption that their student members would be men. The fact that these systems remained in place and the fact that the senior membership of colleges remained male, a result of the process through which mixed-sex colleges were introduced at Oxford, meant that women who did desire female-led support felt unsupported by the formal systems in place in their colleges and by the individuals who were meant to discharge welfare support. This meant that women faced difficulties as members of these institutions. When reflecting on her college experience and the menstrual health issues she faced as a student, Ava commented that 'a nice woman who I could sort of feel at ease with would have been helpful.'⁵⁹ Therefore, some women felt their college experience was made harder by a lack of female-led and focused welfare and health support.

⁵⁷ Carol Dyhouse, *No Distinctions of Sex? Women in British Universities 1870-1939*, (Abingdon, 2016), pp. 65-66.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 59.

⁵⁹ Interview with Ava, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 October 2020.

Women's Experiences with Male Academic Tutors

The style of teaching at Oxford was, and still is, based on students meeting individual academics alone or in small groups. As Thomas argues, even in all-male colleges, 'the success of the system depended very much upon the personalities involved.'⁶⁰ When women entered what had been all-male colleges, the 'success' of the system in these colleges came to also depend on how individual academics in colleges responded to women. Not all academics in mixed-sex colleges were welcoming of women students. Indeed, as noted previously only a two thirds majority vote of college governing bodies was required for a college to become mixed-sex. Therefore, women faced various difficulties in their academic experience of mixed-sex colleges. Women from across all five colleges recalled having tutors that they found difficult to work with. For many, their student experience involved them in dealing with various forms of sexism, as their personal tutors and other fellows in their colleges responded to them in terms of their sex and gendered stereotypes of femininity.

Some women felt this response reflected tutors' gendered attitudes towards young women and their sexual difference from the young men they were used to teaching. For example, Isabella recalled that in one of her interviews at her college, one of the male interviewing tutors 'would ask a question and the other one would say, "do you think it's suitable to ask a young woman that?"'⁶¹ This suggests individual tutors saw potential female members of their college primarily in terms of their identity as 'young women' and not primarily as potential students with whom they could have an open intellectual discussion. At her interview at a different college, Bethany 'felt like I was being assessed for charm rather than academic potential,' suggesting she did not feel it to be a thorough academic interview. Bethany stated that being treated like this 'undermined my confidence' as she felt she had got there 'on false pretences.'⁶² Similarly, Sandra stated that she felt her tutors 'were slightly more chivalrous' with their female students. Sandra suggested this could also affect the way her tutors'

⁶⁰ Thomas, 'College Life', p. 197.

⁶¹ Interview with Isabella, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2020.

⁶² Interview with Bethany, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2022

taught women, stating she felt ‘they were harder on the boys than they were on the girls.’⁶³ Therefore, tutors’ prioritisation of women’s sex, and their gendered perception that women should be approached with a different level of politeness and of intellectual rigour to male students, meant some women felt they were treated differently to male students.

Women’s academic experience in their colleges could also involve tutors sexualising their women students. Sophie remembered there was one tutor that she was a ‘bit uncertain about’ because she felt that ‘he did seem to fancy ... the other woman who was coming into the tutorials’ and would flirt with her in tutorials.⁶⁴ One woman (participant x) in the cohort recalled a serious incident of sexual harassment she experienced while in a tutorial with her college tutor; ‘I had tutorials with (a tutor) on my own. The tutorials were given at a room in the college which, I suppose, must have been his office. During the course of one tutorial, he had his hands down the inside front of his trousers... At the end of the tutorial, he got up from his armchair, went over to the sink... and washed his hands.’⁶⁵ This episode demonstrates an extreme example of the misogyny and abuse that the first female students could face while learning within the first mixed-sex colleges.

The discriminatory treatment women received from academic tutors could shape their academic experiences. Ava said that she thought one of her tutors ‘found the whole idea of women somewhat challenging.’ She reflected that ‘eye contact (was) not his thing... I think it was partly because we were a different creature.’ Ava said that her tutor’s awkwardness affected her academic experience, stating ‘I didn’t feel that I was going to learn much from him.’ This meant that Ava decided not to continue with this tutor’s subject, despite preferring it to the other subjects that made up her degree; she stated that ‘he was the reason I didn’t pursue (that subject). And I regret that.’⁶⁶ Similarly, after her initial academic interview Isabella thought ‘I don’t want to do (that subject) anymore’ because the tutor was ‘so off-putting’. The tutor’s treatment of Isabella made her think ‘I really didn’t want to be

⁶³ Interview with Sandra, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 October 2022.

⁶⁴ Interview with Sophie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 September 2022.

⁶⁵ Email from participant x to Florence Smith, 20 January 2021.

⁶⁶ Interview with Ava.

taught by (that tutor), so when I left that interview, I actually went to somebody or other and said I want to change my application.’ She was able to do so and was offered a place on a different degree programme. When asked how she felt about having to change her degree subject Isabella stated, after a long pause, ‘I had wanted to do (her original subject). That was what I had applied for.’⁶⁷ Thus women’s poor experiences with tutors could determine their academic experience. However, again, women dealt with issues they faced by developing individual strategies to navigate around them in order to continue to study in the mixed-sex college they had applied to, even if that meant not studying the subjects they wished to.

While some women dealt with poor tutors by changing their degree subjects, others simply ignored the discrimination they faced and continued to study the subjects they wished to. For example, participant x recalled that, following the incident of sexual harassment noted above, ‘it did not occur to me to mention it to anyone, not from shyness or fear, but just because I didn’t think about it.’⁶⁸ Similarly, Sophie stated that ‘although I found it very hard’ that her tutor sexualised her tutorial partner she ‘was quite motivated, so didn’t let that affect my academic performance.’⁶⁹ Violet stated that her tutor ‘was not good at dealing with women at all,’ describing his awkwardness when interacting with women students; he would ‘curl up in his armchair and he’d end up more and more curled up during the course of a tutorial. But I think he curled up rather more tightly when dealing with women than men.’⁷⁰ Indeed while it is possible that these tutors were equally awkward with male students, the fact that women specifically see this behaviour in terms of tutors’ responses to having to teach women suggests the women felt their sex was significant in these interactions. As Angela Davis comments, one of the uses of an oral history methodology is that it offers insight into interviewees ‘thoughts and feelings through the subjectivity of their accounts.’⁷¹ Therefore, women’s personal interpretation of such interactions is revealing of their analysis of how far their sex was influential on

⁶⁷ Interview with Isabella.

⁶⁸ Email from participant x to Florence Smith, 20 January 2021.

⁶⁹ Interview with Sophie.

⁷⁰ Interview with Violet.

⁷¹ Davis, *Modern Motherhood*, p. 6.

their experiences as a student at a mixed-sex college. Violet stated that when faced with her tutor's awkwardness she 'just thought it was funny'⁷² and did not see it as something that needed to be addressed. Therefore, while some women dealt with discriminatory behaviour by avoiding certain tutors, others dealt with it by ignoring it, laughing at it, and remaining self-motivated. However, in all cases, women dealt with negative experiences with tutors through developing individual strategies which enabled them to proceed with their academic experience, rather than by raising issues with college authorities, on either an individual or a collective basis.

Whether women faced difficulties in their academic experience at their college depended on the personalities of the individual tutors who taught them. Other factors such as which subject they studied seemed to be less significant, as women who took a range of degrees experienced difficulties with their tutors. Women suggested that tutors who were awkward when dealing with women tended to be older fellows who were more rooted in systems of single-sex education. When recalling negative experiences of one tutor, Emily described him as 'very old school.'⁷³ Similar language was used by other women when they described tutors who they found difficult to work with. For example, Jennie described the tutor she disliked as 'an older guy', commenting that 'you've got to remember that they had never seen a girl in tutorials before – they were just totally unused to it.'⁷⁴ Similarly, when describing the tutors who interviewed her and put her off studying the subject she had originally applied for, Isabella stated that 'they seemed very old to me with grey hair.'⁷⁵ This suggests women faced most difficulties with tutors of an older generation, who were more used to working within male-only educational systems. However, this correlation was not evident when it came to women who felt their tutors sexualised women students. Indeed, some women suggested younger dons in colleges formed sexual and romantic relationships with their female students, although, as the next

⁷² Interview with Violet.

⁷³ Interview with Emily.

⁷⁴ Interview with Jennie.

⁷⁵ Interview with Isabella.

chapter will show, women did not necessarily see such relationships as representing an abuse of power on the part of tutors.⁷⁶

Where tutors were welcoming of women and supportive of their colleges becoming mixed-sex institutions, women could have positive experiences of the way their tutors interacted with them. For example, Catherine stated that she ‘really loved’ large parts of her degree and that one of her tutors was a very supportive teacher; ‘he really wanted you to understand what you were reading and what you were trying to say... you came (out) just thinking I have properly learned more than I did when I went in.’ Catherine felt that her tutor was such a positive figure in her academic experience because he ‘was a very keen proponent of the mixed college therefore I think he was also keen to be sympathetic to us.’⁷⁷ Emily described two of her tutors as ‘exceptional academics, exceptional communicators’ and stated that ‘they were very, very accessible.’ Emily stated the tutors she liked ‘would only have been thirty, thirty-one with young families’ stating that one of them ‘certainly had a very strong social conscience,’⁷⁸ again suggesting women’s positive academic experiences were linked to the background and personal outlook of their tutors. Similarly, Freya stated that ‘my tutors were lovely’ and that she ‘loved’ the academic side of her college experience, emphasising that being taught by her main tutor ‘is one of the gifts of my life.’⁷⁹ Amy similarly stated that ‘I cannot praise (her tutor) highly enough for his support, his welcoming, the way he could talk to us, to me in particular, he expected great things of me. He told me that.’⁸⁰ However, the fact that not all members of newly mixed-sex colleges were welcoming of women in this way meant that many did face difficulties in their academic experiences in the first mixed-sex colleges. As Bethany commented, ‘I’d assumed, really naively, that because the college wanted to go co-ed, that everybody wanted to, and they definitely didn’t.’⁸¹ It was this inconsistency, and the fact that it was not addressed by senior members of

⁷⁶ Interview with Evie.

⁷⁷ Interview with Catherine.

⁷⁸ Interview with Emily.

⁷⁹ Interview with Freya.

⁸⁰ Interview with Amy, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 September 2022.

⁸¹ Interview with Bethany.

colleges before they accepted women, that meant many of the first female cohort in these colleges faced discrimination from academics in these communities.

Women's Interactions with the Wider Community of Staff of Mixed-Sex Colleges

The extent to which women felt welcome in their colleges could also be shaped by their interactions with the wider community of academic and non-academic staff that ran the colleges. Members of the wider academic community of their colleges could also make women feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in the first mixed-sex colleges. Georgia noted that 'I was aware that some of the older dons ... had a much more kind of slightly stiff, formal attitude to the whole thing. And you got the impression that they didn't quite know how to deal with it.'⁸² Bethany found the way one senior member of her college reacted to her disturbing, remembering a time when she 'had been out all night' with her boyfriend and then 'coming back into college in the early morning and (the senior member of college) seeing me come into the quad and looking at me with an expression of utter disgust and saying, "I know what you've been doing".' Bethany reflected that this incident made her feel 'so sort of put down and humiliated,' stating, 'that really made me think I need to get out actually.'⁸³ Bethany moved out of the college at the end of her first term. This suggests that the negative ways that academics of mixed-sex colleges responded to the arrival of women had the potential to shape women's experience of living in mixed-sex colleges as well as their academic experience.

Domestic members of staff, such as "scouts" who performed duties such as cleaning students' rooms, of the first mixed-sex colleges could also be unwelcoming of the first women students. College domestic staff were also an important part of college communities who, as Laura Schwartz argues, were, and continue to be, 'essential to the smooth running and therefore ultimate success of the college.'⁸⁴ By the 1970s the role of domestic staff in college had altered, with the relationship between

⁸² Interview with Georgia.

⁸³ Interview with Bethany.

⁸⁴ Laura Schwartz, *A Serious Endeavour*, p. 110.

domestic staff and undergraduates evolving from one of ‘a young gentleman with his personal servant’⁸⁵ to one where staff provided contracted domestic services to members of college. However, as Thomas argues, college domestic staff could have a life-long connection to their colleges and the older staff particularly ‘were usually stern supporters of traditional ways,’ even in the second half of the twentieth century.⁸⁶ While members of domestic staff had a central role in the running of colleges they did not sit on governing bodies and therefore had not been involved in the decision for male colleges to accept women. Women suggested they felt some members of domestic staff found it difficult to adjust to the presence of women in their colleges. For example, Rosie found that ‘some of them didn’t engage’ while other staff suggested their preference for looking after a male cohort. She stated that her scout ‘certainly liked the young men and would talk about the men last year sort of thing.’⁸⁷ Sandra similarly stated that some male scouts in her college ‘were notoriously anti the women.’ She stated that they ‘made us feel quite unwanted and unwelcome in the college.’⁸⁸ Similarly, Harriet stated that she thought ‘one or two of the older male scouts’ found it hard to adjust to there being women in the college. She commented that she felt one of her scouts, who was ‘in his sixties’ and had been working at the college for the majority of his life, ‘found it slightly strange because he’d got women on his top floor.’⁸⁹ Indeed, an article in *The Times*, looking back on the introduction of women at Brasenose College, reported that ‘problems came from the college cleaners’ noting that one alumna ‘said “the scouts were very worried about us coming. Some were welcoming but some could be quite surly too.”’⁹⁰ Therefore, non-academic members of college communities, particularly older staff who were used to only having to take care of the needs of undergraduate men, could make women feel less welcome in the first mixed-sex colleges. This re-emphasises that the official decision of colleges to accept women did not mean that all members of these communities were willing to accept women or to treat them as equals to the male students.

⁸⁵ Thomas, ‘College Life’, p. 208.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 136.

⁸⁷ Interview with Rosie.

⁸⁸ Interview with Sandra.

⁸⁹ Interview with Harriet.

⁹⁰ ‘Oxford’s Sexual Revolution Pays Off’, *The Times*, 4 October 1999.

The way domestic staff could make women feel unwelcome in colleges could reflect their discomfort at the implications that the arrival of women students had on the gender and class hierarchies that structured college communities, and which these communities reinforced. Before the introduction of women into formerly male colleges, the domestic staff in these colleges were there to care for and serve young undergraduate men. This system had developed from, and itself reinforced, traditional hierarchies which structured British society, where the day-to-day domestic needs of a male social elite were carried out either by men of a lower social class, or by women.⁹¹ When women entered colleges as students for the first time, they disrupted this system and forced a reconsideration of the intersecting gender and class-based hierarchies which structured college communities. Some women in the 1974 cohort suggested that this disruption caused female members of college domestic staff to react negatively to the first female students. Catherine reflected that she felt that the female domestic staff disliked the presence of women in the college. She commented that the ‘ladies who dispensed coffee and toast (in the Junior Common Room) weren’t very keen to see us’ and that she got the sense that her female scout ‘really disapproved of us being there.’ Catherine went on to state that both she and her room-mate ‘got the very strong impression that (the female scout thought that) as we were girls, we should be tidying up after ourselves, and you know, what was she doing coming in and cleaning for us.’⁹² Similarly, in her account of her experience as one of the first women at Churchill College Cambridge in 1973, Judy Holyer commented on the role that ‘bedders’, the equivalent to the Oxford scout, had in the college. She stated that the bedders, who were all female, ‘preferred to look after the young men; mothering them, washing up cups and clearing up if there had been a party’ reflecting that ‘the college may have gone mixed but the bedders seemed to think that women should do their own cleaning.’⁹³ Thus, when women entered mixed-sex colleges they entered communities that were structured around gender and class-based hierarchies. The fact that women’s presence in

⁹¹ Paul Raymond Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920*, (Bloomington, 2005), p. 45.

⁹² Interview with Catherine.

⁹³ Judy Holyer, *A Maze of Twisty Passages The Life of a Student in 1970s Cambridge and What Came Next*, (2019), p. 12.

these institutions disturbed this system led to them experiencing negative reactions from some members of the domestic staff and feeling not fully welcomed by their college communities.

Male Student Identities of Mixed-Sex Colleges

After women entered the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, the normative undergraduate identity associated with these institutions often continued to be gendered as male. This had implications for the extent to which the first women student members of these institutions felt they were welcomed into these communities as women.

The male student identity of newly mixed-sex colleges could be reinforced by the way members of these communities addressed the first cohort of women. Caroline recalled that ‘we were treated like men’ remembering that ‘we were always called “chap” or “sir”’ by the domestic staff who worked in her college. She stated that ‘they didn’t quite know what to call us ...the boys were all called “sir” and so ‘that was the way they coped with it.’⁹⁴ Similarly, in a report on the introduction of mixed-sex colleges published in the *Times Educational Supplement* on 25 October 1974, Ian Bradley reported that ‘the new female arrivals at Hertford have been slightly alarmed by scouts coming in to wake them in the mornings with a cheery “Good morning, sir.”’⁹⁵ Thus, some members of mixed-sex college communities were unwilling or found it difficult to adjust to or acknowledge the presence of women in their institutions and therefore conflated women with a male student identity.

This could also occur through a lack of adjustment to college processes in response to the arrival of women. Rachel remembered that, when she first arrived at her college ‘there (was) a strip of plastic saying the name of the person in such and such a room.’ On this sign Rachel’s name was preceded by the title ‘Miss’ and followed by the title ‘Esquire.’⁹⁶ Indeed, similarly, as reported in an article reflecting on the first year of women at Brasenose College, ‘for months college letters to the new

⁹⁴ Interview with Caroline.

⁹⁵ Ian Bradley, ‘Women Breach Oxford Defences’, *Times Educational Supplement*, 24 October 1974, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Four.

⁹⁶ Interview with Rachel.

women carried “Esq.” after their names.⁹⁷ This indicates a lack of consideration on the part of those that ran the colleges of how far, and in what minute detail, the processes by which their institutions were run were based around the assumption of male exclusivity. A lack of change in these systems prior to the arrival of women meant that women could be addressed in terms of a male student identity.

The way the first mixed-sex colleges were perceived by others inside and outside the University similarly suggests they continued to be seen as male communities. As Anna noted, even after the admission of women, the colleges ‘were always referred to as men’s colleges, not as mixed colleges, because that’s how people thought of them.’ Indeed, she recalled that, when she had got her degree and was preparing to leave her college she ‘got this exclusive invite to go and join a men-only club’ that had been sent to her college. As Anna stated, the club ‘had always sent the letters to (her college)’⁹⁸ and had not considered that the fact that the college had accepted women would require either a change in process or a change in the restrictions of membership of the club. Therefore, while women became members of their college communities, their presence within them did not change people’s perception of these communities as being exclusively male.

However, when women were referred to as men by members of their colleges or in communications from external bodies, they did not see it as a major problem or as something that demonstrated their college’s failure to fully accept women students into their communities. While Caroline said that she found being called ‘sir’ by the domestic staff in her college ‘a bit strange,’ she did not see it as a major issue stating that she ‘felt very comfortable’ in her college and such issues just ‘worked (their) way out.’⁹⁹ Similarly, Anna stated that receiving an invitation to join a male club ‘was a matter to laugh about rather than make a fuss about really.’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ ‘Oxford’s Sexual Revolution Pays Off’, *The Times*, 4 October 1999.

⁹⁸ Interview with Anna, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 10 September 2020.

⁹⁹ Interview with Caroline.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Anna.

Women could also see college processes which elided them with a male student identity as a positive representation of the way women were accepted into their colleges and they welcomed being associated with a male student identity. Rachel thought that the combination of ‘Miss’ and ‘Esquire’ on her room tag ‘summed up... beautifully the transition,’¹⁰¹ suggesting that her college approached the process of admitting women well. Indeed, women who attended the first mixed-sex colleges at Cambridge could be active in associating themselves with the male student identity of their colleges. In her account of her arrival at the newly mixed-sex Cambridge college Churchill in autumn 1973, Judy Holyer wrote that when she was ordering the official group photo of her matriculating year, she noticed that some were labelled as ‘Churchill College Freshmen’ and others labelled ‘Churchill College Freshers’. She stated that ‘the women were expected to opt for the Freshers version’ emphasising that ‘I did not. I was proud to be a Churchill College Freshman.’¹⁰² Such sentiments are important in demonstrating the ideology and attitudes towards equality with which many of the women in the 1974 cohort approached being a member of a mixed-sex institution. It suggests that to some extent women could interpret their full acceptance into mixed-sex colleges in terms of their elision with the pre-existing, normative ‘male’ student identity of these communities. In being treated or referred to as male students, women felt they were being treated as equals within the male-dominated, led and focused institutions they wished to attend.

In other studies of women’s entry into elite male societies researchers have similarly found that women can actively embrace the male identity associated with membership of these societies, seeing this as enabling them to succeed within them. In her study of the initial entry of women law students into the Inns of Court in the 1920s, Ren Pepitone argues that ‘female law students and barristers understood that their best chance of success at the bar was to de-emphasize their gender’ and therefore embraced the characteristics of the male barristers that dominated these institutions.¹⁰³ Similarly, Jane Danke argues, of women architects in the mid-twentieth century, that advancement in the profession

¹⁰¹ Interview with Rachel.

¹⁰² Judy Holyer, *A Maze of Twisty Passages*, p. 13.

¹⁰³ Ren Pepitone, ‘Gender, Space, and Ritual: Women Barristers, the Inns of Court, and the Interwar Press.’ *Journal of Women’s History*, 28.1, (2016) pp. 73-74

and acceptance into elite communities of architects such as the Royal Institute of British Architects involved women in conforming to male practices and approaches. As Danke argues, in architecture ‘the norm is a male, middle-class one,’ and the pressure is on women to conform to this ‘norm’ and ‘not on men to adopt qualities socially defined as feminine.’¹⁰⁴ Margherita Rendel also argued in 1982 that this kind of process was common to women’s entry into elite male societies, arguing that ‘those women who are very exceptional may be accepted into the male establishment. Such a woman becomes as it were male by adoption.’¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the process of women becoming part of the communities of Oxford’s first mixed-sex colleges, and the way in which women responded to these processes by embracing an identity of ‘honorary man’, reflects the wider complexities that have been involved in women entering elite male institutions throughout the twentieth century and beyond. While women had gained access to these institutions, the communities remained essentially male in their identity.

Conclusion

While the governing bodies of the first five Oxford colleges to become mixed-sex had decided to open their institutions to women, there were many members of these communities who were unable and unwilling to welcome women students or accept them as members of their institutions. This meant that women faced various difficulties when interacting with academic and non-academic staff in the first mixed-sex colleges. The discrimination and poor treatment that some women faced had the potential to significantly affect their social and academic experience. This indicates that previous accounts of the introduction of mixed-sex colleges are incorrect in their assessment that women faced few if any difficulties from members of staff of these institutions.

The dynamics of the first mixed-sex colleges were structured around the assumption that their undergraduate members would be male. The detailed ramifications of this fact were not suitably

¹⁰⁴ Jane Danke, ‘Women, Architects and Feminism’, Matrix Organisation (ed), *Making Space: Women in the Man Made Environment*, (London, 1984) p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ Margherita Rendel, quoted in Danke, ‘Women, Architects and Feminism’, p. 18.

addressed before women entered these colleges in 1974. This, coupled with the fact that the senior membership of the first mixed-sex colleges remained male-dominated, meant that women could feel unsupported when facing difficulties during their studies. Furthermore, the continued assumption that the normative student identity of these institutions was male, meant that women's presence in the first mixed-sex colleges was not always fully acknowledged. These institutions did not just remain numerically male-dominated but to some extent continued to be perceived as male institutions.

Women responded to the treatment they received from members of college communities in various ways. While some women saw their college's lack of regard of women's sexual difference to men as a good thing, representing equality of treatment, for others a lack of change in preparation for women students caused them difficulties. However, when women experienced difficulties, they developed individual strategies to improve their undergraduate experience. Furthermore, for the majority, these strategies were focused on enabling women to continue to be part of the institutions that they had been accepted into. In some cases, these strategies involved women in forming their own female support network which helped them deal with difficulties they faced. However, again, women used their personal network to deal with the particular issues they faced as individuals, rather than developing a collective feminist voice to address the general problems and inequalities that women overall faced in mixed-sex colleges. For this cohort their focus was on being resilient to or unaffected by sexism, discrimination or difficulties rather than raising such issues with their college authorities. Similarly, generally women showed a lack of concern when they were elided with a male student identity. Indeed, for some, this represented their full acceptance into the male communities that they had wished to be a part of. Therefore, women could both face difficulties because of the male-dominated, male-focused nature of their college communities, and participate in the process which conceptualised student members of these colleges as male.

Chapter Five

Women's Experiences at Mixed-Sex Colleges: Cultures

The student cultures of the first five mixed-sex colleges at the University of Oxford continued to be essentially male, in that they revolved around traditional stereotypically masculine behaviours and rituals that had developed among the previous male cohorts of these institutions. When women entered these institutions male students generally perceived women's contribution to student life in their college in terms of two roles, one of 'honorary man' and one of sexualised romantic interest. Women's position in the first mixed-sex colleges, and indeed the success of the whole scheme of co-education itself, was evaluated by male student members of these colleges in terms of how far women adopted these roles.

The first women at mixed-sex colleges at Oxford experienced and engaged with the existing college cultures in varying and complex ways. Many women embraced the 'masculine' behaviours and traditional activities that were associated with student life in their college, seeing this as demonstrating their affiliation to their colleges, representing their full acceptance into the student community of these institutions, and showing their commitment to making the scheme of co-education a success. However, women could also find the overtly male atmosphere of their colleges, and the ways women were sexualised within them, challenging.

Women engaged with their college cultures in different ways. For many, their focus was on embracing college life and integrating themselves into the pre-existing culture and the male student society of their colleges. When they faced difficulties because of the overtly male nature of student life in their colleges, women developed strategies to deal with it as individuals. While some dealt with these cultures by disengaging from the dominant social scene of their colleges, or, in a minority of cases, leaving their colleges completely, many responded to difficulties by embracing the male behaviours that challenged them. A strong sense of a collective or shared female identity did not form among groups of women students in the first mixed-sex colleges, nor did they normally socialise in female-

only or dominated groups. Women did not actively seek to change their college cultures or generally involve themselves in feminist activity focused on achieving greater equality for women both within colleges and beyond. This emphasises again that women in the first cohort at mixed-sex colleges did not actively seek to destabilise or deconstruct the nature of these elite, male institutions. Indeed, they did not see this as necessary to the process of them being welcomed as equal members of their colleges. Instead, many interpreted their achievement of full integration into their colleges in terms of their own adaptation to the pre-existing cultures that shaped student life within them.

Historians have noted how far the cultures of student life in British higher educational institutions in the 1970s were shaped by social changes that impacted the lives of young people through the 1960s and 1970s. The rise of youth culture, propelled by the affluence of the 1950s and early-1960s, the liberalisation of social and sexual mores and the development of popular and counter cultures all contributed to the nature of student life in the 1970s. Indeed, William Whyte argues that the ‘increasingly liberal attitudes to sex’ of British society, along with an increase in the numbers of women attending university from the 1960s, both changed the physical nature of universities and enabled the development of new student cultures and life-styles.¹ Women’s historians such as Carol Dyhouse, Sarah Aiston and Judy Wakeling have provided closer examination of women’s experiences of student life at particular British universities through the twentieth century.² These studies have offered insights into both the changes and the continuities in student cultures during this period, and into the complex ways that women experienced these cultures. For example, Dyhouse focuses on the tradition of the ‘student RAG’ to examine the ways in which changes in the university student demographic, and wider social shifts, brought about ‘changes in student identity and culture’ through the twentieth century.³ Wakeling, who focuses on the University of Glasgow, argues that, on the one hand, a greater presence of women and increased association between the sexes at the university

¹ William Whyte, *Redbrick: A Social and Architectural History of Britain's Civic Universities*, (Oxford, 2015), p. 293.

² Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History*, (Abingdon, 2006), Judy Wakeling ‘University Women: Origins, Experiences and Destinations at Glasgow University, 1939-1978’, (PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1998), Sarah Aiston, ‘The Life Experiences of University-Educated Women: Graduates of the University of Liverpool, 1947-1979’, (PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, 2000).

³ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 187.

contributed to ‘important changes in the patterns of behaviour of successive generations of students’ including ‘improved relations between the sexes.’⁴ However, on the other hand, she notes that the masculine culture of the previously male-only Glasgow University Union, successfully maintained ‘its traditional character’ and ‘its gentleman’s club atmosphere’ even after it admitted women in 1980, suggesting that elements of stereotypically male student cultures persisted.⁵ This chapter contributes a further case study to this scholarship on women’s experiences of student cultures in the mid to late-twentieth century. It uses the personal testimonies of women to consider how women engaged with and experienced the student cultures of the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford University. It argues that while the wider context of changing social and sexual mores influenced the nature of student life in mixed-sex colleges, the cultures associated with this form of student life in many ways continued to be shaped by men and were ones that revolved around stereotypically male behaviours.

This chapter also extends previous arguments made about women’s relationship to the student cultures in Oxford’s first mixed-sex colleges. Dyhouse has argued that, among co-educational settings, it was in mixed-sex colleges at Oxford and Cambridge that the ‘traditionally male aspect of student culture’ remained particularly influential on student life, arguing that women who attended these colleges felt ‘pressures’ to conform to this norm.⁶ However, she arrives at these conclusions without examining the personal recollections of the women who entered these institutions. This chapter develops this argument, using women’s own accounts to evidence the continuation of masculine cultures in mixed-sex colleges. However, it also complicates this point, suggesting that women could feel a sense of agency, as well as pressure, in the way they dealt with these male cultures. While women could find the male cultures of their colleges difficult, many actively sought to engage with them, seeing this as a way to achieve full integration into the male-dominated institutions they had wanted to attend.

⁴ Wakeling, ‘University Women’, p. 171.

⁵ Ibid, p. 146.

⁶ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 208.

Women Making Co-education 'Work' Through Participation in College Sport

Women in the first cohort to attend mixed-sex colleges at Oxford felt that the onus was on them to make the 'experiment' of mixed-sex colleges successful, and they saw full participation in student life in their colleges as the way to do this. For the 1974 cohort, participation in student cultures therefore had a significance beyond the personal. Harriet commented that she felt that the group of women at her college 'wanted to make it work' so therefore 'we mucked in and we piled in ... we'd have a go at stuff that we might not otherwise have had a go at because it was part and parcel of that process.'⁷

Catherine similarly expressed that she felt 'a sense of responsibility' to make the move to co-education successful in her college and emphasised that she felt women's involvement in college societies was how they did so.⁸

Focusing on the student experiences at the University of Oxford in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Paul R Deslandes Jr argues that students' identification as being a member of the University, which was associated with an elite form of masculinity, was 'formulated and perpetuated through particular cultural forms and practices' that played an important part in student life.⁹

Therefore, students' social and cultural life contributed to the formation of student identities and symbolised students' membership of both the institution of Oxford University and the elite social groups associated with it. When women entered mixed-sex colleges in 1974, it was similarly through their involvement with the traditional cultures, rituals and activities that shaped student life in their colleges, that they affiliated themselves with the student identity associated with these institutions.

Participating in college sports teams and intercollegiate sporting events was a major way in which women involved themselves in the student cultures of their colleges. Deslandes argues that in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century intercollegiate sporting events within the University, particularly the bi-annual rowing 'bumps' races, were both popular events and important rituals that

⁷ Interview with Harriet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 24 July 2020.

⁸ Interview with Catherine, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 13 July 2020.

⁹ Paul R Deslandes Jr, 'Masculinity, Identity and Culture: Male Undergraduate Life at Oxford and Cambridge, 1850-1920', (PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 1996), pp. ii-iii.

‘functioned as displays of masculine strength, prowess, knowledge, and skill.’¹⁰ In the context of the growing presence of women students in the University from the late-nineteenth century, through the establishment of the women’s colleges, to a greater extent these events served to mark the ‘differences which were thought to exist between male and female worlds and cultures,’¹¹ with women’s accepted role at such events being one of feminine spectator of masculine athleticism. D.J. Wenden argues that through the twentieth century ‘rowing was above all *the* sport’ (original emphasis) that was ‘taken up enthusiastically by students.’¹² However, significantly, as Janet Howarth argues, it was only after the advent of mixed-sex colleges that rowing ‘became a serious college sport for women’¹³ due to the increase in the number of colleges who could enter women’s rowing crews in events. Thus, when women entered mixed-sex colleges, rowing was a sport that was specifically an important part of student life of these institutions and Oxford’s male colleges.

Women emphasised the extent to which the first female cohort at their colleges were committed to participating in rowing. Olivia started rowing which she enjoyed.¹⁴ Evie, who attended a different college to Olivia, remembered that early in the first year of women at her college ‘a couple of us got together and said, “rowing, oh yes, let’s give this a go,”’¹⁵ while Georgia, who attended a different college to both Evie and Olivia, recalled ‘going to the rowing meeting’ early in her first term and getting involved in the sport.¹⁶ Louise, who attended a different college to those quoted above, also ‘took to rowing,’ describing herself as ‘quite a keen rower.’¹⁷ Women emphasised how quickly after their arrival at their colleges they became active members of college rowing clubs and how many of them did so. For example, Georgia commented that out of the first women at her college ‘we had an eight on the river... within the first term’ describing this as ‘quite something.’¹⁸ Lily similarly stated

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 412-413.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 413.

¹² D.J. Wenden, ‘Sport’, in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994) p. 535.

¹³ Janet Howarth, ‘Women’, in Brian Harrison (ed), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 368.

¹⁴ Interview with Olivia, conducted by Florence Smith, online 14 October 2022.

¹⁵ Interview with Evie, conducted by Florence Smith, in Oxford, 8 September 2020.

¹⁶ Interview with Georgia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 June 2020.

¹⁷ Interview with Louise, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 September 2020.

¹⁸ Interview with Georgia.

that ‘the women said “yes, they wanted to row”’¹⁹ while Susanna, who went to a different college, stated that ‘I joined the boat club and enough women did to get a women’s eight together.’²⁰ Their involvement in rowing was an important way in which women felt they demonstrated their commitment to fitting in with pre-existing patterns of student life in their colleges. Lily commented that ‘the rowing club was (a) very important part of the culture’ of her college and therefore women getting involved with the rowing club ‘was a big way of showing that we were part of the college culture.’²¹ Similarly, Georgia suggested that it was through participating in rowing that the women showed their male peers that they were a ‘lively bunch of people’ who were willing to fully immerse themselves in college life.²² Therefore women’s participation in college sport was seen as an important way that they demonstrated their commitment to participating in college life and to maintaining their colleges’ cultures.

Women’s participation in sports particularly associated with their college was considered as demonstrating that the presence of women would not alter the essential character of student life in colleges. For, example, women who attended Jesus college noted the importance of rugby within the college sporting culture. Jesus had initially been founded by Welshmen and went on to establish strong links to Wales, providing financial support and college positions specifically to Welsh students and academics. Martin Johnes argues ‘rugby became an integral part of popular culture in south Wales in the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras’ and it was from this base that in the 1970s a ‘golden age of Welsh rugby emerged.’²³ Therefore, as Lily pointed out, because of the Welsh origins of the college, rugby, and the success of the team ‘is very important to Jesus.’²⁴ Thus, for the women at Jesus College, participation in rugby was not just about their personal interest but it was an important signifier of their commitment to upholding the national identity associated with the college’s origins. Women who attended Jesus emphasised their commitment to upholding this sporting tradition of their

¹⁹ Interview with Lily, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 20 July 2020.

²⁰ Interview with Susanna, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 2 October 2020.

²¹ Interview with Lily.

²² Interview with Georgia.

²³ Martin Johnes, ‘A Prince, a King, and a Referendum: Rugby, Politics and Nationhood in Wales, 1969-1979’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 47:1, (2008), p. 132.

²⁴ Interview with Lily.

college, as Georgia stated, ‘we had a rugby match against the boys in the first term.’²⁵ Harriet similarly remembered this event stating that the men ‘were to walk, we could run.’²⁶ This comment emphasises the complexity of the process of women entering mixed-sex colleges. While women were committed to participating in the male rituals and culture of their college, the reality of sexual difference structured the way they did participate. Harriet saw this match as showing the collective desire of the majority of the first female cohort to get involved in college life, emphasising ‘of course that was fifteen out of the twenty-five (women)’ who played the match against the men. Furthermore, she and others saw this event as having been significant in demonstrating to the college, and indeed a wider public, that the decision to accept women had been a good thing. Harriet recalled that the local press came to report on the rugby match, stating that ‘one of the reasons that we did the rugby thing and got the *Oxford Mail* down (was) sort of saying to the world “oi”...it felt like we were doing it because we wanted to make it work.’²⁷ This suggests how far women themselves saw their participation in the traditional cultures of their colleges as important evidence both of their willingness to sustain these cultures and of their successful acceptance into these institutions.

In order to fully participate in college sport women had to show resilience against those male students in their colleges who did not initially welcome their participation in male cultures and held sexist and gendered assumptions about women’s sporting ability. Caroline recalled that, at her college, certain sports ‘like rugby and football’ remained very male-dominated and ‘it took a little while’ for women to push their way into this side of college life, although the women gradually ‘made inroads.’²⁸ This suggests both how far women’s participation in this side of college life depended on their commitment, and the fact that they saw this participation as important to the process of women becoming fully accepted members of mixed-sex colleges. Susanna stated that when the women at her college said that they wanted to row ‘there were those who were against it.’²⁹ Similarly, Evie

²⁵ Interview with Georgia.

²⁶ Interview with Harriet.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Interview with Caroline, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 July 2020.

²⁹ Interview with Susanna, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 2 October 2020.

commented that ‘the men were a little unsure’³⁰ when the women said they wanted to row. Such attitudes stemmed from gendered and sexist attitudes to women’s suitability for the sport. For example, Susanna stated that some of the men in her college ‘thought we were the wrong shape. They thought there were bits of us that would get in the way. I think they were worried that we would just not be strong enough to lift a boat and we would drop it and break it.’ Susanna emphasised that it was through participating in the sport and having success in the yearly intercollegiate races that the women proved these attitudes wrong. She stated that the women in her college ‘very quickly became the best women on the river... the men were proved wrong.’³¹ As Evie stated, ‘one of the assumptions apparently about women coming to the college was that sport would sort of die away’³² and thus by achieving success in college sport women felt they showed these assumptions to be incorrect.

Therefore, women could see their full entry into student life in their colleges, and the development of a general positive analysis of their admittance into previously male colleges, as depending on them participating in and being successful at the male sporting cultures that shaped student life in these institutions. As Catherine commented, ‘things like the girl’s rugby team, girls wanting to do rowing’³³ were part of how the women showed their commitment to making the ‘experiment’ of co-education work in their college. While this suggests the dominant student cultures of mixed-sex colleges continued to revolve around the traditional activities associated with male student life at Oxford, it also demonstrates that women were active in and enjoyed embracing these cultures. In her study of the gender dynamics present in male-dominated organisations in the late twentieth century, Joan Acker has argued that participation in sport and conversation about sport are ‘symbolic expressions of male dominance’ in such environments, as they offer opportunities for ‘informal bonding’³⁴ among men from which women are traditionally excluded. Thus, through embracing the sporting cultures of

³⁰ Interview with Evie.

³¹ Interview with Susanna.

³² Interview with Evie.

³³ Interview with Catherine.

³⁴ Joan Acker, ‘Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations’, *Gender and Society*, 4:2, (1990), p. 153.

their college, women actively manoeuvred into the spheres of their colleges that represented the masculine nature of these environments.

Masculine College Cultures and Becoming ‘One of the Lads’

The collegiate system of Oxford meant that colleges and the student organisations within them had a significant role in structuring students’ social life. In 1960 the Master of Balliol College wrote that ‘the essence of Oxford is college life’ and that ‘to drop into one’s own JCR’ was part of the pleasure and pattern of Oxford undergraduate life.³⁵ Indeed, Caroline Hoefflerle argues that the University’s Student Representative Council, which had been established in 1961, differed from other university student unions in that it did not ‘receive funds from the government to support bars, dancehalls, sport facilities, and other large-scale amenities.’ Instead, the University ‘divided its union funding between the Junior Common Rooms of each college.’³⁶ Indeed, even after the University agreed to the formation of the Oxford University Student Union in January 1974, following student sit-ins and protests in autumn 1973, the University still refused to provide a space in which the union could be housed or general social facilities be provided to students from all colleges collectively. As Hoefflerle argues, the University came to this decision because they claimed it ‘would take away funding from the Junior Common Rooms.’³⁷ Thus, these college-based, student-run organisations were prioritised by the University as the major provider of social facilities and activities for students within the University. The social atmosphere that these institutions and spaces fostered was therefore significant in shaping the general social experience of junior members of colleges.

Women from all five mixed-sex colleges said that they found the central social areas of their colleges such as the bar and the Junior Common Room masculine in their atmosphere. Catherine referred to her college JCR as ‘unadulterated by females.’³⁸ Caroline, described her JCR as ‘like a men’s club’

³⁵ Sir David Lindsay Keir, Balliol College Record 1960, (5) quoted in Keith Thomas, ‘College Life, 1945–1970,’ Brian Harrison (ed), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume III: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 189.

³⁶ Caroline Hoefflerle, *British Student Activism in the Long Sixties*, (New York, 2013), p. 176.

³⁷ *Ibid* p. 172.

³⁸ Interview with Catherine, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 13 July 2020.

and suggested that her college bar continued to have a masculine atmosphere.³⁹ Similarly, Jayne described her JCR as full of ‘beer drinking male undergraduates’ and having a ‘male pubby atmosphere’ which ‘carried on a bit’ after women arrived in the college in 1974.⁴⁰ Hilda also commented that she ‘found the bar overwhelmingly dominated by guys’ whose behaviour towards the first women would include ‘a lot of being patronising or exclusionary.’⁴¹

Some women also suggested that the general social atmosphere in their colleges was overtly male, and they felt that admission into this social atmosphere depended on them embracing traditional male student rituals such as heavy drinking and practical jokes. Natasha described her college as ‘still such a rugby college’ in which ritualistic drinking games known as ‘sconcing’ were common.⁴² Claire described her college as ‘quite laddish’, referring to the heavy drinking and party culture which were involved in the social scene at her college; ‘there was a lot of vomiting ...you’d have a staircase party... and everybody would drink as much as they could lay hands on’.⁴³ Similarly, Violet described the atmosphere of her college as ‘blokey’ describing ‘people kind of roaring around and getting drunk’.⁴⁴ Other women suggested that the ‘maleness’ of their colleges manifested itself in the shared sense of humour of the male undergraduate cohort. For example, Kristina remembered that the men in her college ‘liked practical jokes and sometimes it could be quite cruel. And they also liked nicknames. They had nicknames for us, which weren’t very nice.’⁴⁵ Indeed, Nadia recalled the kind of practical jokes that the men played in her college; ‘if you were out for the day, they’d go into your room, and take everything and set it up in the quad. So when you came back, your whole room was just in the quad.’ Nadia also recalled ‘lying in bed one night and the window opened and in filed the whole rugby team who just walked through my room and out of the door.’⁴⁶ The frequency which women commented on this kind of behaviour suggests the extent to which this kind of humour was

³⁹ Interview with Caroline.

⁴⁰ Interview with Jayne, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 October 2020.

⁴¹ Interview with Hilda, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 9 November 2022.

⁴² Interview with Natasha, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 September 2022.

⁴³ Interview with Claire, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 August 2020.

⁴⁴ Interview with Violet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 October 2020.

⁴⁵ Interview with Kristina, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 28 October 2022.

⁴⁶ Interview with Nadia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 8 October 2022.

part of the culture of some of the first mixed-sex colleges. Such comments corroborate Dyhouse's point that 'competitive heavy drinking and various kinds of horseplay' remained an important part of student life in mixed-sex colleges and represented the sustained masculine nature of the culture of these institutions.⁴⁷

Women responded to the masculine social atmosphere in their colleges in various ways. In some cases, women actively embraced the male culture and the rituals associated with it. Jennie described herself as having been 'one of the lads' at her college.⁴⁸ Martha recalled that once, when she was at her college bar with one of the male students, 'the guy behind the bar said to me "and what's the lady having?"', to which the male student 'chirped up and said, "(Martha's) not a lady. She's one of the lads,"'⁴⁹ a comment which she welcomed. Claire stated that she 'embraced' the 'laddiness' of her college and participated in the heavy drinking culture that dominated the college social scene and enjoyed doing so.⁵⁰ Kristina similarly recalled of the women at her college that, 'we were one of the boys.' She reflected that 'I think we were too much one of the boys at times' as the women would 'go along with' the sense of humour that was shared amongst the male students in her college.⁵¹

Other women felt greater pressure upon them to embrace the male culture of their college and mimic the behaviours associated with it. Maia recalled 'feeling I must be one of the lads' in order to make friends. She commented that her anxiety about getting to know people within her college 'manifested itself in me definitely joining in with the sort of bar culture.' Indeed, Maia felt that it was through emulating the rowdy behaviour of her male peers that she felt accepted by them. She remembered that, in her college bar, the male students 'used to throw pints of beer at each other' and so on one occasion, when she was confronting the male students in the bar over a practical joke they had played on her, she 'picked up this chap's beer and I poured it over his head.' Maia remembered that in response the men 'roared and cheered, and then somebody threw some at me.' She reflected that, after

⁴⁷ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 208.

⁴⁸ Interview with Jennie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 4 August 2022.

⁴⁹ Interview with Martha, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 26 January 2023.

⁵⁰ Interview with Claire.

⁵¹ Interview with Kristina.

this, 'in a stupid way it was all right.'⁵² Caroline also suggested feeling greater pressure to be accepted within the male culture of her college. She described her JCR as 'quite tricky' to navigate because of its masculine atmosphere, stating that 'you just had to work at it. We worked at getting ourselves accepted as college members.'⁵³ Thus, women could both willingly join in with and feel pressure to adapt to the male culture of their colleges. However, generally they considered that it was through emulating male behaviours and embracing pre-existing college cultures that they asserted themselves within the student community of their colleges.

The extent to which women's entry into elite male environments involves them conforming to male cultures and behaviours has been noted by a number of scholars examining this process in different contexts. In the 1980s Andrea Spurling conducted a study of the position of women academics at King's College Cambridge, and Cambridge University more widely, since the introduction of mixed-sex colleges in 1973. She argues that women academics feel that to be successful in their field, particularly in an elite establishment such as Cambridge, they have 'to imitate the masculine professional stereotype.'⁵⁴ Similarly, in her study of the experiences of women MPs in parliamentary institutions, Karen Ross argues that, in order to deal with 'an often hostile working environment' of male-dominated parliaments 'some women who are already assertive appear simply to exaggerate those so-called masculine traits, so that they function (and are often perceived) as honorary men.'⁵⁵ This suggests women's experience of entering and gaining acceptance within the male-dominated student body of their colleges mirrored that of women entering other elite male institutions in Britain through the latter half of the twentieth century.

However, other researchers emphasise the subsequent difficulties that women who take on such roles face. For example, Spurling argues that women who conform to male behaviours 'in male-dominated

⁵² Interview with Maia, conducted by Florence Smith, in Oxford, 8 October 2022.

⁵³ Interview with Caroline.

⁵⁴ Andrea Spurling, *Report of the Women in Higher Education Research Project 1988-1990*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 13.

⁵⁵ Karen Ross, 'Women's Place in 'Male' Space: Gender and Effect in Parliamentary Contexts', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 55.1, (2002), p. 197.

environments make their colleagues uneasy,⁵⁶ while Linda McDowell argues of women in merchant banking in the 1980s that ‘women who attempt to behave like men are often distressed to find not acceptance but distrust from their male peers.’⁵⁷ In contrast, the women who entered mixed-sex colleges in 1974 suggest that, when it came to participating in social rituals in their colleges, women gained greater male acceptance for their presence within these institutions by mirroring male behaviours. For the women who did mimic the male behaviours associated with their peers such a strategy was seen as a successful way to participate in student life in their colleges.

However, some women found the masculine atmosphere of the social institutions and areas of their colleges difficult and dealt with it by not participating in these parts of college social life. Jayne stated that she ‘loathed the JCR’ because of its overtly male atmosphere and therefore ‘never went in it.’⁵⁸ Amy ‘didn’t particularly enjoy the JCR’ and therefore ‘tended to avoid it.’⁵⁹ Hannah also commented that ‘I think that I would have felt uncomfortable going into the bar.’ She emphasised this was connected to its character as a male-dominated space, stating that through her working life ‘I’ve become more confident about turning up as a female, but as a first year undergraduate... I would not have gone into the bar.’⁶⁰ Indeed, a number of women who did utilise their JCR as a social space recalled that other women would avoid it. For example, Maia stated that ‘a lot of the women wouldn’t go there’⁶¹ because of the rowdiness of the male students. Similarly, Sandra commented that ‘there were a number of girls, the shyer girls, who didn’t participate’ in the social events that her college put on in the JCR. This suggests that women themselves felt that a level of pre-existing self-confidence was required to enjoy the social events at their colleges.⁶²

Women who did not enjoy the communal social areas in their colleges formed their own social life that was separate from that provided by their colleges. For example, Jayne stated ‘the social life that I

⁵⁶ Spurling, *Report of the Women in Higher Education Research Project*, p. 13.

⁵⁷ Linda McDowell, *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City*, (Oxford, 1997), p. 154.

⁵⁸ Interview with Jayne.

⁵⁹ Interview with Amy, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 September 2022.

⁶⁰ Interview with Hannah, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 5 November 2020.

⁶¹ Interview with Maia.

⁶² Interview with Sandra, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 October 2022.

made was sitting in people's rooms that I'd met. I liked drinking coffee or going out with them, doing things together.'⁶³ Mary, who also did not use her college bar or JCR, similarly 'relaxed by going to the pub with my few friends,'⁶⁴ while Rosie, who went to her college bar only occasionally, stated 'my interest was more going for a drink and having a chat ... not anything more formal and organised.'⁶⁵ These women enjoyed the social life they created for themselves. However, the fact that women felt the need to form alternative social routines suggests the form of social life provided by colleges was inflexible and unaccommodating of women who did not wish to fit in with the pre-existing male cultures. Even if women had good social experiences beyond their JCR and college bar, this inflexibility shaped the nature of their social experiences while members of their colleges. As Jayne commented, not feeling comfortable enough to regularly use social spaces within college 'of course will define a little bit one's social life.'⁶⁶ This suggests that women's positive engagement with the organised social life in their colleges depended on their own level of self-confidence and their ability or willingness to embrace pre-existing college cultures. Women who emulated male behaviours, or felt comfortable participating in male-dominated social occasions, formed a positive social relationship with their college. However, those who did not embrace the male culture of their colleges found the dominant cultural atmosphere of their colleges uninviting and inhospitable.

Indeed, for one woman, the overtly male culture of her college contributed to her decision to leave her college and Oxford University completely. Nadia 'felt uncomfortable' and 'found it hard to settle' in her college in part because of its masculine culture. Nadia failed her first-year exams by 'just a little smidgen' and, while her tutors told her that she could have remained at Oxford and retaken the exam, the fact that she did not enjoy the culture of her college meant that failing this exam 'tipped the decision not to come back'.⁶⁷ Thus, for some women, the masculine cultures of their colleges had a significant impact on their student experience and, in Nadia's case, shaped her educational trajectory.

⁶³ Interview with Jayne.

⁶⁴ Interview with Mary, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 25 June 2020.

⁶⁵ Interview with Rosie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 August 2020.

⁶⁶ Interview with Jayne.

⁶⁷ Interview with Nadia.

It should be noted that some women associated their colleges' JCRs more with the liberalism of 1970s youth and counter culture than a conservative form of student life. These women found the social life offered by their colleges fun and liberating, rather than oppressively 'male'. Evie stated that she found her college a 'very fun place to be,' recalling enjoying college parties and suggesting there was an atmosphere of liberal political activism.⁶⁸ Sandra described the organised parties at her college as 'absolutely great. We had some amazing bands that came and played', stating the parties would 'get wild'. Sandra emphasised that she 'felt very comfortable' at these events and 'thrived' in this setting.⁶⁹ Isabella described her college, which was different to Sandra's, as 'incredibly sociable' and generally enjoyed her social life in college. She emphasised the influence that the counter culture of the 1960s and 1970s had on certain groups within her college. She stated 'I was a bit of a hippie' before university and, when she arrived at her college, she 'found like-minded people... amongst the sort of arty people there was quite a sort of alternative culture scene in college'.⁷⁰

Indeed, while women suggest that the masculine atmosphere associated with colleges remained after the arrival of women, the period when they entered these colleges was one in which traditional stereotypes of masculinity were being challenged. As Pat Thane argues, from the late-1960s 'alternative "hippie" lifestyles' grew in America and Europe which involved 'challenging conservative values, experimenting with drugs, sex and flowing hair and clothes for males and females.'⁷¹ Women suggested that this wider cultural movement was an element in student identities in mixed-sex colleges. Louise commented that 'in those days boys and girls looked very similar really because we all had long scruffy hair'⁷². Indeed, in 2019 Jesus College included a copy of the 1974 matriculation photo on a publicity board and placed a highlighted circle around all of the women in the photo. However, they also mistakenly highlighted one of the male students who had particularly

⁶⁸ Interview with Evie.

⁶⁹ Interview with Sandra.

⁷⁰ Interview with Isabella, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2020.

⁷¹ Pat Thane, *Divided Kingdom: A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present*, (Cambridge, 2018), p. 292.

⁷² Interview with Louise.

long hair.⁷³ This suggests that wider shifts in stereotypes of masculinity in the period meant that the nature of the masculine culture in some colleges was itself changing.

Furthermore, the demographic of men who were entering Oxford colleges during this period was also changing. As Thomas argues, the increase in numbers of state school students who were attending Oxford by the 1950s and 1960s meant that ‘the junior common room was also changing its character.’ By the 1970s these institutions that, in their origins, had been ‘modelled on a gentlemen’s club,’⁷⁴ were now common rooms for a more socially diverse male student membership. Therefore, the forms of masculinity and male sociability that such organisations provided for and encouraged were less associated with the social mores of an aristocratic elite. As Thomas notes, from the 1960s ‘junior members ceased to refer to each other as... “gentlemen”, and began to speak of themselves as students, with the implication that they were not a special elite, but just another branch of the worldwide student community.’⁷⁵

However, although the type of masculinity that dominated in college cultures may, to some extent, have subverted previous stereotypes of masculine cultural and social identities, this did not necessarily lessen the extent to which male sensibilities and behaviours determined the dominant culture in colleges. While some women felt comfortable in the organised social scene of their colleges, it is significant that across all five colleges there is at least one example of a woman who found her college JCR to have a distinctly male culture and felt uncomfortable or unwelcome in this atmosphere. Indeed, often women who found their JCRs particularly masculine and rowdy suggested that the men at their college did not fit in to the stereotype of the elite Oxford male student. For example, Sandra suggested her college was not a place with ‘lots of lords and ladies and rich people. It was very egalitarian, people from all over the country, northerners.’⁷⁶ Similarly, Maia commented that ‘there were so many people from the north of England’ in her college, suggesting she felt this

⁷³ Interview with Ava, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 October 2020 and see images in ‘College History Goes on show in Cornmarket’, *Oxford Mail*, (22nd May 2019).

⁷⁴ Thomas, ‘College Life’, p. 203.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 204.

⁷⁶ Interview with Sandra.

contributed to the masculine atmosphere of her college. She described this culture as ‘aggressive, beer, from the north.’ Maia suggested how far the male cohort in her college was dominated by state school students through her comment that, on one of the first evenings of the term, a male student asked her “did you go to public school?” And I said, “Yes. Did you?” And all his friends died with laughter, and I thought, this is not going well.⁷⁷ This gives an indication of the complex ways in which class could also impact women’s relationship to their college cultures, particularly when the women came from a different social background to the majority of the men in their college. Thus, while the male student identities that shaped college cultures in the 1970s may have reflected the changing schooling, class and social background of Oxford students, altering forms of masculine stereotypes within these institutions, this did not necessarily diminish the male nature of these cultures or make them more welcoming of women or female student identities.

Scholars have noted the complex ways in which students who were in a minority group within universities experienced the cultures of higher educational institutions through the second half of the twentieth century. For example, Whyte argues that while the number of working-class students at Britain’s universities gradually rose through the 1960s, these students ‘still stood out’ within the essentially middle-class culture of their institutions.⁷⁸ Diane Reay argues that, when they enter university, working-class students enter an ‘elite white middle-class bubble’⁷⁹ which involves them ‘conforming to middle-class educational norms.’⁸⁰ In her sample Reay found that working-class students were able to negotiate successfully between their class background and the middle-class atmosphere of the elite institutions they attended by taking on ‘middle-class academic dispositions’⁸¹ while also maintaining their connection to their working-class roots. Such studies indicate the negotiations and strategies that have been involved in students engaging with the dominant middle-class culture of higher educational institutions. The accounts of the group of women who entered

⁷⁷ Interview with Maia.

⁷⁸ Whyte, *Redbrick*, p. 239.

⁷⁹ Diane Reay, Gill Crozier, and John Clayton, “Strangers in Paradise?: Working-Class Students in Elite Universities”, *Sociology*, 43:6, (December 2009), p. 1111.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 1114.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 1106.

mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 suggest that, while the background of male students of their colleges could differ, this did not alter the essentially masculine atmosphere of student life in these institutions. Therefore, in the way that working-class students had to negotiate a disjuncture between their class background and the middle-class cultures of their universities, women who entered mixed-sex colleges in 1974 had to negotiate tensions between their sex and the masculine student culture of their colleges. Women's accounts suggest that changes in the social demographic of students entering British universities during the second half of the twentieth century did not necessarily engender student cultures in which women felt more able to participate without conforming to the masculine behaviours or expectations associated with them.

The Importance of Being a 'Feisty' Woman

The idea that the dominant social environments of mixed-sex colleges were welcoming and accessible to particular types of women, especially those who were socially extrovert and confident, is one suggested by women's accounts of their college experiences. Georgia described her cohort of women as 'kind of "joiner inners", we were "doers",' and stated that 'there was a majority presence of people who were just up for the crack, no matter what it was, and so would get stuck in.' She went on to describe her cohort as 'a bunch of fairly feisty sort of women.'⁸² Similarly, Louise, who attended a different college, reflected that 'most of us were sort of pretty into everything that was going on and feisty.'⁸³ Other women similarly suggested that the ability of women to integrate into college life depended on their level of self-confidence. For example, Sandra stated that 'I am fairly gregarious and fairly confident' and therefore found it easy fitting in with her college's social scene, stating 'I really loved it and I really enjoyed it.' However, Sandra also noted that 'I think some of the shyer girls struggled with being called names and really unpleasant stuff.'⁸⁴

⁸² Interview with Georgia.

⁸³ Interview with Louise.

⁸⁴ Interview with Sandra.

Some women claimed that they felt the colleges had specifically chosen women who appeared socially confident, seeing this as a trait which would enable them to thrive in a mixed-sex environment. For example, Ava commented ‘I sort of think, and also talking to some of the dons (at her college) that they were looking for women who would be academically able, but also who would survive... socially,’ suggesting that those who had campaigned for co-education felt the need to prove it had been a good idea and therefore ‘wanted to make sure that they got a group that they thought could handle whatever was going to happen.’⁸⁵ Similarly, Georgia stated that ‘we felt that they had selected people who they thought would not be overawed and would cope really’.⁸⁶ It is difficult to establish the accuracy of this statement. However, a letter from Pembroke College in October 1971 to those in the University considering the introduction of mixed-sex colleges suggests some believed such measures should be taken. The author expressed concern that accepting a small group of women into a mixed-sex college ‘might cause undue pressure on these women.’ Therefore, the author opined that ‘it would be hoped that their headmaster/mistress would have been consulted and would be able to advise as to the suitability of the candidate for life in a mixed college.’⁸⁷ This suggests firstly an awareness that the male-dominated nature of colleges might engender a culture in which women faced ‘pressure’, and secondly that at least some did suggest that women should be chosen on account of their ability to deal with such pressures. Whether or not this view was reflected in the way colleges went about selecting their first female cohort, it is significant that women self-identify themselves and their cohort in this way. It suggests that women themselves assumed that the nature of cultures in previously all-male colleges would present challenges for the first female intake. Therefore, women saw social resilience as necessary to help them to adapt to these cultures. This reinforces the point that women felt the success of the move to co-education depended on their ability to adapt to cultures which they recognised were likely to be difficult to navigate.

⁸⁵ Interview with Ava, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 October 2020.

⁸⁶ Interview with Georgia.

⁸⁷ Letter from Pembroke College Oxford, 25 October 1971, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

The accuracy of some women's identification of their cohorts as strong-willed and 'feisty' can be called into question. Indeed, many women in the cohort, even those who described the collective group in this way, in contrast described the lack of confidence they individually felt when they arrived at their colleges. For example, Catherine stated 'I was quite shy' when she arrived at college.⁸⁸

Similarly, Ava, while suggesting she thought women had been admitted to her college on account of their social confidence, reflected that, in her first year at college 'I was a poor little thing. Really scared, really shy, really naïve.'⁸⁹ This contrast between the way women identified themselves and the way they identify their cohort generally suggests a tension between their personal reflection on their experience and the collective narrative of women's success in gaining acceptance within the male student community of their college. However, what is significant is that women generally construct their narratives of their successful integration into these communities in terms of them demonstrating particular characteristics and behaviours that aligned with the male-dominated cultures, rather than in terms of a narrative of cultural change taking place within the colleges. This gives an insight into the mentality with which women approached and assessed being a member of a mixed-sex college.

Indeed, some women suggested it was the overtly masculine nature of their college cultures that meant their social resilience strengthened. For example, Hannah stated that 'there were some moments' that 'were quite difficult to handle' describing one incident where 'one of the law students in my year came wandering across the quad to say hello to me. And he started the conversation by saying, "Oh, I recognized your dumpy figure on the other side of the quad." Of course it is all sort of rather mortifying'. Reflecting on incidents such as this, Hannah stated that 'I think you had to learn to be quite robust actually, in many ways, in that environment.'⁹⁰ Similarly, Maia recalled 'I had my curtains stolen one night' by male members of her college, stating that, upon finding them gone she 'was absolutely livid, although equally terrified.' In response to this incident Maia confronted her male peers directly at which point 'the curtains reappeared.' She stated that this made her think 'I'm

⁸⁸ Interview with Catherine.

⁸⁹ Interview with Ava.

⁹⁰ Interview with Hannah.

just gonna have to sort of fight back a bit with these people' which she did in part by inserting herself into the social spaces they occupied; 'I went into the bar and they were all having their "antisocial club night" and I thought, well, I don't want to be frightened here. So I sat down at the bar and I had a drink and a fag.' Maia admitted this display of confidence did not represent how she felt inside, stating 'it was all a great facade, inside I was as nervous as anybody else.'⁹¹ These examples firstly give an indication of the kind of cultures that women had to navigate when they entered mixed-sex colleges. Secondly, they suggest that some women found the behaviour which was manifested in these cultures offensive and uncomfortable. However, thirdly they indicate that women felt that the way to deal with such behaviours was to demonstrate their individual resilience and their ability to not let these behaviours phase them, rather than to address the problematic attitudes that underscored such behaviour. This mentality, which Lynne Segal argues is 'often labelled "neoliberal feminism",' is one in which personal strength and resilience is perceived as what enables women to succeed in male-dominated communities. Segal associates this form of feminism with the political rise of Margaret Thatcher, suggesting she 'sowed the seeds' for this mentality.⁹² However, the accounts of the first women who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford suggest this approach to equality was active in women's entry into elite, male-dominated educational institutions in the mid-1970s.

Collectively the sections above suggest how far the dominant cultures and social atmosphere of colleges remained overtly masculine. While some women did find these cultures accessible and enjoyable, this generally depended on how far their own behaviour aligned with these dominant cultures and how far they were confident enough to assert themselves within this social atmosphere. The fact that the maleness of these cultures remained intact meant that for women who did not conform to the identity of a 'feisty' woman or did not become 'one of the lads' the social and cultural atmosphere of their colleges felt less accessible, one deciding to leave her college and Oxford, in part because she found her college culture uncomfortable.

⁹¹ Interview with Maia.

⁹² Lynne Segal, 'Preface to the 2017 edition', *Making Trouble Life and Politics*, (London, 2017), p. xii.

A Sexualised College Culture

Women entered mixed-sex colleges at a time when British culture was generally becoming more relaxed in its sexual mores and sex became an acceptable topic of public discourse. As Thane argues, in the 1970s ‘many aspects of sex were discussed more openly’⁹³ and, while the positive and negative implications of this were debated by feminists at the time, there was a ‘greater openness about the body and sex’ as sex advice manuals, nudity in plays and films, and pornography became more prevalent in British culture.⁹⁴ Dyhouse argues that this culture, along with the availability of the Pill, ‘played a crucial role in reshaping the experience’⁹⁵ of women who attended university in this period. For women who attended the first mixed-sex colleges, this context could have both positive and negative implications for their experience in these institutions.

While women who entered mixed-sex colleges focused on integrating themselves into the male cultures that had shaped student life in their colleges prior to them accepting women, they were often sexualised within these cultures by male students. Sandra thought that the men, ‘liked having the women around and wanted to pursue the women,’ describing the first year of women in her college as ‘very kind of sexual.’⁹⁶ Similarly, Caroline described the men in the years above her at college as ‘welcoming in the obvious way’ stating that ‘lots of the chaps were on the pull,’ suggesting this affected how men interacted with the new female cohort.⁹⁷ Likewise, Maia believed that men’s interactions with the first women students were largely based on men’s view of them as potential sexual partners, stating that, when men spoke to women students, ‘they spoke to you because they were hoping to get into bed with you as quickly as possible.’⁹⁸ Jennie stated that ‘the sleeping-about culture’ was prominent in her college and that the men in college primarily ‘wanted sex’ with the new female intake.⁹⁹ Thus, while on the one hand women’s position in mixed-sex colleges was judged in

⁹³ Thane, *Divided Kingdom*, p. 335.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 336.

⁹⁵ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 107.

⁹⁶ Interview with Sandra.

⁹⁷ Interview with Caroline.

⁹⁸ Interview with Maia.

⁹⁹ Interview with Jennie.

terms of how far women embraced the pre-existing male behaviours and rituals associated with these institutions, on the other hand men could see the arrival of women into their colleges as a good thing because they believed having women in college would add a new sexual dynamic to college cultures.

The culture of male sexualisation of women students impacted on their social experience in their colleges. Some women suggested that it improved their social lives in college, as men's interest in socialising with women guaranteed them an invitation to college events. Isabella stated that the women at her college, 'just got invited to every party because we were a bit of a novelty, and we were the only sort of easily accessible women that these guys could find.'¹⁰⁰ Caroline, who attended a different college, also commented that 'we were invited to an awful lot of parties in that first week' describing this as 'great because you did get to know a lot of people.'¹⁰¹ Claire, who attended a different college to both Isabella and Caroline, similarly remembered 'all of us would get invited to every party' which meant that 'the social life was fantastic.' However, Claire emphasised how far men's desire to socialise with the women was bound up with their objectification of the first female cohort; 'you were young, you were thin and you were female, and really you only had to be two out of the three to be well thought of.'¹⁰² Therefore, women simultaneously saw this element of their college cultures as having contributed to their enjoyment of college life, and acknowledged that it demonstrated the way that male students prioritised women's sexuality in the way they responded to them.

However, it is also important to note that women themselves could feel a high level of sexual agency when it came to the sexual culture of their college. Indeed, as noted in chapter two, a number of women specifically wanted to attend a mixed-sex college because they saw this system as providing them with greater opportunities for sexual and romantic relationships with men. For these women, male attention was perceived as a benefit of being in a male-dominated environment and they were active in seeking out male sexual partners in their college. For example, Isabella responded to

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Isabella.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Caroline.

¹⁰² Interview with Claire.

questions on the topic of sexual harassment by emphasising the extent to which sexual advances within college were initiated as much by the women as the men. She stated that ‘this was the seventies... this was sleeping-around time, I slept with one of them in my first week and it was my idea, not his and he thought it was wonderful.’ Isabella’s emphasis on her own sexual agency indicates how far women could see a sexualised college culture as liberating, fun and desirable. Indeed, she saw having an active sexual life as an expression of her feminist outlook describing it as ‘part of women’s liberation... we were on the Pill and we could enjoy sex like the men and we could have fun and we could invite people to come back to our room.’¹⁰³ Evie similarly described the period of the mid-1970s as ‘very free and easy and relaxed, people had lots of relationships.’ Indeed, by her second year Evie was in a relationship with one of the senior members of her college and noted that other female students also formed relationships with college fellows. Evie emphasised that she and the other women did not consider these relationships as predatory or representing an abuse of power on the part of the male fellows; ‘it was not a sort of “tutor taking advantage of” as it were. These were simply attractive adults who we found interesting.’ Evie reflected on how far she saw attitudes towards sex and relationships that existed in her college in the mid-1970s as an expression of the wider shift in the sexual mores of British society that has come to be associated with the ‘permissive’ society of the 1960s. She referred to a view, which she supported, that ‘the sixties really happened in the seventies.’¹⁰⁴ Thus, for some women the sexual cultures of mixed-sex colleges simply reflected a progressive shift in the role that sex had in young people’s lives.

The existence of this culture in their colleges enabled women to have whatever kinds of sexual experiences they wanted. Jennie emphasised how far she felt that the specific context of the 1970s provided women with the opportunity to have casual relationships if they wished to. While she was more interested in finding a serious, long-term relationship while at college, Jennie reflected that the important thing about the period was that ‘people had a choice’ as it was the period ‘after the Pill and

¹⁰³ Interview with Isabella.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Evie.

before all the other horrors'¹⁰⁵ referring to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. Isabella similarly commented that it was the fact that this period was post-Pill and 'pre AIDS' that enabled women to have the casual sex they desired.¹⁰⁶ The extent to which the 1960s and 1970s represented a period of 'sexual revolution' has been debated by historians. For example, Matt Cook argues that while there may have been 'a loosening of attitudes' toward sex during this period, the effects of this were 'equivocal, partial and localised, and a traditional framework was largely retained in the way people thought about sex and relationships'.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, Callum Brown argues that 'the sexual revolution was overwhelmingly a sudden event, not a gradualist one,' arguing that this 'revolution' took place between 1957 and 1975 and was one that involved 'significant change in social mores' regarding sex and sexuality.¹⁰⁸ While Hera Cook sees changes in sexual mores in terms of a 'long sexual revolution' which took place between 1800 and 1975, she also argues that 'from 1965 to 1969, there was a transformation of sexual mores. This happened as a result of supplying contraception to women publicly and solely for the purpose of sexual pleasure, indeed explicitly to prevent reproduction.'¹⁰⁹ The accounts of women who attended the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford suggest that, at least for some women who entered university in the 1970s, the period after the introduction of the Pill was seen as a period of sexual liberation in which they could have sex free from concerns of potential consequences. As Hera Cook argues, 'in the late 1960s, many young women believed that a sexual revolution was taking place.'¹¹⁰ Furthermore, they suggest that, whether or not their own behaviour reflected a more liberal attitude to sex, they still understood this period as one in which women had greater agency in deciding whether to be more liberal and casual in their sexual activity. As Jennie commented, 'I didn't want to be promiscuous, but it was a choice.'¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Jennie.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Isabella.

¹⁰⁷ Matt Cook, 'Sexual Revolution(s) in Britain', G. Hekma, and A. Giami, (eds), *Sexual Revolutions*, (London, 2014), p. 126.

¹⁰⁸ Callum Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA since the 1960s*, (Cambridge, 2012), p. 127.

¹⁰⁹ Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800-1975*, (Oxford, 2004), p. 295.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 271.

¹¹¹ Interview with Jennie.

While women could embrace and enjoy the sexualised culture of their colleges, other women from across the five colleges found this atmosphere unpleasant, experiencing unwanted advances from men, particularly from those in the years above who had experienced a single-sex college culture in their initial year. In these cases, women recognised the misogynistic nature of men's sexualisation of women. Indeed, while enjoying being invited to so many social events, Caroline admitted that many of the men who invited women to these events 'were trying to make relationships with the girls, some of them in a bit of a sort of pushy, very immature way.'¹¹² Catherine recalled that 'there was definitely sometimes unattractive interest from the older (years)' stating that 'there were a few who you really felt were going through the list and ticking us off.'¹¹³ Emily felt some of the men in her college 'had given themselves licence' to try and sleep with as many of the women as possible, stating 'it was almost as if there was a competition to see how many women they could get through.'¹¹⁴ Sophie also recalled that she had heard that, in her college, 'there was a kind of league set up... whereby the boys were deciding which girls were the most attractive.'¹¹⁵ Sandra commented that the sexualised attitude men had towards women students led to predatory behaviour at her college, suggesting this was often linked to the heavy drinking culture of her college; 'of course there was drink involved... and all sorts of unpleasant things would happen.' Furthermore, she noted the complex, misogynistic way in which men reacted to women who were sexually active with men in her college. She stated that she and other women students would 'sleep with some of the men and then the tide would change and suddenly they would be labelled a college bicycle.' Sandra reflected on the complexity of the men's attitude to the women, stating that on the one hand the men enjoyed the fact that there were women in the college because they offered the men opportunities for sex and relationships, but on the other hand they showed 'resentment'¹¹⁶ towards the first women and demonised them when they appeared to

¹¹² Interview with Caroline.

¹¹³ Interview with Catherine.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Emily, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 9 July 2020.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Sophie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 September 2022.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Sandra.

embrace this culture to too great an extent. Thus, when women appeared to take control of the sexual culture of colleges to suit themselves, men reacted against it.

The concept that a liberal attitude to sex was shared by all women students within mixed-sex colleges could also lead to male expectations of female promiscuity and misogynistic claims of women's abnormality if they did not submit to male advances. As Claire commented of male students' treatment of women in her college, 'if you didn't want to have sex with somebody it (was) because there was something wrong with you. It wasn't because they were smelly and repulsive and vile. It was (because) you must be frigid.' She stated that, in the climate of sexual liberation, the accusation of being 'frigid' was 'something dreadful.'¹¹⁷

This indicates the complex ways in which seemingly liberalised sexual cultures of the period could engender misogynistic attitudes towards women's position in male-dominated institutions. The development of a general student culture in which sex became a normalised part of student life, on the one hand allowed women the freedom for sexual exploration and activity, which many saw as an important part of their life as students. However, on the other, in the context of mixed-sex colleges, women's sexuality could become a criterion by which male students judged the value of women's presence in college. While men welcomed the addition of women into college cultures on account of their sexuality, they also used women's sexuality, particularly when women's sexual activity appeared to subvert male control of female sexuality, to express hostility towards the female presence in their colleges.

Indeed, here Oxford's move to mixed-sex colleges is representative of the wider complexities that are involved when assessing how and if the liberalising of sexual mores engendered positive sexual dynamics between men and women in the period. Accounts written by women about their experiences in 1960s and 1970s Britain suggest how far women found that this period of apparent 'liberalisation' carried with it expectations of promiscuity, placing new pressures on women. For example, Mary

¹¹⁷ Interview with Claire.

Ingram, writing about the experiences of her female social group as young adult women, suggested that the association of sexual promiscuity with a progressive youth culture meant that women felt a pressure to have sex so as ‘not to appear repressed and old-fashioned.’¹¹⁸ Similarly, in a survey conducted in 1977 by Shere Hite, one respondent argued that, because of the availability of the Pill and the general liberalising of attitudes towards casual sex, women ‘are considered “square” or “frigid” if they don’t rush into bed.’¹¹⁹ As Cate Haste ponders, ‘perhaps women actually lost, rather than gained, some of their freedom of choice under the new orthodoxy’¹²⁰ of sexual liberation.

Thus, while college cultures may have been affected by the wider liberalising of sexual mores, this process did not necessarily engender cultures in which all women felt comfortable or empowered. Furthermore, it is questionable whether these cultures were ones in which women’s attitudes and desires were considered to the same extent as men’s. While some women enjoyed the sexualised culture of their colleges, some found it difficult. These women found that the male gaze and male sexual expectations were the dominant force shaping these cultures and determining women’s position within them. For these women, their experience of their role as women in mixed-sex colleges was one of expected subservience to male sexual appetites, indicating the continuing influence of patriarchal hierarchies in shaping student cultures within mixed-sex colleges.

A Lack of Female and Feminist Cultures in Mixed-Sex Colleges

The movement to mixed-sex colleges at Oxford came about during a time of increasing concern for women’s equality, and the development of an organised, politicised feminist movement in the form of the Women’s Liberation Movement. The introduction of what Thane describes as ‘liberal legislation’ from 1965, such as the 1967 Abortion Act,¹²¹ both reflected and reinforced changes in attitudes towards women, their lived experiences, and their expectations. An awareness of the continued

¹¹⁸ Mary Ingram, *Now We Are Thirty Women of the Break Through Generation*, (London, 1981), p. 179.

¹¹⁹ Shere Hite, *The Hite Report*, (1977) quoted in Cate Haste, *Rules of Desire: Sex in Britain World War I to the Present*, (London, 2002), p. 327.

¹²⁰ Cate Haste, *Rules of Desire: Sex in Britain: World War I to the Present*, (London, 2002), p. 229.

¹²¹ Pat Thane, ‘Women in the 1970s: Towards Liberation?’, Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane (eds) *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, (Manchester, 2013), p. 172.

inequalities that women faced, and a belief in the need for greater social, political and economic change, also manifested itself in the growth of feminist movements in the late-1960s and early-1970s. For example, Lynne Segal argues that ‘the year 1969 really was the turning point in the rebirth of “militant women” in Britain’¹²² and that it was in the 1970s that ‘feminism grew rapidly as a remarkably influential social movement.’¹²³ Indeed, the first National Women's Liberation Conference was held at Ruskin College in Oxford in 1970. In this movement the idea of a shared, female identity and experience was utilised by feminists to unite women in the struggle against the collective oppression of women by the structures of patriarchy. In the view of those involved in the feminist movement of the 1970s, there was powerful political and social potential in women recognising their shared womanhood. Indeed, while noting that these views would come to be challenged by later feminist thinking, which recognised the importance of categories such as class and race in shaping women’s experience, Lynne Segal argues that ‘there was considerable attention given to the situational specificity of women’¹²⁴ by feminists in this period. She argues that ‘the appeal to women’s shared experiences’¹²⁵ was a key practice within 1970s feminism.

The growth of the Women’s Liberation Movement has often been associated with the growing educational opportunities that were available to girls and women at secondary and tertiary level through the post-war period. For example, Sue Burley and Laurel Forster argue that ‘increased educational opportunities’ for girls and women following the Second World War were an important context for the development of ‘feminist activism and other feminist practices, agency and organisation in Europe, North America and many other developed countries between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s.’¹²⁶ Indeed, Dyhouse argues that ‘rising levels of aspiration and educational achievement amongst women, following the extension of secondary schooling after 1944, and the extensions of university provision from the 1960s, were crucially important in the rise of “second

¹²² Lynne Segal, ‘“Jam Today” Feminist Impacts and Transformation in the 1970s’, Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton, and Pat Thane (eds), *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, (Manchester, 2016), p. 154.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹²⁶ Sue Burley and Laurel Forster, ‘Historicising the Women’s Liberation Movement’, *Women's History Review*, 25:5, (2016), p. 697.

wave” feminism through the 1960s and 1970s.¹²⁷ However, the accounts of women who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 suggest a different relationship between developments in women’s education and feminist sentiment. For them, educational opportunities made them see it as less necessary to associate with political feminist movements of the period and they generally did not see themselves as sharing in a collective female identity. This meant that a distinctly woman-focused, or feminist culture did not develop in the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, shaping the way women responded to the difficulties they did face as members of these institutions.

While the women who entered mixed-sex colleges in 1974 believed in the basic right of women to have opportunities and experiences that were equal to those of men, few expressed this belief in terms of a conscious or active ‘feminist’ identity. For example, Ava felt that, when she was a student, she ‘probably was ideologically feminist, I just didn’t know I was.’ Ava emphasised her belief in equality but suggested she did not consider this attitude in terms of a politicised identity; ‘I would have thought completely unreasonable the assumption that I couldn’t do something because I was a woman, but I never articulated that because it never occurred to me that anybody would dream of doing such a thing.’¹²⁸ Similarly Alice stated that she did not consider herself a feminist when she was a young woman because she ‘never felt the need. I never felt in any way discriminated against.’¹²⁹ Martha also commented that, through her life, ‘opportunities presented themselves’ and therefore she ‘didn’t feel I had to fight for (them).’ This meant that Martha ‘never thought I had to be’ a feminist.¹³⁰ When asked if she considered herself a feminist Georgia replied ‘you didn’t think of yourself as a feminist. I just thought as myself as – I absolutely thought that I should be able to access anything that a man could access.’¹³¹ Thus, for these women, educational opportunity and their ability to successfully take up such opportunities made them see it as less necessary to subscribe to a collective, politically feminist identity.

¹²⁷ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 205.

¹²⁸ Interview with Ava.

¹²⁹ Interview with Alice, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 3 August 2020.

¹³⁰ Interview with Martha.

¹³¹ Interview with Georgia.

Women similarly suggested that they did not consider themselves to have shared in a collective female identity while they were young women. Georgia stated that she had ‘never taken into consideration whether I was male or female’ when she was young.¹³² Lucy similarly stated that she ‘didn’t see myself as being particularly female’ while she was a student.¹³³ Hannah recalled her son saying to her that, “‘you’re not like a normal girl. You are half man.’” Hannah relayed this comment with laughter and stated that she found it ‘a compliment in some ways.’ She recognised this as an accurate description of her character, using the fact that she mainly socialised with men while she was at college and the fact that she ‘generally prefer(s) working with men’¹³⁴ as evidence of it being so. Therefore, women who entered the first mixed-sex colleges could see themselves as partly sharing in the male student identity that was the normative identity associated with these institutions.

The fact that women did not consider themselves as sharing in a collective female identity, and the fact that they did not associate with a politically feminist identity, shaped the way they interacted with the student lifestyles and cultures of the first mixed-sex colleges. The social groups that emerged within the first mixed-sex colleges tended to be male-dominated and women did not find that a female social network emerged among the women students. Mary’s main friends at college were ‘all men’¹³⁵ while Georgia described the social pattern of the women at her college as ‘two or three of us... with a group of men.’ Georgia emphasised that she ‘had far more male friends than I had female friends, and some of the girls I really didn’t know very well at all.’¹³⁶ Jennie also ‘had pretty well only male friends’¹³⁷ while Violet suggested that she did not become strong friends with the other women at her college; she stated that she had a friend who attended one of the women’s colleges who ‘made very strong friends’ who were women. She felt that women in her college ‘had less opportunity to do that’ because there were so few women.¹³⁸

¹³² Interview with Georgia.

¹³³ Interview with Lucy conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 June 2020.

¹³⁴ Interview with Hannah.

¹³⁵ Interview with Mary.

¹³⁶ Interview with Georgia.

¹³⁷ Interview with Jennie.

¹³⁸ Interview with Violet.

While women were a minority in all five of the colleges, as noted previously, they were often accommodated in groups in specific areas. This may be expected to have provided women with greater opportunities to get to know each other. However, women suggested that this was not the case. Nadia's college placed women on two staircases, but she recalled 'there were quite a few guys I was friends with' and commented that 'I don't think (the women) liked each other terribly much.'¹³⁹ Similarly, Sandra stated that 'we as girls didn't bond,' reflecting that she felt that this was in part caused by women being a minority group in their colleges; 'obviously you are not going to find necessarily your soulmate amongst twenty-six girls.'¹⁴⁰ Indeed, women emphasised how far they felt they were subsumed into the male student community and culture of their colleges. Violet commented the 'we just sort of were absorbed into the college'¹⁴¹ and Sandra similarly noted that the college 'just went from being three hundred men to two hundred and seventy men and thirty women.'¹⁴² Both Violet and Sandra suggested the presence of women did not engender the formation of a distinct female undergraduate identity or culture within mixed-sex colleges.

Some women felt it was unfortunate that women did not form strong social groups within mixed-sex colleges. For example, Sandra described this as 'sad' and felt that this was symptomatic of her college's lack of consideration of the steps it would need to take to ensure that the women, as a group, found the college socially hospitable; 'I think there was no attempt to kind of get the girls to bond and to make friends.'¹⁴³ Violet, while reflecting in retrospect that the lack of strong female social groups in her college was a negative thing, admitted that she had 'come to appreciate the company of women more over time' suggesting that it was only in later life that she felt that it was a 'shame' that she did not have more female friends.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, many women suggested they actively preferred male company while they were students. For example, Georgia commented that she 'always got on well with boys ... in some ways I find them easier to get on with, sometimes, than women.'¹⁴⁵ Louise also

¹³⁹ Interview with Nadia.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Sandra.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Violet.

¹⁴² Interview with Sandra.

¹⁴³ Interview with Sandra.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Violet.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Georgia.

stated that ‘I was used to having lots of male friends’ and she found it normal that there was not ‘a group of women who stuck together all the time.’¹⁴⁶ Sophie similarly suggested that she enjoyed being a minority group of women in her college because of the social dynamics it created, stating ‘I was very pleased, because I liked boys.’¹⁴⁷ The fact that this cohort did not have strong female social networks as young women, or see it as necessary to do so, contrasts to the way other women approached adult life during the period. For example, Mary Ingram writes that when facing the contradictions of life as adult women in the 1970s, her ‘close female friends’¹⁴⁸ were an important support network. This suggests how far, for women in the 1974 cohort, attending a mixed-sex college at Oxford was linked to their personal preference as young women for male-dominated social circles. For these women, entering a male-dominated social scene and culture was seen as desirable and therefore they themselves did not want to alter the social structure of their colleges.

This lack of a sense of shared female identity could also impact women’s view of future cohorts of women that entered their colleges. Some said they felt a degree of hostility to the arrival of more women in the autumn term of 1975. For example, while generally seeing it as a good thing that colleges remained mixed-sex, Catherine felt that women in her year ‘were quite hacked off’¹⁴⁹ when more women entered the college because they felt it diminished the exclusive status that she and others felt at being the few women within the college. Louise suggested that the college culture became ‘less fun’ when more women came into the college in the second year. She felt this was because the women were less willing to join in with the frivolous, male college culture than the first-year women, stating ‘we would do stupid things like climbing over the college roof and that sort of silly jape that people have been doing forever, but the second year women didn’t seem to be into that.’ Louise described the second year of women as ‘highly academic’ and said ‘they did seem to spend more time in groups of women.’¹⁵⁰ Thus, women in the first cohort did not necessarily see their entry

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Louise.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Sophie.

¹⁴⁸ Ingram, *Now We are Thirty*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Catherine.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Louise.

into previously male colleges primarily in terms of promoting the collective movement of women against institutions of male exclusivity. At the time, they viewed their entrance into these colleges more with an individualist mind-set of personal achievement of access to an elite male institution. Furthermore, they could see any sense of a feminisation or alteration of the mores of student life in their colleges, and the establishment of a distinctive female social network, as negatively affecting the culture of their colleges.

This attitude is also reflected in the fact that women in the first year generally did not see it as necessary to encourage or participate in collective women-led or focused activity that was aimed at bringing about feminist change to colleges. Evie felt that ‘once we were there, there wasn’t much discussion’ about the complexities that might be involved with women entering a formerly male college. Evie reflected that ‘it takes a while for, if you like, a more active feminism to emerge’ and suggested that ‘it’s only the later groups who come in probably sort of three or four or five years down the line (when) people start saying actually why is this like that and why can’t such and such change.’¹⁵¹ Indeed, Hilda commented that she felt that, despite the wider context of a growing feminist movement, ‘to a certain extent I accepted the status quo, didn’t realize the extent to which you needed to undermine it.’¹⁵² Thus, as previous chapters have noted, women formed individual strategies to deal with difficulties that they faced in mixed-sex colleges, but this did not engender a collective feminist critique of the way their colleges had responded to the first cohort of women.

This mentality led to some women seeing any critiques of the way women were treated in mixed-sex colleges as a negative thing. Jayne suggested that, when later years of women did start to question the inequalities that were present in mixed-sex colleges, she did not see this kind of enquiry in a positive light. She stated that, in one of the later cohorts of women at her college, one of the women students ‘was quite strident about the fact that male teachers were misbehaving, that the attitude to women was not right’ and therefore organised a ‘meeting about the women in college’ to discuss these issues.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Evie.

¹⁵² Interview Hilda.

Jayne recalled 'feeling a bit cross with her because I thought, I worked very hard to get here and to enjoy the same privileges as the men. And now you're telling me that it's not working.'¹⁵³ Thus, women could view greater feminist analysis of their position within colleges unfavourably, precisely because it had the potential to destabilise their personal narratives of their individual achievement of successful participation in elite, male-dominated institutions.

Women's view of it as unnecessary to approach the difficulties they faced in their colleges in terms of a collective feminist call for change also shaped the ways women responded to sexism that did occur within the student cultures of mixed-sex colleges. The majority of women did not consider such behaviour as symbolic of their inequality within institutions. They acknowledged that everyday sexism was, and had been during their formative years, a part of the social dynamic of women's lives both within and beyond their college. However, they saw individual resilience to its occurrence, rather than collective outrage at, and struggle against, its existence, as the way to assert their presence within male spaces, communities and cultures. When discussing men's sexualisation of women students that occurred at her college, Maia stated that 'if there were issues, most of them you could laugh off, or you just tell the person to "bugger off"... You got teased, people were a nuisance. There was pouncing, but then, to be honest, I've had that all my life in work as well and I think if you can't cope with that, I think it's your problem to some extent.'¹⁵⁴ Isabella similarly reflecting on 1970s Britain generally, commented that 'sexual harassment was just so much part of the culture. I find it kind of amusing now when women complain about, you know, having their bottom patted or something, I mean, it just happened all the time and you just didn't care about it.' Isabella, who did identify herself as having been a feminist when she was a young woman, said she did not mind such behaviour because she found 'it easy enough to just slap people off and just laugh at them.'¹⁵⁵ Such comments indicate that while women were aware of the misogynistic elements of college cultures, and of the

¹⁵³ Interview with Jayne.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Maia.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Isabella.

ubiquity of male sexualisation of women in society more generally, they did not consider collective action against such treatment as the way to prevent it.

Therefore, the maleness of the culture of mixed-sex colleges was in part perpetuated by the fact that the first cohort of women did not establish a collective female identity or feminist culture in their colleges. In part because of their ability to successfully integrate into the male cultures of their college, and to take up the increased educational and social opportunities open to them, women did not see it as important to address the issues they faced in their colleges, or indeed beyond, in terms of wider structural inequalities of British society. For this cohort, the educational opportunities that women gained through the twentieth century had the potential to reinforce an understanding of equality as being achieved on an individualist basis and within male-dominated, led and focused systems and spheres, rather than through a collective dismantling of such structures.

Conclusion

The nature of the Oxford collegiate system meant that, when women entered mixed-sex colleges in 1974, they became part of a social institution that had an established cultural identity. When women entered mixed-sex colleges these social institutions and the bodies within them that structured social life in colleges, such as JCRs, were made up of groups of men. Therefore, the cultures of these institutions were essentially male, in that they were produced by and for male students and revolved around stereotypically masculine behaviours. This chapter has argued that, when women first entered mixed-sex colleges, these dominant cultures remained male and women's position in colleges was determined, and indeed judged, in terms of how they interacted with these male cultures. Generally, the roles women were expected to conform to in these cultures were 'honorary man' or 'sexualised romantic interest'.

Women engaged with these cultures in various ways, both desiring and feeling pressure to adapt to them. While some found the male cultures of their colleges challenging, many embraced the masculine nature of student life in their colleges, conforming to the masculine, 'laddish' codes of

behaviour and identities that were promoted by these cultures. Some participated in the sporting rituals that had come to symbolise affiliation to the dominant cultural, and in one case, national, identity of colleges. These women saw participating in these areas of student life within their colleges as an important demonstration of their commitment to their colleges. Moreover, they could also see such participation as proving that the presence of women in previously male colleges would not essentially change their institutional identity. In this way, women's ability to conform to the pre-existing male patterns of student life came to be seen as important to men's positive evaluation of the project of co-education itself.

While some rituals and activities associated with college life remained significant during this period, wider social shifts that occurred in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s impacted on the nature of the student cultures within mixed-sex colleges. The new openness with which sex was discussed in British culture, changes in sexual mores and the free availability of the contraceptive pill for single women altered the role that sex had in student life, particularly in terms of women's view of the possibility of having carefree and casual sex as students if they wanted to. This context engendered a sexualised culture within mixed-sex colleges. While women could find these cultures fun and liberating, they could also see them as objectifying and ones in which the subservience of women to male impulses and desires was assumed. Thus, while the cultures in mixed-sex colleges in some ways changed in pace with the 'liberalising' of attitudes towards sex, the male gaze and the male experience often continued to be privileged within them. Furthermore, men could evaluate women's presence in mixed-sex colleges in terms of their participation in these sexualised college cultures. Thus again, male students' positive evaluation of the scheme of mixed-sex colleges was associated with women's involvement in a culture that was structured and encouraged by men.

A distinctive female-centric or actively feminist culture did not generally emerge among the first women at mixed-sex colleges at Oxford. Women did not feel that there was a collective female identity shared among those who entered these colleges and strong female-dominated social networks did not generally develop. Instead, women's social lives were shaped by their immersion in male-

dominated social groups, which for many women reflected their own social preferences. This emphasises again that many women saw attending a mixed-sex college as desirable specifically because they wanted to be part of a majority male, minority female environment and enjoyed the cultural and social life this provided.

Furthermore, the initial presence of women also did not lead to the formation of a collective feminist political culture within mixed-sex colleges. While believing in the principle of equality, the majority of women in the first cohort did not associate with the political feminism of organised feminist movements of the time. For these women the educational opportunities that they had accessed meant they did not consider it necessary to subscribe to a feminist identity. Furthermore, when faced with sexism in their colleges, or society more widely, women did not see it as necessary to apply principles of collective female oppression by patriarchal structures to their experiences of obstacles and misogyny. Instead, their approach to achieving equality within male spaces, communities and cultures was one focused on demonstrating personal resilience, and commitment to achieving integration. Cultures in the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, therefore, remained male and unaffected by a collective feminist ideology of change. This was in part because women themselves did not see such change as required for the achievement of equality for women within these institutions.

Chapter Six

Mixed-Sex Colleges and Women's Post-University Experiences

This chapter examines the post-university experiences of women who entered Oxford's first mixed-sex colleges in 1974. Pat Thane argues that Oxford and Cambridge are historically 'privileged institutions... whose male graduates did and do get the best jobs'¹ and therefore, 'if any group of women could have been expected to 'make it' in conventional career terms,' women who attended these institutions 'should have been in the best position to do so.'² This chapter asks whether this was the case for women in the first cohort to attend the same colleges at Oxford as these men.

The chapter argues that while some women who attended the first mixed-sex colleges entered and experienced linear progression in male-dominated careers that were associated with Oxford male graduates, many did not. The experiences of many of the women in the cohort reflect general trends of graduate women's employment in the 1970s and 1980s, suggesting attending a formerly male college at Oxford did not significantly alter women's likely career pattern or guarantee that women would have a career trajectory that more closely resembled that associated with male Oxford graduates. Furthermore, despite the fact that the women who entered mixed-sex colleges entered employment after the introduction of legislation, such as the 1970 Equal Pay Act, which came into force in December 1975, the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, and the 1975 Employment Protection Act, for many of the women in this cohort, their post-university experiences mirrored those of earlier generations of graduate women. This reflects what Jane Lewis describes as the 'continuity'³ of women's relationship to paid employment through the twentieth century, despite the introduction of legislation which aimed to minimise earning discrepancies between men and women, and legally provided women with job protection when they had children. Therefore, this chapter argues that many

¹ Pat Thane, 'Girton Graduates: Earning and learning, 1920s-1980s', *Women's History Review*, 13:3, (2004), p. 349.

² Thane, 'Girton Graduates', p. 349.

³ Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years*, (Oxford, 1992), p. 69.

of the barriers that graduate women faced before the introduction of such legislation continued to influence women's experiences of employment into the late-1970s, 1980s and early-1990s, even for women who graduated from elite male-dominated educational institutions.

For those women who did experience progression in male-dominated careers, a significant number suggested that their experiences at mixed-sex colleges helped them to achieve professionally.

However, these women generally found it was the experience of overtly masculine cultures at mixed-sex colleges, and of sexism within these cultures, that was of most use for their future careers. This was because it made them more resilient when it came to facing similar, or worse, cultures and behaviours in the workplace. Therefore, attending a mixed-sex college helped some women, but by no means all, to enter and progress within male-dominated careers, but the primary way that their college experience supported these women was to prepare them for the negative aspects of working within male working environments and cultures. This suggests again that women's experiences at mixed-sex colleges could reinforce the view that women's success and achievement of greater equality depended on them adapting to, embracing and working within male spaces, communities and cultures, rather than challenge their patriarchal nature.

Some have associated the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford with increasing numbers of women entering male-dominated careers and professions. For example, Helen McCarthy notes that the numbers of women in senior ranks in the civil service, in accounting and in the law had all increased through the 1970s, arguing that this development 'reflected a narrowing gender gap in higher education.' She associates Oxford's move to mixed-sex colleges with this process, stating that, at this time, 'women's representation at the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge also improved as a string of all-male colleges went mixed.'⁴ This reflects a wider assumption that women's increased access to a university education through the second half of the twentieth century brought them greater employment opportunities when they graduated. This argument was suggested by Rosemary Crompton and Kay Sanderson in their 1990 study and has been accepted by some

⁴ Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives A History of Working Motherhood*, (London, 2020), p. 333.

historians.⁵ For example, Carol Dyhouse argues that ‘the situation began to change’ in the 1970s in terms of the ‘traditional gender divisions in the graduate labour market’⁶ as more women entered British universities and elite male colleges at Oxford and Cambridge started accepting women, and equalities legislation was introduced. As the chapter will show, the assumption that access to formerly male colleges would make it more likely for women to have career trajectories that more closely resembled those associated with male Oxford graduates has been present in the commemorative rhetoric that surrounds Oxford’s move to mixed-sex colleges, and has been expressed by those both inside and outside the first five mixed-sex colleges. This view fails to recognise the wider systematic inequalities that women who graduated from these institutions faced through their working lives despite increased educational opportunities and the introduction of equality legislation through the 1970s. This chapter argues that providing women with access to the same colleges as men did not necessarily lead to them having career trajectories that resembled those of their male peers, or mean that their experiences of employment were different from other graduate women through the period.

A number of case studies focusing on graduate women’s careers have challenged the assumption that women’s increasing access to a university education through the twentieth century enabled them to gain greater career opportunities in non-gendered forms of employment. For example, in her study of women who graduated from the Cambridge women’s college Girton between 1920 and 1980, Thane argues these women graduates tended to have ‘less conventionally successful careers than men of equivalent ability and training.’ She notes that, at least up until the 1970s, women’s career opportunities continued to be limited ‘above all to school-teaching,’⁷ and, while women who graduated after this point were able to access a greater number of careers ‘they still went less far in their careers than comparable men’⁸ and ‘often experienced male hostility or discrimination’⁹ when they did enter male-dominated professions. Similarly, in her study of female graduates from the

⁵ R. Crompton and K. Sanderson, *Gendered Jobs and Social Change* (London, 1990), pp. 54-64.

⁶ Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History*, (Abingdon, 2006), p. 115.

⁷ Thane, ‘Girton Graduates’, p. 347.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

University of Liverpool between 1947 and 1979, Sarah Aiston found that women faced ‘limited, gendered career options’¹⁰ when they left university, often ‘faced difficulties ... in reconciling paid employment and domesticity’ and had lower levels of career progression than men.¹¹ Bethany White, focusing on the experiences of working-class graduate women who attended universities and other forms of higher education in the 1960s and 1970s, similarly argues that, while attending university could contribute to a certain amount of occupational mobility for working-class women, it was not ‘sufficient to ensure linear upward mobility.’¹² These studies suggest that graduate women’s employment trajectories reflected general trends of women’s employment during the period. For example, in her study of women’s employment in Britain from 1945, Lewis argues that while ‘there has been a remarkable post-war increase in women’s paid employment’¹³ there are significant continuities in terms of the type of work undertaken, often low paid and low status, and in the extent to which motherhood impacts women’s career trajectories.¹⁴ She argues that ‘given the gendered division of unpaid work and the unavailability of childcare, a majority of women with small children have not been able to contemplate full time employment’¹⁵ and therefore the majority of working mothers took on part-time roles through the second half of the twentieth century.

This chapter argues that in many ways the career trajectories of women who entered Oxford’s first mixed-sex colleges mirror these trends of women’s employment through the late-twentieth century. While some women, at least for part of their working lives, broke stereotypes of female employment and entered high status, male-dominated occupations, as many did not. As Selina Todd argues, ‘the expansion of further and higher education in the 1970s meant that for some women the 1980s was a decade of expanding opportunity;’¹⁶ however this was not the experience of all. Furthermore, while a growing number of women gained employment opportunities in high status, high paid, male-

¹⁰ Sarah Aiston, ‘A Good Job for a Girl? The Career Biographies of Women Graduates of the University of Liverpool Post-1945’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol 15, No. 4, (2004), p. 361.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 386.

¹² Bethany White, ‘Working Class Women’s Experiences of Higher Education in Post-War Britain’ (DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2019), p. 162.

¹³ Lewis, *Women in Britain*, p. 65.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁶ Selina Todd, *Snakes and Ladders: The Great British Social Mobility Myth*, (London, 2021), p. 109.

dominated professions, these spheres remained essentially male in their atmosphere and culture. In order to succeed within them women had to conform to the male behaviours and working patterns associated with them – a process which women felt their experiences in the male spaces, communities and cultures of Oxford’s first mixed-sex colleges had prepared them to navigate.

Planning for a Career

This section considers how far women in the 1974 cohort left university with a clear idea of what they wanted to do and, if so, what were the important factors that helped them make this decision. Other case studies have shown that it was common for women graduates in the 1960s and early-1970s to leave university without a clear idea of what they wanted to do after their studies. For example, Aiston argues that of her sample of graduates from Liverpool University ‘the majority of the women ... had no definite idea of what they wanted to do on graduating from university.’¹⁷ Aiston argues that this was the result of a lack of careers advice that was free from gendered ideas about what constituted a desirable job for a female graduate, as well as the discriminatory nature of job advertisements during the period. As she states, ‘throughout the 1960s and early-1970s, career adverts were introduced that were predominantly aimed at university men.’¹⁸ Aiston argues this situation reflected the ‘persistence in sexist assumptions about women’s life-plans’¹⁹ and the continued expectation that women would have a temporary working life in jobs before having children, rather than embarking on a lifelong career. Similarly, White found the women in her sample often did not have clear ideas about what they wanted to do after university, arguing that ‘many women related a sense of “aimlessness” in their post-graduate career decisions.’²⁰

The women who entered Oxford’s first mixed-sex colleges left full-time education and started their professional lives after the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975. Therefore, unlike many in the cohorts of women studied by Aiston and White, they were a group for whom most careers

¹⁷ Aiston, ‘A Good Job for a Girl’, p. 741.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 366.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 361.

²⁰ White, ‘Working Class Women’s Experiences of Higher Education’, pp. 174-178.

were, at least legally, open. Furthermore, they were a group of women who had experienced university among a male cohort who commonly expected to embark on a career when they left university. The extent to which male graduates were targeted in job advertisements in student newspapers suggests this was the demographic that employers expected to apply for jobs when they left university.²¹ For some women who attended the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford, this context contributed to them having clearer career plans when they left university and moving directly into male-dominated professions. However, this was not the case for all, as for many a lack of non-gendered or any careers advice at university led them to ‘fall’ into their first professions which tended to be in traditionally female professions such as teaching.

A number of women in the 1974 cohort left Oxford with a clear plan of what they wanted to do next and, for some, experiences they had had while at university had been helpful to them in forming their plans. For example, Rachel commented that ‘I decided very early on that I wanted to be a journalist’ and found her experience writing for, and later being editor of, an Oxford student newspaper to have been invaluable to her career progression in journalism.²² Women who had studied law and medicine similarly tended to have a clear idea of their professional route after university, although, as will be discussed later, this was not always the case. Anna, Hannah, Jessica and Martha moved directly from their medical degrees to clinical training and then subsequently had careers in medicine.²³ Jessica emphasised her focus on entering the medical profession while she was a student, stating ‘I was very determined to become a doctor.’²⁴ Susanna, who studied law and had clear plans on how she would enter the legal profession after university, suggested that attending a mixed-sex college was of specific help to her in this process. She recalled that ‘college certainly introduced me to an old college member in Middle Temple, who could be my sponsor for membership into the Inn.’ Susanna went on to emphasise that ‘I was assisted by some of my college contacts’ through the early stages of her legal

²¹ See Aiston, ‘A Good Job for a Girl’, p. 366.

²² Interview with Rachel, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 July 2020.

²³ Interview with Hannah, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 5 November 2020, Interview with Anna, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 10 September 2020, Interview with Jessica, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 2 July 2020, Interview with Martha, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 26 January 2023

²⁴ Interview with Jessica.

career.²⁵ This emphasises that going to an elite historically male college did have the potential to help women to establish careers in male-dominated fields, as it provided women with access to an ‘old boys network’ of Oxford alumni who formed the societies that made up such professions. Indeed, Violet emphasised that becoming a barrister ‘is very much about who you know and getting into the right Inns of Court.’²⁶

Other women, while not necessarily having independently formed an idea of what they wanted to do after university, found different forms of university careers services useful in supporting their move into traditionally male careers. For example, Eloise recalled that she ‘went along to the Oxford careers place and said “look, I’m going to be graduating ... at the end of this year and I’d like to carry on using (the language she had studied), what can you suggest?” And they gave me two brochures ...so I applied for both things and went to interviews with them.’ Eloise got a job as a linguist for a government agency which she thoroughly enjoyed.²⁷ For a number of women, the ‘milk-round’ was the way in which they found out about opportunities in male-dominated careers in areas such as business and industry. Unlike Eloise, these women suggested that they did not receive any direct careers advice from the University but used the system of the ‘milk-round’, where companies advertised at universities and would hold recruitment events, to get their first interviews. For example, Harriet recalled that she did the ‘milk-round’, ‘got a handful of interviews’ and got offered a job with a petrochemical company.²⁸ Similarly, Sandra commented that, while she was not given any careers advice by the University, the University ‘just said the ‘milk-round’ is coming, all these different big firms are coming to interview this year’s Oxford candidates.’ Sandra commented that ‘because everyone else was doing it’ she decided to take up the opportunity. Significantly, throughout her interview Sandra emphasised that she was mainly friends with the boys in her college, stating that ‘we as girls didn’t bond.’²⁹ Indeed, as noted in the previous chapter, a large proportion of women in the

²⁵ Interview with Susanna, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 2 October 2020.

²⁶ Interview with Violet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 October 2020.

²⁷ Interview with Eloise, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 3 September 2020.

²⁸ Interview with Harriet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 24 July 2020.

²⁹ Interview with Sandra, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 October 2022.

cohort suggested their main friends in their colleges were men. Therefore, when it came to thinking about post-university careers, women's main peer group were male undergraduates for whom careers resources such as the 'milk round' were historically intended and who more commonly established clearer plans for their post-university careers; indeed Ava noted that she felt 'the guys had much more of a path' planned out.³⁰ These examples illustrate one way in which attending a mixed-sex college had the potential to encourage women to establish clearer post-university career plans, and to take up opportunities such as the 'milk-round', which enabled them greater access to male-dominated careers. Indeed, in her study of the gender dynamics of City banks, Linda McDowell argues that 'informal social networks among men ... built up at school and university'³¹ were significant to maintaining the elite, male-dominated nature of the banking sector. Thus, as Sandra's and Susanna's accounts suggest, giving women greater opportunities to access these college-based male social networks had the potential to offer them a greater awareness of and access to the career opportunities that were available through such networks.

In contrast, many of the women who graduated from the first mixed-sex colleges did not have such experiences and, like women in other samples, experienced a lack of direction when it came to planning their post-university careers. Ava recalled that when she finished her degree 'I fuffed about, and then I thought, "oh god, better do something"'.³² Similarly, Rosie reflected that 'I hadn't really got much idea'³³ about what she wanted to do after university, and Alice stated that 'I didn't know what to do' and eventually did a PGCE because it gave her 'something to do'.³⁴ Louise recalled the depression she felt at the end of her degree, describing herself as 'a bit lost to be honest. I didn't know what I was going to do next.' She recalled 'I got myself a job at a restaurant' at the end of her degree as she did not have a clear idea about her future.³⁵ Other women whose initial post-university plans fell through could also experience a sense of vagueness when it came to deciding what they wanted to

³⁰ Interview with Ava, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 October 2020.

³¹ Linda McDowell, *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City*, (Oxford, 1997), p. 192.

³² Interview with Ava.

³³ Interview with Rosie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 August 2020.

³⁴ Interview with Alice, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 3 August 2020.

³⁵ Interview with Louise, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 September 2020.

do, and would often fall into gendered, low-paid and low-status forms of employment. Georgia started a doctorate but didn't complete it, as she stated it 'sort of collapsed in failure' and when her funding ran out she started teaching as a self-employed tutor 'just to make a living' and 'bumbled along like that for a number of years.'³⁶ Jayne similarly started a doctorate, stating that when she finished her undergraduate degree she 'wanted to teach at university.'³⁷ However, Jayne also did not complete her doctorate and went into teaching instead. Jennie also went into teaching when she dropped out of the clinical studies element of her medical degree. Jennie recalled thinking 'if you've got to do something, you'd better teach.'³⁸ These examples indicate that teaching could often be a career that women fell into when their initial plans fell through, corroborating Aiston's argument that teaching was a career that women drifted into because it was accessible.³⁹

However, women could also slip into such careers on account of receiving ineffectual careers advice or not receiving any at all. Careers advice was delivered by Oxford University centrally rather than by individual colleges, so while this cannot be seen as a fault with the way colleges dealt with their female students it nonetheless indicates the limited impact that the initial move to mixed-sex colleges had on the wider systematic inequalities that were present within the University as a whole. Some women had little, if any, recollection of there being a careers service which itself suggests that it was not a prominent body within the University. Violet stated that 'I don't think Oxford as a whole did anything in the way of career awareness or planning'⁴⁰ while Ava reflected, 'I don't remember anybody saying "what do you think you might be good at".'⁴¹ Emma recalled that 'nobody gave me careers advice' going on to state that 'unless you were going to do postgraduate work, they weren't terribly interested in what you were going to do after'⁴² and Isabella reflected that 'I don't really remember getting any careers advice... or anybody really talking to us about what we were going to

³⁶ Interview with Georgia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 June 2020.

³⁷ Interview with Jayne conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 October 2020.

³⁸ Interview with Jennie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 4 August 2020.

³⁹ Aiston, 'A Good Job for a Girl? The Career Biographies of Women Graduates of the University of Liverpool Post-1945', *Twentieth Century British History*, 15:4, (2004), p. 371.

⁴⁰ Interview with Violet.

⁴¹ Interview with Ava.

⁴² Interview with Emma, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 8 October 2020.

do next. I think we were just left to sort of find our own way really.⁴³ Such comments corroborate Sarah Curtis' findings in her study of female graduates from St Hugh's College Oxford. Curtis notes that the careers service at Oxford 'receives stringent criticism from graduates of most periods.'⁴⁴

Some women did use the careers service but found it unhelpful and, in some cases, discouraging of them considering careers beyond what was already familiar to them because of their family employment history. Caroline recalled that 'I went to the careers interview and the guy said, "Oh, what were you thinking of doing afterwards?" And I said, "I'm not so sure. I'm thinking about maybe town planning. I'm thinking maybe teaching."' "Oh", he said, "well, here are the forms for teacher training. That's what you need." And that was it'. Caroline reflected that 'there was no information about what careers might be open to people' and suggested that it was only through her career in teaching that she realised the possible careers that she could have had after university.⁴⁵ Alice recalled how far the careers service actively encouraged her to follow a gendered career path that mirrored that of her parents. She stated that:

the careers service at Oxford was absolutely useless in those days. I actually went for an interview ... and said "Well I know what I don't want to do. I don't want to teach." And the man said, "Oh yes, you do." I said, "no, I don't. I know about teaching. My parents are teachers. I don't want to do it myself" ... And the guy just said ... "you're doing that because you're protesting against your parents." And, I said, "I want to know about banking" which he wouldn't tell me about.⁴⁶

Significantly, both Caroline and Alice did go into teaching, indicating how far the lack of effective careers advice for women could have a limiting impact on their eventual career choice, leaving them with the traditional gendered career choices available to women.

The careers advice women received could also be influenced by the continuing structural inequality of the workplace. Harriet remembered going to the careers office and:

talking to this woman ... she talked about different options and she said, "whatever you do, don't go into personnel." I said, "really?" She said, "no, because they'll just give you a job as

⁴³ Interview with Isabella, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2020.

⁴⁴ Sarah Curtis, 'Origins and Outcomes', Penny Griffen (ed), *St Hugh's One Hundred Years of Women's Education in Oxford*, (London, 1986), p. 267.

⁴⁵ Interview with Caroline, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 July 2020.

⁴⁶ Interview with Alice.

a typist.” She said “the BBC is bit like that.” So she listed organisations where you might well end up as a typist.⁴⁷

On the one hand Harriet’s recollections suggest that some women were encouraged to avoid career paths that would confine them to gendered roles. Indeed, when commenting on the ineffectual careers advice that Girton graduates felt they received, Thane considers that ‘however disappointing at the time, this may have been a realistic appraisal by careers advice centres of the female labour market.’⁴⁸ However, such examples nonetheless indicate how far careers advice given to women in the late-1970s, even those who had gained access to elite male educational institutions, was shaped by an awareness of the gendered structure of the workplace and patterns of employment.

Dyhouse has argued that, by the 1970s, and following the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, university careers services became more effective at encouraging the employment ambitions of women students.⁴⁹ However, the recollections of women in this sample suggest, at least at the University of Oxford, this was not the case for all women. While some women received effective advice from the careers service which encouraged them into male-dominated, higher paid, higher status professions, for many the careers service either did little to encourage them to be aspirational in their career choice or it actively encouraged them to follow traditionally female career paths. The careers support that appears to have been most effective at providing women with opportunities to enter male-dominated professions was systems such as the ‘milk-round’ which enabled women to apply to such opportunities. In this case, it was women’s own agency and the influence of their peer groups, which in the case of mixed-sex colleges tended to be majority male, that were more effective at providing non-traditional career opportunities than official university careers advice. This again suggests that where the careers service was lacking in non-gendered careers advice, attending a mixed-sex college did have the potential to provide women with a broader view of their career options. However, for many women this potential role did not affect their initial career destinations.

⁴⁷ Interview with Harriet.

⁴⁸ Pat Thane, ‘The Careers of Female Graduates of Cambridge University, 1920s-1970s’, David Mitch, John Brown, and Marco H. D. Van Leeuwen (eds.), *Origins of the Modern Career*, (Cambridge, 2004), p. 218.

⁴⁹ Dyhouse, *Students*, p. 115.

Where women received limited, if any, careers advice, the background, employment history and class of their families were significant in shaping women's early attitudes towards their careers. Some perceived that their family's working-class background or employment patterns limited their own awareness of possible career paths. Georgia reflected that 'I'd grown up with no money ever so I wasn't particularly motivated by the whole sort of City thing,' seeing her father being a vicar as having influenced her perception of what constituted a desirable job. Georgia stated, 'I had very much grown up in this world of the vocation rather than the profession,'⁵⁰ and therefore never considered a commercial career. While Georgia did not suggest that she felt that this outlook, and the extent it limited her occupational mobility, had been detrimental to her, her comment nonetheless suggests that family background could confine women's occupational ambitions. Emily suggested that her view that she would not go into a profession and her eventual decision to go into business was informed by her family's background and her father's career. She stated that she 'wasn't interested in any of the professions... because as a family, we didn't know anybody in those professions, but I did know about business because by the time I was ready to go to uni, my dad had then become a successful consulting engineer with his own engineering business.'⁵¹ Violet suggested that despite having done a degree in law, her family's lack of knowledge of the profession contributed to her decision not to embark on a legal career after university. She reflected that, 'maybe if I'd had lawyers in the family, I would have known more' about the profession, stating that, 'I really knew bugger all. I was just so ignorant.' Violet's lack of awareness of the intricacies of the profession meant she perceived it to be an undesirable career, admitting on reflection that her attitudes 'were mostly wrong.' However, significantly, Violet felt that her ignorance also stemmed from the fact that her law tutor at her mixed-sex college 'found it easier to deal with men than women,' commenting that 'he was not somebody I would have particularly turned to for advice.'⁵² Therefore, she did not ask him for information about a legal career. Thus, in contrast to Susanna who found her mixed-sex college helpful in supporting her to enter the legal profession, Violet did not, and subsequently did not embark on a legal career. While

⁵⁰ Interview with Georgia.

⁵¹ Interview with Emily, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 9 July 2020.

⁵² Interview with Violet.

Violet and Emily, who went into business and industry respectively, did not necessarily see their early career moves as something they regretted, their narratives nonetheless emphasise how women saw their family background as having influenced their choices.

Other women suggested their early career choices had been limited because their university experiences had not counteracted the influence of their families' employment patterns. Ava reflected on how far her initial engagement with the job market was influenced by her background and preconceived attitudes towards employment. Ava stated that 'no one would have stopped me if I applied to be an accountant ... but I mean, it would never have occurred to me' to do so. Ava reflected that 'unless the idea is in the zeitgeist... you sometimes don't think that you want to do something because it's never occurred to you that it might (a) exist or (b) be a possibility.'⁵³ Caroline, who was from a working-class background, emphasised that 'we went into things that we knew about.' Caroline particularly felt that her background, and the lack of exposure she had to the mechanics of sectors such as finance and business prevented her from accessing career opportunities that her peers at her mixed-sex college pursued. She commented that 'other people knew about things like the "milk-round" and the graduate schemes and all these other things' but 'there was no information sessions on what the "milk-round" was for those people who didn't know what the "milk-round" was.'⁵⁴ This indicates that their family and class background, as well as gendered, ineffectual careers advice, could determine the extent to which women accessed the opportunities that an elite university such as Oxford was thought to offer and which some in mixed-sex colleges did access. These examples also suggest that while some women felt that the way their college peer group approached the job market influenced their own ideas, others felt that their colleges' social milieu or college experiences did not counteract the influence that their familial background had on their choices.

Therefore, while some women left mixed-sex colleges with clear plans to enter male-dominated professions, many did not, and these women were more likely to fall into traditionally female roles

⁵³ Interview with Ava.

⁵⁴ Interview with Caroline.

such as teaching. Furthermore, while some women who did directly enter male-dominated professions suggested that attending a mixed-sex college helped them to do so, other women suggested that accessing mixed-sex colleges did little to mitigate the impact that their class, familial employment histories, or gendered attitudes to employment had on the way they initially approached the job market after university.

Post-University Career Trajectories

The chapter now examines the women's longer term career trajectories in order to establish how far they differed from those represented by other samples of women who left university through the second half of the twentieth century. In doing so, it considers whether attending a mixed-sex college had any impact on women's career experiences, and if so, what was the nature of this contribution. Women who attended mixed-sex colleges entered a range of careers, some that conformed to pre-existing trends of female employment and some that deviated from these trends, with some women entering and experiencing upward career mobility within male-dominated fields. However, the extent to which women remained in these careers and experienced progression within them often depended on decisions regarding having and caring for children, and women's ability, or willingness, to accept and adopt male working cultures and patterns. Thus, while some women in this cohort were able to have careers that more closely resembled those of their male peers, they experienced similar challenges and barriers in their working lives to other women who graduated through the second half of the twentieth century. Significantly, women's accounts suggest that where their experience of a mixed-sex college was most useful, it was in that it prepared them for the masculine working environment that dominated in certain professions.

Studies of women's post-university careers in the mid-twentieth century indicate that women were more likely to enter the public sector after university. For example, sociologists Kelsall, Poole and Kuhn argued in the 1960s and early-1970s, that at this time women tended to enter public sector

jobs.⁵⁵ Thane argues that the private sector remained ‘less hospitable to women than the public sector’⁵⁶ for women graduating from Girton College Cambridge between 1920 and 1980. Aiston argues that women who graduated during the 1960s and 1970s experienced their post-university lives ‘within the confines of a discourse that emphasised a ‘good job for a girl’ as opposed to a career for a woman’⁵⁷ and that graduate women continued to be encouraged to take on traditionally female roles that could be combined with motherhood, such as teaching. In this discourse, the concept of linear, sustained career development continued to be gendered as a male trajectory.

Examinations of the careers of women who graduated in the 1970s and 1980s show that there was a gradual movement away from teaching and that a larger number of professions and industries became more common career destinations for graduate women. For example, Thane argues, of Girton alumnae, that ‘graduates of the 1970s and 1980s entered a wider range of occupations with greater success than their predecessors’⁵⁸ and the numbers going into teaching declined from ‘one third in the early 1960s’ to ‘20% of those in the early 1970s.’⁵⁹ Similarly, in her study of the post-university career destinations of graduates of St Hugh’s College Oxford, Curtis found that by ‘1976 the proportion taking teaching qualifications had fallen from the high of 29 per cent in 1936 to 19 per cent’⁶⁰ and, as she argues, by the 1970s a growing number of graduates entered ‘jobs previously held by men.’⁶¹ While Curtis’ study suggests that, by the 1970s, women who graduated from Oxford’s women’s colleges were able to experience early career destinations that more closely resembled those associated with Oxford’s male graduates, as her study was conducted in the 1980s it cannot give us an indication of how far these women experienced sustained career development in these fields; as she acknowledges, ‘we do not yet know how far they will be able to proceed up the managerial ladder.’⁶² Thane argues that, in the case of Girton graduates who did enter male-dominated professions, ‘they

⁵⁵ R. K. Kelsall, Anne Poole, and Annette Kuhn, *Graduates: The Sociology of an Elite*, (London, 1972), pp. 174-5.

⁵⁶ Thane, ‘Girton Graduates’, p. 356.

⁵⁷ Aiston, ‘A Good Job for a Girl?’, p. 361.

⁵⁸ Thane, ‘Girton Graduates’, p. 358.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

⁶⁰ Curtis, ‘Origins and Outcomes’, pp. 266-267.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 270

⁶² *Ibid.*

still went less far in their careers than comparable men even if they did not marry or have children'⁶³ and that 'discrimination or, often, lack of imagination on the part of management, plays a part in holding back the careers of many women.'⁶⁴ These case studies of groups of graduate women's employment in the late-1970s and 1980s, support Lewis' argument that during this period a growing number of women 'have gained the credentials to enter professions such as law and accounting in vastly increased numbers' but that this did not guarantee them sustained career development in their field.⁶⁵

The career trajectories of women who attended Oxford's first mixed-sex colleges both confirm and disrupt these narratives, and ultimately demonstrate the complex and various ways that women who graduated from elite educational institutions in the 1970s and 1980s experienced and interacted with the job market. To some extent, the cohort confirm the picture that, by the late-1970s and 1980s, the range of careers that were open to graduate women, particularly in male-dominated fields, was increasing. A large proportion of women in the sample worked in male-dominated fields at some point through their professional lives. For example, Emily moved into industrial marketing after she left university stating that she 'worked in industry for ten years.'⁶⁶ Lucy 'went into the City and... was an investment analyst' after dropping out of the clinical stage of her medical degree for financial reasons.⁶⁷ Violet worked for an oil company 'in their supply and distribution department' for four years after graduating, before studying for an MBA and moving into consultancy.⁶⁸ Amy 'got a job as an aerodynamicist' before moving to work for a technology corporation.⁶⁹ Four women eventually became medical consultants and seven women embarked on a career in the law after leaving university, entering male-dominated sectors in this profession; for example, Susanna became an inhouse lawyer for a bank after initially practising as a barrister.⁷⁰ One woman who became a lawyer

⁶³ Thane, 'Girton Graduates', p. 358.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 359.

⁶⁵ Lewis, *Women in Britain*, p. 87.

⁶⁶ Interview with Emily.

⁶⁷ Interview with Lucy, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 June 2020.

⁶⁸ Interview with Violet.

⁶⁹ Interview with Amy, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 September 2022.

⁷⁰ Interview with Susanna.

had not obtained a university degree, having left Oxford after her first year. This woman did her full legal training at a law college, which involved additional years of training due to the fact she did not have a degree. She suggested that, at the point at which she did her training, this route to a legal career had become unusual.⁷¹ Indeed, Leonard Schwartz argues that the 1970s was the key ‘turning point’ in the process by which professions such as accountancy and the law were ‘compelled to become graduate bodies’⁷² due to the increasing numbers of young people who were attending university. Two women became chartered accountants, and one went to work at a global trade organisation.

A number had sustained progression in these fields and achieved positions of status and influence within them. For example, Susanna commented that she ‘did well in the bank and I ended up in a senior position’⁷³ while June reflected on the position of influence she achieved over her career as a lawyer. She stated that she ‘ran for and was elected the president’ of a national legal organisation, describing this as ‘a very prestigious thing.’⁷⁴ Similarly, other women, while initially entering more stereotypically feminine professions, changed their careers later in their working lives, achieving high status positions within their new occupations. For example, one woman (participant v) initially taught English as a foreign language after she left university, before doing a PGCE and becoming a teacher and then a head of department in a secondary school. She eventually decided to leave teaching, initially working in the TV industry before deciding to apply to the Civil Service Graduate Fast Stream programme. She was successful in her application and thereafter worked her way up through the Civil Service, eventually becoming a senior Civil Servant.⁷⁵ Emma similarly changed her career trajectory in her 30s. After university she worked in a children’s home and then became a social worker. Emma recalled that ‘I did that for 13 years... and then I became a lawyer,’⁷⁶ a profession

⁷¹ Interview with Nadia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 8 October 2022.

⁷² Leonard Schwartz, ‘Professions, Elites, and Universities in England, 1870-1970’, *The Historical Journal*, 47: 4, (2004), p. 962.

⁷³ Interview with Susanna.

⁷⁴ Interview with June, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 14 September 2020.

⁷⁵ Interview with participant v, conducted by Florence Smith, online, date not given to protect participant’s identity.

⁷⁶ Interview with Emma.

which she continued to work in for twenty years. Evie completed a doctorate and has had a sustained career as an academic.⁷⁷

However, while such women progressed through their careers and achieved substantial career success, they did not necessarily gain the highest positions within their fields. For example, Ava, who had a successful career in television, becoming ‘one of the first female programme directors at twenty-eight’ and subsequently a producer, commented that ‘I never strove to be the big boss.’ Ava noted how far her career mirrored the gendered nature of the hierarchy of the television industry, stating ‘the big bosses with the money... they are very often male because even now women tend not to take that final leap into actual management’, reflecting that ‘we do the work but we don’t take that final leap. And it’s kind of irritating actually, because we should do.’⁷⁸ Other women similarly said that, while having successful careers, they did not take on the higher status roles, and suggested the complex reasons that caused this. For example, Hannah commented that she ‘chose a “Cinderella specialty”’, not aiming for the more competitive areas of medicine, as she stated, ‘I wasn’t terribly ambitious in my specialty choice.’ Here, Hannah’s use of the phrase ‘Cinderella specialty’ emphasises how far less competitive areas of medicine were gendered as female. However, she also mentioned that one reason for her speciality choice was that she ‘didn’t like being woken up in the middle of the night,’⁷⁹ and she did think about leaving medicine completely because of this. Ava who, while initially reflecting that she could have gone into a higher-status, higher-paid role in her career commented directly afterwards, ‘but first of all, I wouldn’t want to. And secondly, I don’t think it would have been easy because I wouldn’t be a white bloke.’⁸⁰ Here, Ava’s movement between her own decisions and the structural inequalities that shaped her career experiences suggests how far women’s reflections on their career choices involved a negotiation between a sense of their own agency and the inequalities that informed such choices. Susanna reflected that ‘I never wanted to be in a top position’ in her career, stating ‘I loved doing my job, the legal work, but when you get into a more senior position and

⁷⁷ Interview with Evie, conducted by Florence Smith, in Oxford, 8 September 2020.

⁷⁸ Interview with Ava.

⁷⁹ Interview with Hannah.

⁸⁰ Interview with Ava.

you've got people to manage, that's not something I've ever wanted to do.' She stated that her choice to not go for higher roles was also 'a matter of confidence' but 'not because I'm a woman.'⁸¹ This comment illustrates the complexities of women's own analysis of the factors that stopped them entering the highest positions in their professions. While choosing to emphasise that her sex was not a limiting factor, Susanna's acknowledgement that she lacked confidence suggests that her career choices were in part shaped by a gendered trend of women doubting their own abilities. Indeed, Thane argues that 'characterising the processes shaping women's careers as 'choices' misses many complexities' and does not offer 'sufficient sensitivity to the external, institutional and cultural constraints.'⁸²

Thus, while a significant number of women in the 1974 cohort did experience career success in male-dominated fields, for many, their career trajectories continued to reflect the trend of women not entering the most senior roles within their professions. As Linda McDowell argues, while by the 1980s and 90s 'unprecedented'⁸³ numbers of women were becoming part of the professional elite and entering fields such as banking, 'their penetration of the highest levels of occupational power and status remains limited.'⁸⁴ The factors that limited women's sustained career development will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter.

While the above examples show that some in the 1974 cohort did enter male-dominated professions, the experiences of just under half of the sample show a different picture. For this group of women, traditionally female occupations continued to be a common initial post-university destination, with women entering professions such as teaching, social work and librarianship. Of the sample, 17 per cent did a PGCE or started teaching after they left university. As White notes, data on national trends of graduate women's initial career destinations shows that, of women who graduated from university

⁸¹ Interview with Susanna.

⁸² Thane, 'Girton Graduates', p. 358.

⁸³ McDowell, *Capital Culture*, p. 204.

⁸⁴ *Ibid* p. 205.

between 1976-1977, 14 per cent went on to teacher training.⁸⁵ While it should be noted that some women in this cohort did not go on to teacher training but taught as independent tutors or in public schools, this nonetheless suggests that the number of women who left mixed-sex colleges at Oxford and initially became teachers was roughly in line with, if not above, the national average. Indeed, some women who went into teaching suggested that they were aware that teaching was a common career for graduate women, and, because of this initially resisted entering the profession. As noted earlier, Alice remembered saying in a careers interview ‘I know what I don’t want to do. I don’t want to teach’⁸⁶ and similarly Mary reflected that for a while after leaving university she, and her husband, ‘were determined not to be teachers’ and so she worked as a barmaid to avoid teaching.⁸⁷

A number of women entered stereotypically female careers other than teaching. Emma and Rosie both entered social work after university. Rosie suggested that, after initially not knowing what she wanted to do, she ‘suddenly thought I’d better do something,’ so went to the careers service and ‘pretty quickly came up with thinking about social work.’⁸⁸ Emma worked in a children’s home after graduating before doing a social work qualification. She reflected that this role was below what she might have achieved, and that this was a view held by her college tutor. She commented that ‘I gave my ... tutor as a reference and the reference he wrote was, “I’m sure she’ll be fine in your residential home, but really her degree is good enough to do post-graduate work”.’⁸⁹ Two women became librarians after they left university. For Claire this decision was encouraged by the careers service at Oxford. She recalled a careers adviser asking her what she wanted to do, to which she replied “‘well, I’ve worked in libraries in the holiday” and so she gave me application forms for ... civil service library training.’ Claire stated that, following this training she ‘worked in libraries until I had the children.’⁹⁰ Therefore, many of the 1974 cohort’s early career destinations continued to reflect

⁸⁵ Calculations made from statistics taken from University Grants Committee, *University Statistics 1980 Volume Two: First Destinations of University Graduates 1980-81*, (London, 1982) also in White, ‘Working Class Women’s Experiences of Higher Education’, p. 166.

⁸⁶ Interview with Alice.

⁸⁷ Interview with Mary, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 25 June 2020.

⁸⁸ Interview with Rosie.

⁸⁹ Interview with Emma.

⁹⁰ Interview with Claire, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 August 2020.

gendered employment trends, with professions such as teaching remaining a common initial profession. This suggests that the experience of attending a mixed-sex college at Oxford did not guarantee that women would move from university into the professions and careers that were common destinations for their male peers.

However, while teaching and other gendered roles remained a common initial destination for women in this cohort, as noted earlier a number left these professions later in their lives and built successful careers in other fields. Jennie and Caroline both moved out of teaching. Caroline explained that after having children and leaving teaching ‘I started my own business in educational resources and research’ before getting a job as an educational researcher, completing a PhD, lecturing at a university and eventually obtaining a senior position within a university.⁹¹ Jennie moved into writing textbooks after she left teaching and set up a business with her husband.⁹² In her study of working-class women who attended university from 1965 to 1978, White found that 43 per cent were teachers for their whole career.⁹³ In comparison, of the 1974 cohort, only Jayne taught for the majority of her working life. However, she also wrote and successfully published poetry, stating ‘if you like, I’ve had a dual career,’ describing teaching as her ‘day job’ and writing as her ‘vocational job.’⁹⁴ Two other women remained in teaching until they had children. Of these women, Mary eventually became a supply teacher when her children were at school. However, she was also a successful composer.⁹⁵ This suggests that women in the 1974 cohort were more able than other cohorts to move out of school teaching and build successful careers in alternative occupations.

Therefore, the women who entered mixed-sex colleges in 1974 demonstrate how varied women’s post-university careers were and how common it was for women to move between occupations. While a large number entered male-dominated fields and experienced career development and success within them, they still often did not gain the highest positions in their professions. Furthermore, almost as

⁹¹ Interview with Caroline.

⁹² Interview with Jennie.

⁹³ White, ‘Working-Class Women’s Experiences of Higher Education’, p. 167.

⁹⁴ Interview with Jayne.

⁹⁵ Interview with Mary.

many women continued to enter traditionally female professions, with a higher percentage than the national average doing a PGCE or entering teaching after university. While a significant number moved away from such professions and experienced career mobility later in life, this nonetheless suggests that for many women who attended mixed-sex colleges, post-university career patterns continued to reflect gendered employment trends which saw women located in lower-status, lower-paid occupations and roles after leaving university compared to their male peers.

Male Spaces, Communities and Cultures – Women’s Working Lives

So far, the chapter has examined the initial career trajectories of women in the 1974 cohort and indicated the ways in which they both differed from and were similar to general patterns of graduate female employment. In doing so the chapter indicates that attending a mixed-sex college did not conclusively lead to women having careers that mirrored those associated with their male peers. The chapter now considers women’s experiences of work, particularly those of women who did enter male-dominated fields. In doing so this section indicates the ways in which women felt that attending a mixed-sex college enabled them to work more effectively within such environments, as their experience of the male communities and cultures of their colleges prepared them to work in similarly male-dominated settings in their working lives.

Some who considered and called for the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford perceived mixed-sex colleges as environments which would prepare women for post-university life, particularly the prospect of entering a male-dominated working environment. For example, during the initial debates over New College’s original proposal to accept women, which were carried out in the University, local and national press, one participant, while weighing up the pros and cons of mixed-sex colleges, commented, of women in the women’s colleges, that ‘perhaps our graduates’ worst problem in ordinary life... is how to cope with an intensively competitive society in which most of their rivals and bosses – despite forty years of emancipation – are not women but men.’⁹⁶ The author

⁹⁶ A.N. Sherwin-White, ‘Mixed Colleges’, *Oxford Magazine*, 4 March 1965, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File One.

suggests that women-only colleges did not prepare women to enter such an environment. Similarly, when the ‘Jesus Plan’ was under consideration, in a letter published in the *Oxford Magazine* Mary Jacobus, an academic at Lady Margaret Hall, defending the move to mixed-sex colleges, argued ‘wouldn’t there be a case for saying that if we want men and women to live and work alongside one another on more equal terms when they leave university, then the sooner they begin the better,’⁹⁷ suggesting attending a mixed-sex college would offer women this opportunity. Similarly, a statement submitted by the Jesus College JCR to the committee that was reviewing the initial scheme of co-education, to establish whether the scheme should be extended to other colleges, commented that ‘we believe that mixed educational institutions provide a far better preparation for the outside world’ and that those who attend them ‘become better prepared for future life.’⁹⁸ For many of the women who attended these colleges, this ‘future life’ involved working within a patriarchal employment structure and a male-dominated environment.

As McCarthy notes, women were ‘dramatically outnumbered by men in the senior ranks of business and the professions right through the 1980s and 1990s.’⁹⁹ While a substantial number of women in this sample entered such careers, they emphasised their position as a minority in their working environment. For example, Susanna stated that ‘banking at that time was still very male. So for a long time, I was the most senior woman in the bank.’¹⁰⁰ Emily similarly described herself as ‘the only woman in a very male environment’¹⁰¹ while Sandra commented that there ‘were definitely far fewer women than men’ at the firms she worked for through the early stages of her career. Indeed, Sandra emphasised the extent to which her profession was dominated by male Oxbridge graduates, stating that, in the year she joined her first firm, ‘I think they took about twelve people ... from Oxford and Cambridge, and maybe four were women.’¹⁰² Kristina, who went to work at a global trade

⁹⁷ Mary Jacobus, ‘Coresidence at Oxford’, *Oxford Magazine*, 9 June 1972, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives, UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁹⁸ Submission to the University Co-residence Review body from Jesus College JCR, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Oxford University Archives UR6/W/12, File Three.

⁹⁹ McCarthy, *Double Lives*, p. 357.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Susanna.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Emily.

¹⁰² Interview with Sandra.

organisation after university, also emphasised that entering this organisation meant she was in ‘a very male-dominated society.’¹⁰³

These women emphasised how far having attended a mixed-sex college meant they felt more equipped, and indeed more entitled, to work within these male-dominated organisations. For example, Kristina commented that, for her, the ‘result of going to a co-ed college, was that I always felt that I had a right to be at the table,’ elaborating that she ‘used to go to meetings ... and I would quite often be in a room of about three hundred people, and they’d all be men. I’d be the only woman in there... but I never felt that I didn’t have a right to be there.’¹⁰⁴ Sophie similarly commented that she felt attending a mixed-sex college ‘gave me a certain amount of confidence with dealing with men’ who ‘in industry were and are so prominent.’¹⁰⁵ Miriam stated that ‘it was good to have been in a mixed or mainly male environment before I went into the law’ suggesting that she was more aware of the importance of fitting in with the ‘male’ behaviours expected in her firm; ‘I think the example I would give is of a female articulated clerk the year ahead of me who didn’t get a job... And I remember hearing some comment that the way she dressed wasn’t appropriate and she should have known what the appropriate way to dress was.’¹⁰⁶ Thus, Miriam suggested that the male-dominated nature of her college gave her greater insight into the behaviour associated with male professional environments. Maia described the field in which she worked as one with ‘absolutely no women in at all.’ She similarly perceived her time at a mixed-sex college to have benefitted her career, stating that ‘being the minority was actually incredibly helpful’ as it got her used to a similar working environment.¹⁰⁷ Sandra similarly noted that her experience of the male culture of her college ‘gave me a lot of confidence. It gave me a lot of understanding of the world and how the ‘old boy network’ works.’¹⁰⁸ Indeed, in an article in *The Times* which reported on the careers of the first year of women at Brasenose, one alumna who worked for Camden Council described it as having a “‘boys’ club”

¹⁰³ Interview with Kristina, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 28 October 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Sophie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 September 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Miriam, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 26 August 2020.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Maia, conducted by Florence Smith, in Oxford, 8 October 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Sandra.

atmosphere’, commenting that “‘I always said that being in one of the first bunch of women at Brasenose was good training for Camden Council.’”¹⁰⁹ Therefore, it was the experience of the male cultures formed within the male-dominated communities of their colleges that women who entered male-dominated occupations felt made the most significant contribution to their post-university working experiences.

Indeed, women who entered less traditionally male careers, but who found the hierarchies within their professions to be similarly patriarchal, also suggested their experience of attending a male-dominated college gave them confidence within such work environments. For example, Catherine commented that, while she was working as a librarian in an academic library, ‘there’d be four of us, two women, two men,’ emphasising that the men were the librarians while the women were the ‘deputy librarian(s)’ and were on the ‘next row down’ from the men. However, she suggested that her undergraduate experience ‘gave me the confidence to disagree’ with her male colleagues ‘and then when I disagreed, when the... irascible men would say “well, whoa, whyever not” to be able then to muster my arguments and to say, “well, firstly, because this, and secondly, because of that”.’¹¹⁰ Catherine felt that both her academic and social experience at a mixed-sex college gave her this confidence. Similarly, Rosie stated that in social work she faced a ‘glass ceiling’ and when she first applied for a job in social care ‘they had five posts, one for each of the area offices. And I was the only female. They had four men and me.’ Rosie commented that, before she went to a mixed-sex college, ‘I didn’t feel confident with men’ reflecting that ‘I suppose my first bit of having to brave the walking around the quad and people making sort of witty remarks and thinking I didn’t like that’ meant she became ‘more confident with men’ which was valuable in her career. Rosie was explicit about how far she felt this was specifically related to going to a formerly male college, commenting, ‘I don’t think I would have been like that if I’d gone to St Hugh’s’ where she originally applied.¹¹¹ Examining the experiences of women who went to women’s colleges and then entered male-

¹⁰⁹ ‘Oxford’s Sexual Revolution Pays Off’, *The Times*, 4 October 1999.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Catherine, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 13 July 2020.

¹¹¹ Interview with Rosie.

dominated occupations, and establishing whether they did feel less prepared to work in a male environment is beyond the scope of this thesis and is an important question for future research, as studies such as Curtis's do not offer such qualitative insights into women's personal working experiences.¹¹² However, it is significant that women who attended mixed-sex colleges saw the contribution of mixed-sex colleges in such a light.

As Rosie's comments suggest, often it was the challenges women faced in mixed-sex colleges on account of the persistence of the male identity of these spaces, communities and cultures that women saw as making the most significant contribution to their successful navigation of male-dominated working environments. This suggests that these experiences contributed to a pattern whereby those women who developed resilience within male communities and cultures in college would feel more confident when dealing with similar communities and cultures in the working world. Indeed, significantly, it was the women who saw their colleges as most masculine in atmosphere, and who faced the most difficulties within them, who appear to have felt the most prepared for male working environments. In contrast, Eleanor, who found her college more welcoming of women and did not report experiencing overt sexism, suggested she was more taken aback by the cultures she came across when she entered the financial sector as a chartered accountant. She commented that 'it was so male-dominated... I felt like that was going into a bear pit.' Eleanor emphasised that because she had a generally positive experience in the mixed-sex environment of her college she 'wasn't expecting' this kind of culture at work, stating 'I absolutely hated it, really hated it.'¹¹³ Therefore, it was the colleges that most resembled the masculine cultures of British corporate and financial institutions in the 1970s, 80s and beyond, that ironically made the greatest contribution to women's ability to flourish in male-dominated workspaces. This suggests, where colleges did contribute to women's ability to enter and succeed in male-dominated spheres of employment it was partly on account of the lack of feminist change that occurred as their particular colleges accepted women.

¹¹² Sarah Curtis, 'Origins and Outcomes', p. 271.

¹¹³ Interview with Eleanor, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 June 2020.

As Eleanor's comment above demonstrates, for those who entered traditionally male fields, and for some who did not, male cultures and practices shaped both their experience of the work environment and the nature and structure of the work they did. As McCarthy argues, in the 1980s and 1990s banking was 'notorious for its sexist culture'¹¹⁴ and women's accounts emphasise how far such a culture was a feature of working in this field and in other male-dominated professional environments. While some women felt equipped to deal with masculine environments and showed resilience toward misogynistic treatment, nevertheless sexist cultures and practices in the workplace and overt and covert discrimination had the potential to prevent women from experiencing the sustained upward career mobility that was associated with male Oxford graduates.

Those who did enter such working environments noted how far the male-dominated nature of their companies engendered a male working atmosphere and culture. For example, Emily stated that in industrial marketing 'the culture was pretty blokey to put it mildly.'¹¹⁵ Others described the rituals and behaviours that were associated with these working environments, with many commenting on the extent to which social, and at time working, life in their companies was associated with a male drinking culture, as it had been in mixed-sex colleges. For example, Kristina stated that in her workplace 'there was very much this sort of gin and tonic at lunch time culture'¹¹⁶ and Sandra commented that her colleagues would 'go to the pub after work' and have 'liquid lunches' which was where her male colleagues would 'do the schmoozing,' emphasising how far the process of establishing professional relationships was dependent on partaking in this culture.¹¹⁷ Eleanor similarly recalled that the men at her firm 'just drank like fish' emphasising the pressure she felt to partake in this culture, stating that her colleagues would say "'well, what would you like" and I knew I couldn't say "well actually an orange juice"... that was completely not an acceptable answer in those environments - even if it was lunchtime.' Eleanor further emphasised the sexism that was bound up with such social rituals, stating that 'I'd say "'well I'd like a glass of dry white wine.'" And there was

¹¹⁴ McCarthy, *Double Lives*, p. 375.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Emily.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Kristina.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Sandra.

one guy in particular who'd go, "'oh dry white wine'" relaying this phrase in a high-pitched, feminine voice. Eleanor reflected that in such situations she thought 'oh god, I'll have to ask for some lager, I'll have half a lager or half a cider, that will possibly be deemed laddish enough to be acceptable, you know?'¹¹⁸ Eleanor's account thus emphasises that such cultures worked to reinforce the idea that the normative identity of members of such working communities was male and to emphasise women's separation from this identity if they did not conform to its masculine behaviours. As Linda McDowell argues in reference to banking, daily interactions in the work place, and the social rituals that occurred between colleagues, worked to 'construct and place women as the 'other,' differed from an idealised masculine norm and so excluded them from the still predominantly masculinised culture of merchant banking.'¹¹⁹ Thus, while women may have succeeded in entering such professions, their acceptance into the male society of their working environments depended on them conforming to the male rituals associated with them. In this way women's experience of entering male-dominated working environments mirrored that of their entrance into formerly male colleges.

Although she hated the male culture of her company, Eleanor commented that she 'stuck with it' and 'survived,'¹²⁰ again demonstrating that women saw resilience in the face of sexism as an important component of achieving within male-dominated institutions. However, other women reflected that, while outwardly showing resilience to their male colleagues' sexism, it did prevent them from being as ambitious as they might have been. For example, Ava stated that 'sexism was just everywhere' in the television industry; 'as a director in television, I used to be in charge of all-male crews, going all over the place. And a lot of them really didn't like it.' Ava commented that the way she dealt with such behaviour was to 'just pay no attention, take the mickey out of them, laugh at them and you get there in the end.' While initially claiming that 'I don't think it ever held me back,' Ava then reflected, 'but in a sense (it did) actually in that I didn't try to do things that I might have tried to do if I were a man; I didn't, for example push to do big stories when I was in the newsroom because I just thought I

¹¹⁸ Interview with Eleanor.

¹¹⁹ McDowell, *Capital Culture*, p. 133.

¹²⁰ Interview with Eleanor.

might not be good enough.¹²¹ While suggesting she felt prepared to work in an all-male environment, Kristina also felt the male cultures of her workplace limited her career progression and eventually she decided to leave her job at the global trade organisation to work in local government, stating that she ‘couldn’t be involved in’ the drinking culture of her male colleagues and felt she ‘was not going to get as far in that world as I would want to go.’¹²² Thus, while women could feel that their time at mixed-sex colleges to some extent prepared them for male working environments, this would not necessarily mean that they felt able to continue to accept and embrace the male cultures that were associated with them. For these women, such working environments and cultures therefore limited their ability to sustain career development.

In this way the experiences of this cohort mirror those women who graduated from elite universities in the previous decades. For example, Thane argues that ‘almost all Girtonians who entered mixed-sex occupations before the 1960s, and some later, describe tensions and feelings of discrimination and/or hostility.’¹²³ Therefore, women who entered such careers in the 1970s and 1980s could experience similar feelings of discrimination to earlier graduate women, despite the introduction of equalities legislation through the 1970s. This was because such discrimination was embedded in the male working cultures, behaviours and rituals that continued to structure the dynamics of male-dominated working environments. However, significantly, while Thane argues that for Girton graduates ‘women have often been deterred from occupations for which they were qualified by realistically anticipating hostility and opposition,’¹²⁴ this was not the case for women who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford. Instead, many of them saw their experiences of the male-dominated communities and masculine cultures of their colleges as having prepared them to enter such environments and they felt better equipped to be resilient within them. This suggests that attending a mixed-sex college rather

¹²¹ Interview with Ava.

¹²² Interview with Kristina.

¹²³ Thane, ‘Girton Graduates’, p. 357.

¹²⁴ Ibid p. 358.

than a women's college altered the way women responded to male-dominated working environments, prior to and after they entered them.

'Honorary Men' and Mothers

The failure of certain professions to accommodate female employees who decided to have children, the male and female pay gap, and gendered attitudes towards parenting meant that, for many women in this sample, their decision to have children continued to be a major reason for them experiencing downward professional mobility in their working lives, despite the fact that they started their careers after the introduction of the 1970 Equal Pay Act, the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act and the 1975 Employment Protection Act. This was true for both those who entered male-dominated professions and those who entered traditionally female careers such as teaching.

In this way, the experiences of women in this sample mirror those of other graduate women who left university in the 1970s and the previous decade. Studies of graduate women's experiences through the 1960s and early-1970s indicate the impact that marriage and motherhood had on these women's working lives. For example, R. Kelsall, K. Poole and A. Kuhn argued in a study published in 1972 that 'highly educated women are, far more than their male counterparts, greatly restricted in their occupational achievements by prevailing conditions'¹²⁵ which assumed that the only forms of employment women could take on would have to be compatible with women's 'traditional obligations at home.'¹²⁶ Indeed, in their studies of graduate women, which collectively cover a period from the 1920s to the late-1970s, Thane, White and Aiston all found that motherhood limited women's ability to have sustained upward progression through their careers.¹²⁷ This suggests that even after the implementation of employment equalities legislation through the 1970s, women's careers continued to be impacted by motherhood in the way they were for women who graduated before the introduction

¹²⁵ R.K. Kelsall, K., Poole, and A. Kuhn, *Graduates*, p. 140.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 149.

¹²⁷ Sarah Aiston, 'A Maternal Identity?: The Family Lives of British Women Graduates Pre- and Post-1945', *History of Education*, 34:4, (2005); Aiston, 'A Good Job for a Girl?'; Thane, 'Girton Graduates'; White, 'Working Class Women's Experiences of Higher Education'.

of such legislation. As Lewis argues of women in late-twentieth century Britain, the trend of increasing numbers of women entering work, with legislation provided to protect their employment rights after they had children is normally 'interpreted as an indicator of emancipation, but given the gendered division of unpaid work, it falls considerably short of liberation.'¹²⁸

Over two thirds of the women in the sample had children. Of these women, the majority experienced a substantial shift in their career trajectory around the time that they had children, whether that was through not returning to paid work after maternity leave, either temporarily or permanently, or returning to work part-time or for a different, often smaller, company. Furthermore, those women who returned to work sooner after having their children could still feel that their working lives were affected by having children through an unequal division of childcare and domestic labour between themselves and their male partners.

For women who did embark on careers in male-dominated fields, where their decision to have children had the greatest impact on their career trajectory was where the practices by which their companies operated were unaccommodating of and inflexible to women with children. Such companies had a continued expectation that their employees would follow male life patterns. For example, Emily left her job in industrial marketing when she had children and was out of paid work for eight years. She commented that 'if you're just in sort of that messy world of industry and commerce... you've got to keep going, women certainly have to try and keep going.' Emily described her work as involving 'very late nights and travelling and so on' and therefore she felt she 'just couldn't have a family and do that type of work.' When she had a family Emily thought 'I cannot do what I was doing part-time.' Emily never went back into industrial marketing after having children, retraining as a careers adviser after her eight year break.¹²⁹ Miriam, who became a lawyer in a City firm after leaving university, 'didn't go back after the children were born' commenting that she felt it was 'very pressurised to be a solicitor and to get to the top' and felt this working culture did not seem

¹²⁸ Lewis, *Women in Britain*, p. 69.

¹²⁹ Interview with Emily.

‘to be compatible with the family life that my husband and I wanted.’¹³⁰ As Thane argues ‘just at the point at which women were at last gaining wider work opportunities the ‘long hours culture’ came along to provide a new obstacle,’ as such a culture did not accommodate women having children.¹³¹

Indeed, Amy similarly felt her job at a technology corporation was incompatible with having children, while also suggesting that the company reacted negatively to her becoming pregnant. She commented that her managers ‘used to say things like “we’ve got a meeting in x, y, z tomorrow morning. Can you get on a plane to go to that meeting?” And then I just thought, I cannot be doing this. I’m just about to have a baby.’¹³² Olivia emphasised how far the firm where she worked was so structured around the expectation that their employees would be men, that her managers had unrealistic expectations of her after she had children. She stated that she was only the second woman in a senior position in her firm who had had a baby, and she felt that the company did not have systems in place to respond to a woman becoming pregnant. Olivia felt that her company expected her to start working full time very soon after having her baby, showing a lack of regard for the six months maternity leave she was entitled to. Olivia stated that following this response by her firm she decided to leave work and become a full-time mother. Significantly, Olivia felt that her company saw and treated her as an ‘honorary man’, in the fact that they expected her to behave like her male colleagues.¹³³ This emphasises that women who did enter male-dominated professions and working environments were expected to continue to conform to the male professional identity and behaviours that were associated with such lines of work. Therefore, companies continued to be unaccommodating of women who acted in an overtly female way, for example by becoming pregnant, and women’s ability to have career trajectories that matched those of their male colleagues was therefore significantly diminished. This supports McDowell’s argument that ‘the very structures of an organisation are based on masculinised assumptions – about the timing of work, the structure of tasks and the ways of doing

¹³⁰ Interview with Miriam.

¹³¹ Thane, ‘Girton Graduates’, p. 359.

¹³² Interview with Amy.

¹³³ Interview with Olivia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 14 October 2022.

things'¹³⁴ and therefore only accommodate women who continue to act as 'honorary men' through all their working lives.

While women could emphasise that the working patterns of their jobs were what pushed them to leave when they had children, they also suggested that they experienced overt discrimination from their employers which resulted in them leaving. For example, Amy stated that the technology corporation she worked at 'didn't want me when I was pregnant' and she was offered redundancy which she took and 'didn't think anything more about work,' instead bringing up her two children.¹³⁵ This was also the case for Nadia who, after taking time off from her job as a lawyer to have her second child, 'sort of tried to go back to work, but (her superior) had given my job away to someone else.' Nadia described this as 'clear discrimination'; she initially worked part time at the firm before leaving and staying at home with her children for two years.¹³⁶ Indeed, Hilda also 'encountered sexism and was treated badly' when working as a researcher in a research unit at a university during the period when she had her children. She commented that, when her research unit was restructured, her boss told her that 'he was supporting these other two guys rather than me' during this process. Hilda's 'job effectively disappeared ... and then (her boss) advertised for a new one. But it was the same. It was the same thing. And then we had interviews and I didn't get the job.' While, with the help of her union, Hilda was re-employed under the university rather than the research unit, she found this process, along with the intensity of having children, too much, 'having a nervous breakdown' and taking 'early retirement.'¹³⁷ Thus, despite the introduction of equalities legislation through the 1970s, overt discrimination and sexism, and continued limitations in terms of women's job protection, often in relation to them having children, could be a significant factor in them facing downward career mobility or leaving work altogether.

¹³⁴ McDowell, *Capital Culture*, p. 137.

¹³⁵ Interview with Amy.

¹³⁶ Interview with Nadia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 8 October 2022.

¹³⁷ Interview with Hilda, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 9 November 2022.

Where women who worked in such occupations were able to return to work sooner after having a child, it was the extent to which the managers and companies were flexible to and accommodating of them as mothers that was the important factor. For example, Lucy ‘worked from home and went in once a fortnight for about ten years, way before anybody worked from home’ which enabled her to work while bringing up her children. She emphasised that this was made possible by the fact that ‘I had quite a forward-thinking manager’ so was able to establish ‘an entirely unique arrangement.’¹³⁸ As McCarthy argues, by the 1980s and 1990s ‘some technology firms started experiments in remote working, using cable networks to set programmers and analysts up with terminals in their homes, a convenient arrangement for many women with small children.’¹³⁹ However, such an arrangement firstly depended on the outlook of individual employers and secondly arguably made it even more likely that women would take on the majority of the childcare which they fitted around their working day. Lucy suggested how far her working-from-home arrangement involved her in combining the work of childcare with her job, stating that ‘I’d do a lot of work in the evenings but I’d do about three hours during the day when the children had their nap’. However, Lucy also had to be on call throughout the day, meaning that she would often have to respond while she was out with her children; ‘I can remember being out shopping with the children and the bleep would go and (I’d) have to rush and find a phone box because you know we didn’t have mobile phones.’¹⁴⁰ Emma, who had her second child after she had retrained as a lawyer commented that in her law firm ‘the head of HR at that time was very keen on promoting women. She was really supportive of the maternity leave.’ While this support helped Emma have the time off she needed and then return to her company, she did also have a career change when she did return. She stated, ‘I was in the corporate law department and the hours can be quite unsocial. It happened that when I went back that the firm had decided to recruit a new partner to develop technology contracts. So I started doing that work – the hours are much more regular.’¹⁴¹ Thus again this suggests that the practices and lifestyles associated with different forms of employment could be influential on how far women felt able and willing to continue to work in such

¹³⁸ Interview with Lucy.

¹³⁹ McCarthy, *Double Lives*, p. 359.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Lucy.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Emma.

fields after having children, even where companies were supportive and innovative in the way they responded to their female employees who had children.

The fact that their male partners and husbands earned more than them and had more secure, prestigious jobs than them, was also a significant factor that led to women leaving work or changing their work pattern when they had children. This was true of both women who worked in male-dominated fields and those who did not. Lily, who had initially worked in journalism before becoming a case worker on a government social work scheme, decided to stay at home after having her first child ‘because my career path as it were, had sort of run into the sand’ whereas her then husband continued to work as a journalist.¹⁴² Eleanor recalled that when she and her partner had children they had a discussion about who would stay at home to look after them and decided Eleanor would because ‘his job made far more money than mine.’ After a period out of work Eleanor joined a ‘small firm of chartered accountants’ and worked part-time, thus experiencing a degree of downward occupational mobility.¹⁴³ Georgia stated that there was no real discussion over who would stay at home with the children because ‘he had a proper job, whereas mine was still self-employed so had no security, no pension, no holiday pay, no sick pay.’ Georgia therefore left her job as an English tutor when she had children.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Claire left her job as a librarian when she had children partly because ‘I was never going to earn very much money’ and her husband, who attended the same Oxford college as she did, ‘had the potential for earning more money.’¹⁴⁵ Emily, whose husband at the time had not gone to university, recalled that ‘I suppose it was just a given’ that she would stay at home with the children instead of him, stating ‘he had a higher income anyway. If I were the higher earner, it may well have been the other way around.’¹⁴⁶ In this way the trend of graduate women earning less than their male graduate and non-graduate partners reflects the persistence of the general pay gap between men and women’s work after the implementation of the 1970 Equal Pay Act. As Lewis argues ‘women’s hourly

¹⁴² Interview with Lily, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 20 July 2020.

¹⁴³ Interview with Eleanor.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Georgia.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Claire.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Emily.

earnings reached 74 per cent of those of men in 1977.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, women's decision to leave work was motivated by gendered economic trends which saw male partners earning more than women graduates, even when the women had achieved similar or higher levels of educational attainment than them.

Catherine similarly suggested that her husband's career status made it inevitable that she would leave work instead of him to raise their children. She stated that, because of his profession, 'there was no question that he was ever going to be home at six. I just thought you've got to have one parent who's always there because he was not ever going to be able to do half the childrearing.'¹⁴⁸ Significantly, both Catherine and her husband also attended the same college at Oxford, both studied a degree in the humanities and graduated within a year of each other. Like Claire's, Catherine's narrative firstly reflects the trend of male members of the first mixed-sex college entering high-paid and high-status jobs after university to a greater degree than their female peers, suggesting that an Oxford degree provided men with greater occupational opportunities than women. Secondly, Catherine's account, as well as those noted above, suggests that it was the inequality in the early graduate dividend between men and women, which limited women's early career progression, that made it more likely that women's career trajectories would be significantly impacted by motherhood. The downward occupational mobility that such interruptions caused then reduced this dividend even further.

Of the sample two women's male partners took a more active role in childcare from when their first children were born. Bethany's partner worked part-time in the same way she did when their children were young; 'we split the childcare pretty much half and half.' While Bethany saw this as a positive arrangement in terms of the division of labour, she recognised its negative impact on career development for both of them; 'we did really understand we were very poor... it wasn't good for either of our careers.'¹⁴⁹ Rachel was the only woman whose partner fully left his job to be a full-time parent, allowing her to continue to work full time as a journalist. Rachel was explicit about how

¹⁴⁷ Lewis, *Women in Britain*, p. 80.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Catherine.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Bethany, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2022.

uncommon this was at the time, stating ‘I was lucky in that my husband was willing to give up his job’ and emphasising that their parenting model ‘wasn't normal.’ However, even Rachel’s experience of work was somewhat affected by her childcare responsibilities. She stated, ‘it was hard to breastfeed when you’re also working’ reflecting that the combination of work and childcare meant she ‘never stopped’.¹⁵⁰ Thus even women whose familial childcare arrangements did not follow gendered patterns could face difficulties as employment systems and structures were ones which did not support their employees to combine work and career progression with childcare, or flexible working patterns.

Indeed, while some women went back to work soon after having children and therefore were able to remain in their careers while raising their children, their working lives were still affected by the additional labour that motherhood brought them. Jessica was a junior doctor when her first child was born prematurely; she only received six weeks of statutory maternity leave because she had previously been living abroad. Jessica stated that ‘I didn’t feel supported by my husband at that time,’ instead relying on childminders during the week and taking her son to work with her when she worked at weekends. She stated that:

I had to manage on my own and do full-time on-call work. And if I was on-call at a weekend, I had to take my baby into the accommodation for on-call in his carry cot. And then when I was called to the wards, I had to put him in his buggy and push him and leave him at the nurses’ station, so it was a hard time.¹⁵¹

Eloise similarly stated that ‘I never really stopped working’ after having children, working from home and fitting her work around her childcare responsibilities. Eloise emphasised how far she took on the bulk of the childcare, stating ‘the lion’s share of that fell to me’ and described her domestic responsibilities as ‘very hard work and gruelling and relentless.’ Although she was able to continue working after having children, Eloise still considered motherhood to have restricted her career options, stating she ‘felt it impinged hugely’ on her life and career choice.¹⁵² Women who continued working while raising their children thus often took on twice the labour, commonly doing the majority of the childcare while also working. This corroborates Thane’s argument in reference to women who

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Rachel.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Jessica.

¹⁵² Interview with Eloise.

attended Girton College that the ‘careers of women graduates were more strongly influenced by family relationships and responsibilities than those of men’ through the twentieth century.¹⁵³

Significantly, those women who did not have children felt that this had had a positive impact on their careers and these women tended to have more linear career progression than women who did have children. For example, Violet reflected that not having children ‘absolutely’ helped her in her career progression as it enabled her to work hard throughout her career and achieve seniority in her profession.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, June commented that she felt working as a lawyer would have been ‘a hard (job) to do with young children’, seeing her ability to take positions of status and authority in the profession as in part a result of the fact she did not have children.¹⁵⁵ Thus, while women of this generation had greater control over their fertility due to the increased availability of the contraceptive pill, and had greater legal rights in regards to maternity leave due to the 1975 Employment Protection Act, they could continue to perceive the achievement of sustained career development as being somewhat incompatible with having children.

Therefore, the fact that male-dominated professions were not accommodating of female behaviours and life patterns, the persistence of gendered perceptions of childcare as primarily being the mothers’ responsibility, and economic trends in which graduate and non-graduate men earned more and achieved greater career progression than women, meant that the career trajectories of women who graduated from Oxford’s first mixed-sex colleges were more likely to be affected by parenthood than those of their male peers. Therefore, while this cohort of women accessed elite, formerly male educational and social institutions, persisting wider social and economic inequalities restricted their careers, despite the introduction of equalities legislation through the 1970s. Furthermore, the persistence of gendered attitudes to parenthood limited how far this access enabled women to have post-university experiences that more closely matched those associated with the men who attended

¹⁵³ Thane, ‘The Careers of Female Graduates of Cambridge University’, p. 210.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Violet.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with June.

these institutions. Instead, for women in this sample who had children, their careers were affected by motherhood in a similar way to other women who left university through the 1960s and 1970s.

Mixed-Sex Colleges and Women's Life-Paths: Reflections and Commemorations

The post-university experiences of women in the 1974 cohort indicate the various forms women's career trajectories took and demonstrate how far gendered working structures and trends could lead to women's career experiences differing significantly from those associated with male Oxbridge graduates, despite them attending formerly male Oxford colleges. For those women who did not have linear or upwardly mobile careers or enter high-status, high-earning professions, and for some who did not reach the highest positions in their careers, an awareness of this difference influenced the way they reflected on their post-university experiences and, for some, this could lead to a sense of underachievement. Significantly, women who expressed this sense of underachievement linked it to a perceived failure to make the most of opportunities that attending Oxford could have offered them. This was despite describing the systematic gendered inequalities that were present through their working lives. In this way, women's own analyses of their post-university lives were shaped and reinforced by the cultural script that assumed that accessing elite formerly male educational institutions would enable women to access the career opportunities associated with male Oxford graduates.

A number of women saw themselves as not having had a 'proper' career. Georgia stated, 'I didn't really have a career,'¹⁵⁶ reflecting on the fact that her teaching job was insecure and unsalaried, and she did not return to it after having children. Similarly, Alice, who did not have children, stated 'my career isn't really very much,' also basing this view on the fact that she worked intermittently in insecure and casual roles.¹⁵⁷ Lily, despite achieving 'a senior elected church role', also reflected that 'I'm not sure I've ever had a career,' having moved from journalism, to social work, before

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Georgia.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Alice.

completing a second bachelor's degree in theology and eventually being ordained as a minister.¹⁵⁸ Catherine stated that 'I haven't had a sort of straight-line career'¹⁵⁹ while Jennie reflected that 'sometimes I think wouldn't it be nice to have had more of a straightforward career.'¹⁶⁰ Freya's narrative emphasised the extent to which the direction of women's career trajectories could change throughout their lives; she recalled doing various different things after university, including working 'as a copywriter in advertising' until she realised she was a 'fish out of water' in that role, working as a researcher for the BBC and writing a novel that was not published. Freya recalled the years after leaving university as ones of anxiety and poor mental health, stating 'I went through an early life crisis kind of thing' at which point she 'had crap jobs' so she could do volunteer work. Freya went on to do further degrees and eventually taught in a number of universities whilst also publishing poetry. In reflecting on her post-university experience, Freya commented that 'my career trajectory is not normal.'¹⁶¹ Significantly, these reflections suggest that women saw a 'normal' career trajectory as a linear and continually upwardly mobile one, despite the fact that, as this sample and others suggest, it continued to be uncommon for graduate women to have careers of this shape throughout their lives. Thus, these women were basing their assessments of a 'normal' career pattern on a traditional 'male' one, suggesting an expectation that a traditional 'male' life-pattern would be open to them when they left university.

Other women, who by the end of their working lives had moved away from their initial career and achieved upward occupational mobility, expressed a sense of regret at their early career choices, suggesting these choices had limited their early career opportunities. Caroline stated that it was only later that she realised that she could have gone into a career other than teaching after university, stating that 'all sorts of things could have been open to me.'¹⁶² Emma reflected that she 'should have perhaps thought a bit more' about what she wanted to do after university, considering with hindsight

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Lily.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Catherine.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Jennie.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Freya, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 July 2020.

¹⁶² Interview with Caroline.

that her initial job in social work did not match her ability.¹⁶³ Ava similarly suggested that she could have been more ambitious in her initial career aims. Reflecting on the career path of a male friend from her college, Ava stated that he ‘did (a humanities degree) and then he went into business and he’s doing all sorts of things and he made pots of money... with my moderate (humanities) degree I could have done that too.’¹⁶⁴ Ava’s comparison of her career choices to those of her male peers who attended her college, and her emphasis on her own subjectivity when considering her own choices, suggests how far women in this cohort evaluated their career paths more by comparing them with the experiences of their male counterparts than by considering the structural inequalities that controlled their engagement with the working world. Thane, Aiston and White all found their cohorts similarly expressed a sense of ‘under achievement’¹⁶⁵ when reflecting on their career paths suggesting, as White argues, that such an evaluation of their careers is a ‘feature of women graduates’ lives in this period.’¹⁶⁶

Some women found it difficult talking about their initial career trajectories because of a sense of regret that they had not achieved more after university. Despite being content with their eventual career path and achievements, these women still considered themselves to have not reached their full potential in their early careers. Louise found speaking about her post-university experiences difficult, stating ‘I’m getting tearful. It’s taken me quite a long time to stop regretting that lost time in the middle because it all came right in the end.’¹⁶⁷ Jennie stated that ‘you know, if you meet someone at a party and they say, “what do you do?” You can’t say “I’m a such and such, I’m director of a so-and-so”. So there’s always a little bit of feeling, maybe I should have done more.’¹⁶⁸ Here, Jennie’s use of the first person pronoun again emphasises how far she interpreted the shape that her career took as being a result of her personal choices. Freya suggested she had a sense of not having reached her potential and a feeling of regret that she had not done more with her Oxford degree, indicating that

¹⁶³ Interview with Emma.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Ava.

¹⁶⁵ Thane, ‘Girton Graduates’; Aiston, ‘A Good Job for a Girl?’; White, ‘Working Class Women’s Experiences of Higher Education’.

¹⁶⁶ White, ‘Working Class Women’s Experiences of Higher Education’, p. 191.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Louise.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Jennie.

this feeling subsided after reconnecting with the other women in her year. Freya stated she realised that ‘quite a few people have not had on paper glittering careers’ but had achieved in other areas of their life.¹⁶⁹ She suggested that this lessened the feeling that she had wasted a privileged education. Freya’s comment is significant in several ways. Firstly, it suggests that a number of women who attended her college in 1974 felt a sense of insecurity at not having had higher status, linear careers. Secondly it suggests that women could feel that if they did not have these kind of ‘glittering’ careers they had not made the most of their education. Thirdly, this feeling was influenced by the cultural script which characterised them as privileged women who had gained access into the elite, male educational institutions which were seen to provide their members with the greatest opportunity to achieve in elite, male-dominated occupations and organisations when they left university.

Indeed, this cultural script was one that was in part developed by the way members of the first colleges that accepted women, and those from outside these institutions, have reflected on the introduction of mixed-sex colleges at Oxford. For example, Catherine recalled that, when attending an alumni event commemorating the move to co-education, a then senior member of her college mentioned to members of the 1974 cohort at her college ‘how disappointing he had found our careers... they thought we would all be captains of industry.’¹⁷⁰ This comment shows both that some later senior members of the first mixed-sex colleges believed that providing women with access to their institutions would have enabled them to access the same career opportunities as men, and that they could also judge the success of the scheme of mixed-sex colleges itself in relation to whether women did access such opportunities. This latter point is demonstrated further by an article that was published in *The Times* in October 1999 entitled ‘Oxford’s Sexual Revolution Pays Off’. In the article, specifically focused on the introduction of co-education at Brasenose, the author comments that ‘a quarter of a century on the 28 pioneers of Brasenose class of 1974 have, almost to a woman, carved out sparkling careers to vindicate the fellows who let them in.’ While the report notes that of the women ‘a handful gave up promising careers to start families’ and others faced sex discrimination

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Freya.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Catherine.

during their careers, the driving conclusion of the article is that attending Brasenose enabled women to have ‘sparkling careers’ and this proved that it had been a good thing to allow women to attend the college.¹⁷¹

The colleges’ own commemorative rhetoric has similarly focused on women’s post-university careers, commemorations of the first year of women being elided with celebration of women’s professional achievements. For example, Violet stated that her college ‘recently commissioned some photographs of eminent women who’d been at (her college) to hang in the hall and that was launched with some fanfare.’¹⁷² Indeed, at Brasenose, the Junior Common Room commissioned a similar exhibition to the one at Violet’s college for the 40th anniversary of the first year of women. For the anniversary, the Brasenose JCR wrote that it ‘felt it was important for us to look back over these last 40 years and reflect on some of the achievements and contributions to society that Brasenose women have made.’¹⁷³ They therefore initiated ‘The Amazing Women Portraits Project’, commissioning photographs of a group of Brasenose women who were chosen from nominees who alumni ‘believed to be inspiring and exceptional.’¹⁷⁴ In an article written about the project, Margherita De Fraja, a member of the Brasenose JCR involved in producing the exhibition, wrote that the JCR modelled the ‘exhibition on the way that the portraits in Hall remind us of the many alumni who made great contributions to College and to society,’ suggesting that such pre-existing portraits are a reminder that the college has had ‘centuries of churning out men who have gone on to do great things.’¹⁷⁵ Thus, women’s acceptance into Brasenose was commemorated in relation to the extent to which they achieved the career success that was associated with male Oxford undergraduates.

The extent to which this focus fails to recognise the reality of the lives of many women graduates has been noted by some. For example, in a report on ‘The Amazing Women Portraits Project’ written on

¹⁷¹ ‘Oxford’s Sexual Revolution Pays Off’, *The Times*, 4 October 1999.

¹⁷² Interview with Violet.

¹⁷³ Margherita De Fraja, ‘The Amazing Women Portraits Project: JCR Report’, *The Brazen Nose*, vol 29, 2014-2015, (2015), p. 97.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid* p. 98.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 97.

behalf of the Brasenose alumni society, the author, alumna Drusilla Gabbot, made greater efforts to emphasise the importance of recognising women who were not ‘high profile in a conventional career sense.’¹⁷⁶ She stated that ‘I feel it is important to reference, on behalf of all of us currently working at home, or who have permanently or intermittently committed ourselves there, Amie Lidbetter’s (2003) nomination by a peer, “A devoted full time mother of two, raising two wonderful children; surely the most important job”.’¹⁷⁷

Indeed, many of the women in the 1974 cohort emphasised that they saw themselves as having been successful in areas outside of paid work. Georgia felt ‘very privileged actually’ to have been able to stay at home with her children, describing it as ‘the single most important, most influential... and difficult and demanding job you could possibly do.’¹⁷⁸ When asked if she saw herself as having been successful, Mary initially stated ‘well I’ve certainly got a happy marriage. I’m happy with my children’ before going on to state that she ‘enjoyed quite a lot of success as a composer.’¹⁷⁹ Eleanor commented that she ‘loved’ motherhood and ‘didn’t want to work full-time and I wanted to be there when they were little’. She stated that ‘my work of bringing up children is a luxury.’¹⁸⁰ Other women suggested that the greatest contribution that attending a mixed-sex college made to their lives was in terms of their domestic life as they met their husbands while at college. For example, when asked if her time at college had a significant impact on her life, Alice stated ‘yes, I mean, I met my husband there.’¹⁸¹ Similarly, Catherine recalled that meeting her future husband at college had a significant impact on her interpretation of her experience; she reflected that ‘I’m sure that makes a difference to how I feel about college.’¹⁸² Thus, women could evaluate their life achievements in terms of a more holistic definition of ‘success’.

¹⁷⁶ Drusilla Gabbot, ‘Alumni Nominations for the Amazing Brasenose Women Project: Brasenose Society Report’, *The Brazen Nose*, vol 29, 2014-2015, (2015), p. 101.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 102.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Georgia.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Mary.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Eleanor.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Alice.

¹⁸² Interview with Catherine.

However, the focus of college commemoration has centralised career achievements in their evaluation of the post-university achievements of their alumnae. Indeed, the group of women chosen to be photographed for the Brasenose project reveals this prioritisation, with the majority having achieved significant positions of authority and status in their careers. The fact that the biographies included in the report on the project focus on the women's career achievements itself emphasises how far women's characterisation as being 'amazing female role models' was tied to their career trajectories in the eyes of the project organisers.¹⁸³ Therefore, for women in the 1974 cohort, a sense of underachievement could itself be caused by a view of the potential career success that being an Oxford graduate could bring. This view was based on the experiences and expectations of male graduates and was reinforced by colleges themselves as being the blueprint against which women's experiences should be evaluated. Where women's post-university careers did not match this blueprint, both colleges and women themselves could express a sense of disappointment.

The extent to which some women in this cohort compared their experiences to those of their male peers, or felt that they had not achieved the type of career success expected of an Oxbridge graduate, contrasts to the recorded reflections of other samples of graduate women. For example, White argues that, for working-class graduate women in her sample, 'careers... were not remembered and experienced primarily as disappointing or less successful than those of their male counterparts.'¹⁸⁴ Thane argues that Girton graduates in the 1970s and 1980s were 'realistic' about the limitations that they faced in their careers, particularly in regard to having children.¹⁸⁵ In contrast, those women in this sample who expressed a sense of underachievement in their careers showed greater awareness of having achieved less in their careers than some of their male peers. Furthermore, they expressed this more in terms of missed opportunities than in terms of a 'realistic' assessment of the inequalities they faced. Thus, the assumption that providing women with access to elite male institutions would bring them greater career opportunities that were more equal to those of male members of the colleges,

¹⁸³ Margherita De Fraja, 'The Amazing Women Portraits Project: JCR Report', *The Brazen Nose*, vol 29, 2014-2015, (2015), p. 98.

¹⁸⁴ White, 'Working Class Women's Experiences of Higher Education', p. 191.

¹⁸⁵ Thane, 'Girton Graduates', p. 359.

could itself contribute to women's sense of underachievement. This narrative failed to acknowledge how far women's post-university careers were shaped by wider social and economic inequalities. Here, the way colleges thought about their first alumnae reflected the way these institutions initially approached becoming mixed-sex. They understood equality in terms of providing women with access to the same institutions as men, failing to consider the wider structural and systematic changes that would need to take place, both within and beyond these institutions, to enable women to benefit from this access to educational opportunity to the same extent as their male peers.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the various directions that women's career paths took after leaving mixed-sex Oxford colleges. It argues some women broke gendered trends in graduate women's employment and entered male-dominated occupations and work environments when they left mixed-sex colleges. Of these women some suggested being in a formerly male college gave them access to the male networks that governed certain professions, and encouraged them to engage with potential employers in the way their male peers did. However, for as many women, this was not the case. These women had similar experiences to graduate women studied by other researchers, often leaving university without clear plans of what they wanted to do and entering lower-status, lower-paid occupations that tended to be female-dominated. Furthermore, for women in the cohort who had children, their career trajectories were affected by motherhood in a similar way to other women graduates who left other universities through the post-war period into the 1960s and 1970s. Firstly, this suggests that attending a mixed-sex college at Oxford did not necessarily lead to women having career paths that more closely matched those of their male peers. Secondly, it suggests that equalities legislation introduced through the 1970s did not mitigate the impact that motherhood had on graduate women's career trajectories.

For those who did enter male-dominated occupations, and indeed for any who came across patriarchal working hierarchies in their occupations, the experience of being a minority woman in the male-dominated spaces, communities and cultures of their colleges was considered to have prepared them

to enter such environments in their working lives. Women who faced the most difficulties at their colleges and found them the most masculine in their atmosphere suggested they were the most prepared to work within male-dominated workplaces and to deal with the cultures and working practices that materialised within them. Thus, one of the major ways that attending a mixed-sex college contributed to women's working lives was to encourage them to be resilient and confident in the face of patriarchal working structures and cultures. However, often this resilience would manifest itself in women feeling that they had to 'put up with' or embrace male working cultures, becoming 'honorary men', in order to survive within this structure. Those who could not survive such working environments and the work and social patterns encouraged within them, whether because of their dislike of the social atmosphere of their workplaces, or because of their decision to have children, faced downward occupational mobility. Thus, women's college experiences contributed to women's perception that in order to enter, and assert and retain position and status within male-dominated environments they had to work within the patriarchal systems and structures of these environments. Women who demonstrated 'masculine' traits of determination and confidence, which women felt were characteristics both required to attend one of the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford and enhanced by the experience of doing so, had a greater chance of asserting themselves within male working environments. Therefore, while women may have seen attending a mixed-sex college as having had a positive impact on their ability to deal with male-dominated occupations, this process also reinforced the idea that the way women could succeed within a patriarchal organisation was to be determined and 'male', diminishing full recognition of the barriers that this situation presented to women generally.

Finally, women's own analysis of their post-university experiences and their assessment of whether they reached their potential, could be shaped by the cultural script that assumed that women who attended formerly male colleges at Oxford would be able to achieve the same career patterns as their male peers, should they want to. In their reflections on their careers, women, particularly but not exclusively those who did not enter high-paid, high-status professions or gain senior roles in their occupations, could express a feeling that they 'could have done more' or could have gone further in their careers. These women often emphasised their own subjectivity when commenting on and

critiquing their career directions, and compared their career trajectories to those that were associated with male Oxford graduates. This script, which fails to fully acknowledge the inequalities and barriers that women continued to face in their post-university lives, has been reinforced by the way the first mixed-sex colleges themselves have reflected on and commemorated their decision to accept women. Thus, the way colleges have responded to their first alumnae reflects the way they initially approached becoming mixed-sex institutions. Throughout the process and beyond they maintained an underlying assumption that providing women with access to an elite male institution would itself enable women to have social, educational and employment experiences that were equal to those of the male students for whose benefit these institutions had been established. This thesis demonstrates that this was a limited view of what was necessary to create a situation in which women could have equal university and post-university experiences.

Conclusion

This thesis provides the first examination of the experiences of the women who entered the five initial mixed-sex undergraduate colleges at the University of Oxford in 1974. The forty-one interviews conducted for this thesis constitute a body of new primary source material, providing insights into what it was like for women to live and learn within these institutions, their attitudes towards these institutions and motivations for attending them, and their post-university experiences.

The first cohort of women undergraduates who became members of formerly male colleges at Oxford from 1974 faced various difficulties during their student experience. This was because the spaces, communities and cultures of these institutions remained essentially male in that they were led and dominated by men, they catered primarily for the needs of male students, and their cultural atmospheres revolved around stereotypically masculine behaviours and rituals. The difficulties women faced were the result of the way in which individual colleges prepared for the arrival of women. This was a process in which individual men, and the male-dominated governing bodies of each college, made decisions about how their colleges would accommodate women. Such decisions did not effectively consider the needs of women students. Therefore, Oxford's initial move to mixed-sex colleges cannot be characterised as a process which saw the successful establishment of institutions that were fully accommodating and welcoming of women students. The thesis demonstrates that much of the current scholarship on the move to mixed-sex colleges at Oxford is incorrect in its assessment of this moment of change within the University as having been a smooth and successful process and one in which women did not face difficulties or sexist treatment. These previous conclusions result from the methodological choices of historians to focus on archival sources and the oral accounts of senior members of colleges who supported the move to co-education, rather than on an examination of women's accounts of their experiences. This thesis corrects this methodological imbalance.

However, the women who entered mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 responded to these institutions, and the difficulties they faced living and learning within them, in various ways. Women

in this cohort saw these colleges as desirable because they wanted to attend an institution that was not female-led, female-dominated and stereotypically feminine in its atmosphere. Therefore, the male institutional identity of the first mixed-sex colleges, which led to women facing difficulties in their colleges, was also what initially made them appealing to the first cohort of women. When faced with difficulties women focused on developing individual strategies and resilience in response, enabling the majority to continue to participate as members of the institutions they wanted to attend.

Furthermore, many women embraced the masculine behaviours and rituals that the male cultures of their colleges revolved around, seeing this as a way they could demonstrate their affiliation to their colleges and show that the move to co-education had been a good thing that would not alter the essential character of these institutions. Therefore, women could be active in sustaining the male institutional identity of the first mixed-sex colleges, an argument which nuances previous feminist scholarship on the move to co-education.

Significantly, where women developed strategies to overcome the difficulties they faced, it was on an individual level and on an ad hoc basis. Women responded to the particular difficulties they came up against with personal resilience in a way that improved their own student experience. While women managed to navigate around difficulties in this way, such strategies did not address the fundamental cause of the difficulties or the wider inequalities that women faced in their colleges. Indeed, a collective feminist mentality or critique of the general way that colleges had gone about becoming mixed-sex institutions did not develop among these first cohorts of women. This was similarly the way women responded to male-dominated, culturally masculine working environments when they graduated from mixed-sex colleges.

Through its life history approach the thesis makes a number of significant contributions to the history of women's social, educational and employment experiences from the mid-1950s to the end of the twentieth century. Through examining how women's pre-university familial, social and schooling experiences influenced their view of the desirability of formerly male colleges and the undesirability of women-only colleges, this thesis offers insights into the experiences of girls and young women

through the 'long-1960s'. For women in this sample this was a period in which both liberal and conservative attitudes to women's lives were present in their familial, schooling and social experiences and both were significant in shaping their educational ambitions. Furthermore, while for some their attitudes towards higher education were shaped by experiences of co-educational schooling, the attitudes of the majority were influenced by negative experiences of girls-only schools. For women in this cohort, it was this context that contributed to women seeing male institutions as more desirable and female-led, female-dominated institutions with a feminine atmosphere as socially and academically restrictive and conservative.

In analysing women's experiences of mixed-sex colleges in terms of their interactions with the spaces, communities and cultures of these institutions, this thesis contributes to a growing body of literature examining the history of higher education in Britain in terms of the social experiences of students. This approach indicates the various inequalities that persisted in mixed-sex colleges and the extent to which the physical structure of higher educational institutions, the groups of people that ran them, and the cultural dynamics of student life that were formed within them all had the potential to significantly impact women's academic and social experiences within them. Specifically, this thesis indicates the limited effective institutional changes that came about with the move to a mixed-sex system. This suggests that, when interrogated in terms of the lived experiences of women students, the processes which saw mixed-sex colleges, halls of residence and student services becoming the 'norm' at British universities during the 1970s cannot simply be understood as reflecting and reinforcing more progressive attitudes of institutions to their students. Furthermore, these processes did not conclusively improve the dynamics between men and women students.

Finally, the thesis shows that attending a mixed-sex college at Oxford had an uneven impact on women's post-university experiences. While college rhetoric suggested a perception that attending the same college as men might enable women to have career trajectories that more closely resembled those of their male peers, this was not the case for all women. Some women's careers more closely resembled those associated with male Oxford graduates, as women followed the example of their

male peers, and accessed college alumni networks. However, for the majority, despite the fact they graduated after the introduction of equalities legislation through the 1970s, the continuation of gendered or ineffective careers advice, gendered trends of employment and pay, workplace discrimination, gendered attitudes towards parenting and the inflexibility of employers towards women with children all had the potential to significantly limit women's post-university career trajectories. In this way, the post-university experiences of women who attended mixed-sex colleges at Oxford in 1974 reflect those of other graduate women from the period. Therefore, the expectation and perception of some that attending a mixed-sex college at Oxford from the mid-1970s would offer women similar career opportunities to their male peers failed to acknowledge the wider structural inequalities that continued to affect women's careers through the late-1970s, 1980s and beyond.

Women who worked in male-dominated professions and entered male spaces, communities and cultures in their working lives suggested their experiences of mixed-sex colleges made them more capable of dealing with these professional environments. Indeed, women who faced more hostility in their colleges felt most able to deal with the behaviours and cultures of these male working environments. Thus, women's experiences of mixed-sex colleges reinforced the view that succeeding in male working environments depended on women embracing or being resilient to such cultures. This approach enabled a few women to achieve a high level of success in male-dominated professions if they behaved as 'honorary men'. Where women did not want to, or were not able to, do this, for example when they had children, their working experiences and trajectories were negatively impacted. However, the assumption that attending an elite formerly male college at Oxford would offer women the same career opportunities as their male peers could also contribute to women feeling a sense of underachievement when their careers did not match this pattern.

Therefore, this thesis offers a case study which develops understanding of women's social, educational and employment experiences during the second half of the twentieth century, and of the complex attitudes that shaped women's evaluation of their own experiences. Ultimately, the experiences of the first women who attended mixed-sex colleges at Oxford from 1974 demonstrate

the complexities involved in the process of women entering and gaining equality within elite male institutions. In the case of the first mixed-sex colleges at Oxford a lack of consideration of these complexities in the way formerly male colleges prepared for their first women students, and a lack of effective change to address such complexities, meant that the essentially male institutional identity of these colleges remained, and women faced difficulties living and learning within them. However, women's evaluation of elite male institutions and the way they interacted with these institutions also demonstrate the complex ways that women thought about equality, and responded to inequalities they faced, in their social, educational and employment experiences through the second half of the twentieth century.

Bibliography

Oral History Interviews

Interview with Alice, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 3 August 2020.

Interview with Anna, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 10 September 2020.

Interview with Amy, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 September 2022.

Interview with Ava, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 October 2020.

Interview with Bethany, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2022.

Interview with Caroline, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 July 2020.

Interview with Catherine, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 13 July 2020.

Interview with Claire, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 August 2020.

Interview with Eleanor, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 30 June 2020.

Interview with Eloise, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 3 September 2020.

Interview with Emma, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 8 October 2020.

Interview with Emily, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 9 July 2020.

Interview with Evie, conducted by Florence Smith, in Oxford, 8 September 2020.

Interview with Freya, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 1 July 2020.

Interview with Georgia, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 June 2020.

Interview with Harriet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 24 July 2020.

Interview with Hannah, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 5 November 2020.

Interview with Hilda, conducted by Florence Smith, online 9 November 2022.

Interview with Isabella, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 21 August 2020.

Interview with Jayne conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 October 2020.

Interview with Jennie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 4 August 2020.

Interview with Jessica, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 2 July 2020.

Interview with June, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 14 September 2020.

Interview with Kristina, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 28 October 2022.

Interview with Laura, conducted by Florence Smith, online 8 June 2022.

Interview with Lily, conducted by Florence Smith, online 20 July 2020.

Interview with Louise, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 September 2020.

Interview with Lucy, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 June 2020.

Interview with Mary, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 25 June 2020.

Interview with Martha, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 26 January 2023.

Interview with Maia, conducted by Florence Smith, in Oxford, 8 October 2022.

Interview with Miriam, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 26 August 2020.

Interview with Nadia, conducted by Florence Smith, online 8 October 2022.

Interview with Natasha, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 September 2022.

Interview with Olivia, conducted by Florence Smith, online 14 October 2022.

Interview with Rachel, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 18 July 2020.

Interview with Rosie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 August 2020.

Interview with Sandra, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 27 October 2022.

Interview with Sophie, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 23 September 2022.

Interview with Susanna, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 2 October 2020.

Interview with Violet, conducted by Florence Smith, online, 7 October 2020.

Email Correspondence From Participants

Email from 'Alice' to Florence Smith 8 August 2020.

Email from participant x to Florence Smith, 20 January 2021.

Archival Sources

Oxford, Oxford University Archive, Bodleian Library, UR/W/12, Admission of Women to Men's Colleges.

Oxford, Jesus College Archive, John Habakkuk File.

Oxford, Jesus College Archive, MC/1247 Co-Residence File.

Oxford, St Catherine's College Archive, Box XIID/B IV 14(f), Alan Bullock and Wilfrid Knapp, The Admission of Women to St. Catherine's, 12 October 1971.

Personal Collections

Geoffrey Warnock, 'Letter from the Principal' (4 February 1974) sent to Florence Smith by participant.

Newspaper Articles

'College History Goes on show in Cornmarket', *Oxford Mail*, 22 May 2019.

'Girl Student Interviews', *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 Nov 1969.

'Oxford's Sexual Revolution Pays Off', *The Times*, 4 October 1999.

Printed Primary Sources

Acker, S., *Women and Education*, (London, 1984).

Barreca, R., *Babes in Boyland A Personal History of Coeducation in the Ivy League*, (New England, 2005).

Blackstone, T., 'Preface' in Mary Evans, *A Good School Grammar School in the 1950s*, (London, 1991).

Brittain, V., *The Women at Oxford: A Fragment of History*, (London, 1960).

Crompton. R., and Sanderson, K., *Gendered Jobs and Social Change*, (London, 1990).

De Fraja, M., 'The Amazing Women Portraits Project: JCR Report', *The Brazen Nose*, vol 29, 2014-2015 (2015).

Deem, R., (ed) *Schooling for Women's Work*, (London, 2012).

Department of Education and Science, *Statistics of Education: Vol. 6 Universities*, (London, HMSO: 1975).

Evans, M., *A Good School Life at a Girls' Grammar School in the 1950s*, (London, 1991).

Forster, M., *Hidden Lives: A Family Memoir*, (London, 1996).

Gabbot, D., 'Alumni Nominations for the Amazing Brasenose women Project: Brasenose Society Report', *The Brazen Nose*, vol 29, 2014-2015, (2015).

- Gavron, H., *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers*, (London, 1966).
- Green A., 'Memories of Brasenose', *The Brazen Nose 2014-15*, (2015) pp.103-107.
- Heron, L., *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties*, (London, 1985).
- Holyer, J., *A Maze of Twisty Passages The Life of a Student in 1970s Cambridge and What Came Next*, (2019).
- Hubback, J., *Wives Who Went to College*, (London, 1957).
- Ingram, M., *Now we are Thirty Women of the Break Through Generation*, (London, 1981).
- Jephcott, P., *Married Women Working*, (London, 1962).
- Kelsall, R.K., Poole, A., and Kuhn, A., *Graduates: The Sociology of an Elite*, (London, 1972).
- Kelsall, R.K., Poole, A., and Kuhn, A., 'Marriage and Family-Building Patterns of University Graduates,' *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 3:3 (1971), 281-87.
- Lunt, J. D, "I Remember, I Remember" *Wadham College Gazette*, New Series 3, no. 9, (Jan. 1994).
- Myrdal, A. and Klein, V., *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*, (London, 1956).
- Oakley, A., *Man and Wife: Richard and Kay Titmuss: My Parents' Early Years*, (Harmondsworth, 1996).
- Richards, G., 'The Admission of Women to Brasenose', *The Brazen Nose*, vol 29, 2014-2015 (2015), pp. 88-92.
- Rodgers, A., *Degrees by Degrees: The Story of the Admission of Oxford Women Students to Membership of the University*, (Oxford, 1938).
- Rowbotham, S., *The Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties*, (London, 2001).
- Shaw, J., 'Education and the Individual Schooling for Girls, or Mixed Schooling - a Mixed Blessing?', Rosemary Deem (ed) *Schooling for Women's Work*, (London, 2012).
- Spender, D., and Sarah, E., (eds.), *Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education*, (London, 1980).
- Spurling, A., *Report of the Women in Higher Education Research Project 1988-1990*, (Cambridge, 1990).
- The Franks Commission, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, (Oxford, 1966).
- Thomas, K., 'Obituary: Sir John Habakkuk', *Jesus College Record*, (2002).

University Grants Committee, *University Statistics 1980 Volume Two: First Destinations of University Graduates 1980-81*, (London, 1982).

Woolf, V., *A Room of One's Own*, (London, 1931).

Woolf, V., *Three Guineas*, (London, 1938).

Secondary Sources

Books

Abrams, L., *Oral History Theory*, (New York, 2016).

Adams, P., *Somerville for Women: An Oxford College, 1879-1993*, (Oxford, 1996).

Ainsworth, R. A., Howell, C., *St Catherine's, Oxford: A Pen Portrait*, (London, 2012).

Annot, M., David, M. and Weiner, G., *Closing the Gender Gap: Post-War Education and Social Change*, (Cambridge, 1999).

Bell, S. J., *The Education Debate*, (Bristol, 2017).

Bennett, J., *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*, (Philadelphia, 2006).

Bertaux, D. and Thompson, P., *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories, Volume II, Between Generations: Family Models, Myths, and Memories*, (Oxford, 1993).

Boys, J., Bradshaw, F., Danke, J. et al, 'Matrix', *Making Space: Women and the Man-made Environment*, (London, 1984).

Brockliss, L., *The University of Oxford: A History*, (Oxford, 2016).

Brockliss, L., *The University of Oxford: A Brief History*, (Oxford, 2018).

Brown, C., *Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA since the 1960s*, (Cambridge, 2012).

Bruley, S. *Women in Britain since 1900*, (Basingstoke, 1999).

Carter, L., *Histories of Everyday Life: The Making of Popular Social History in Britain, 1918-1979*, (Oxford, 2021).

Christie, N. and Gauvreau, M. (eds.), *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*, (Toronto, 2013).

Cobban, A., *English University Life in the Middle Ages*, (London, 1999).

Cook, H., *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800-1975*, (Oxford, 2004).

Cosslett, L., Lury, C. and Summerfield, P., *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, (London, 2000).

Davis, A., *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, 1945-2000*, (Manchester, 2012)

Deslandes, P.R., *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920*, (Bloomington, 2005).

Dyhouse, C., *No Distinction of Sex?: Women in British Universities, 1870-1939*, (London, 1995).

Dyhouse, C., *Students: A Gendered History*, (Abingdon, 2006).

Gluck, S.B. and Patai, D. (eds.), *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, (New York: London, 1991).

Halsey, A. H. *Decline of Donnish Dominion: The British Academic Professions in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1995).

Halsey, A.H. and Josephine Webb (eds), *Twentieth Century British Social Trends*, (Oxford, 2000).

Haste, C., *Rules of Desire Sex in Britain, World War One to the Present*, (London, 2002).

Hoefflerle, C., *British Student Activism in the Long Sixties*, (New York, 2013).

Hunt, F., *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women 1850-1950*, (Oxford, 1987).

King, L., *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960*, (Oxford, 2015).

Leatherwood, C., Read, B., *Gender and the Changing Face of Higher Education: A Feminised Future?*, (Maidenhead, 2009).

Lewis, J., *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years*, (Oxford, 1992).

Lowe, R., *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History*, (London, 1988).

Mahony, C., Zmroczek, C. (eds.), *Class Matters 'Working-Class' Women's Perspectives on Social Class*, (London, 1997).

Maitland, S., *Very Heaven: Looking Back at the 1960s*, (London, 1988).

Mandler, P., *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's Transition to Mass Education Since the Second World War*, (Oxford, 2020).

McCarthy, H., *Double Lives A History of Working Motherhood*, (London, 2020).

- McDowell, L., *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City*, (Oxford, 1997).
- Miller-Bernal, L., and Poulson, S.L (eds) *Going Coed: Women's Experiences in Formerly Men's Colleges and Universities, 1950-2000*, (Nashville, 2004).
- Miller-Bernal, L., and Poulson, S.L., *Challenged by Coeducation: Women's Colleges Since the 1960s*, (Nashville, 2006).
- Rayner, M., *The Centenary History of St Hilda's College, Oxford*, (Oxford, 1993).
- Reay D., David, M. E., Bell., S., *Degrees of Choice Social Class Race and Gender in Higher Education*, (Stoke on Trent, 2005).
- Rich. A., *Of Woman Born*, (New York, 1976).
- Ritchie, D. A., *Doing Oral History*, Third Edition, (New York, 2015).
- Sandbrook, D., *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain 1974-1979*, (London, 2013).
- Sandbrook, D., *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-1974*, (London, 2011).
- Schwartz, L., *Serious Endeavour: Gender, Education and Community at St Hugh's, 1886-2011*, (London, 2011).
- Segal, L., *Making Trouble Life and Politics*, (London, 2017).
- Soares, J., *The Decline of Privilege: The Modernisation of Oxford University*, (Stamford, 1999).
- Spencer, S., *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s*, (Basingstoke, 2005).
- Thane, P., *Divided Kingdom: A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present*, (Cambridge, 2018).
- Todd, S., *Snakes and Ladders: The Great British Social Mobility Myth*, (London, 2021).
- Todd, S., *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010*, (London, 2014).
- Vicinus, M., *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women: 1850-1920*, (London, 1985).
- Weiss Malkiel, N., *"Keep the Damned Women Out": The Struggle for Coeducation*, (Princeton, 2016)
- Whyte, W., *Redbrick: A Social and Architectural History of Britain's Civic Universities*, (Oxford, 2015)
- Worth, E., *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain since 1945*, (London, 2022)

Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., (ed) *Women in Twentieth Century Britain: Social, Cultural and Political Change*, (London,2014).

Articles

Abrams, L., ‘Liberating the Female Self: Epiphanies, Conflict and Coherence in the Life Stories of Post-War British Women’, *Social History*, 39:1, (2014), pp. 14-35.

Acker, J., ‘Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations’, *Gender and Society*, 4:2 (1990), pp. 139-158.

Aiston, S., ‘A Good Job for a Girl? The Career Biographies of Women Graduates of the University of Liverpool Post-1945’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 15:4, (2004), pp. 361-87.

Aiston, S., ‘A Maternal Identity? The Family Lives of British Women Graduates Pre- and post-1945’, *History of Education*, 34:4, (2005), pp. 407-26.

Aiston, S., ‘“A Woman’s Place ...”: Male Representations of University Women in the Student Press of the University of Liverpool, 1944–1979’, *Women’s History Review*, 15:1, (2006), pp. 3-34.

Bunkle, P., ‘The 1944 Education Act and Second Wave Feminism’, *Women’s History Review*, 25:5, (2016), pp. 791-811.

Burley, S., and Forster, L., ‘Historicising the Women’s Liberation Movement’, *Women’s History Review*, 25.5 (2016), pp. 697-700.

Carter, L., ‘“Experimental” Secondary Modern Education in Britain, 1948–1958’, *Cultural and Social History*, (2016), pp. 1-21.

Dyhouse, C., ‘“Apostates” and “Uncle Toms”: Accusations of Betrayal in the History of the Mixed College in the 1960s’, *History of Education*, 31:3, (2002), pp. 281-97.

Dyhouse, C., ‘Graduates, Mothers and Graduate Mothers: Family Investment in Higher Education in Twentieth-Century England’, *Gender and Education*, 14:4, (2002), pp. 325- 36.

Dyhouse, C., ‘The British Federation of University Women and the Status of Women in Universities, 1907-1939’, *Women’s History Review*, 4:4, (1995), pp. 465-85.

Glew, H., ‘In a Minority in Male Spaces: The Networks, Relationships and Collaborations Between Women MPs and Women Civil Servants, 1919–1955’, *Open Library of Humanities*, 6:2, (2020), doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.597>.

Hamilton, S., ‘Interviewing the Middle Class: Women Graduates of the Scottish Universities c.1910-1935’, *Oral History*, 10:2, (1982), pp. 58-67.

Johnes, M., ‘A Prince, a King, and a Referendum: Rugby, Politics and Nationhood in Wales, 1969-1979’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 47:1, (2008), pp. 129-148.

- Jones, J. and Castle, J., 'Women in UK Universities, 1920-1980', *Studies in Higher Education*, 11:3, (1986), pp. 289-97.
- Lambart, A., 'Mersey: A Grammar School for Girls in the 1960s', *Gender and Education*, 9:4, (1997), pp. 441-56.
- Langhamer, C., 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40:2, (2005), pp. 341-362.
- Mandler, P., 'Educating the Nation: I. Schools', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 24, (2014), pp. 5-28.
- Mandler, P., 'Educating the Nation: II. Universities', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25, (2015), pp. 1-26.
- Mandler, P., 'Educating the Nation: III. Social Mobility', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26, (2016), pp. 1-23.
- Mandler, P., 'Educating the Nation: IV. Subject Choice', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 27, (2017), pp. 1-27.
- Mills, H., 'Using the Personal to Critique the Popular: Women's Memories of 1960s Youth', *Contemporary British History*, 30:4, (2016), pp. 463-83.
- Pepitone, R., 'Gender, Space, and Ritual: Women Barristers, the Inns of Court, and the Interwar Press.' *Journal of Women's History*, 28:1, (2016), pp. 60-83.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G., and Clayton, J., "'Strangers in Paradise'? Working-Class Students in Elite Universities', *Sociology*, 43:6, (2009), pp. 1103-1121.
- Ross, K., 'Women's Place in 'Male' Space: Gender and Effect in Parliamentary Contexts.' *Parliamentary Affairs*, 55:1, (2002), pp. 189-201.
- Schwartz, L., 'Professions, Elites, and Universities in England, 1870-1970', *The Historical Journal*, 47:4, (2004), pp. 941-962.
- Spencer, S., 'Reflections on the 'Site of Struggle': Girls' Experience of Secondary Education in the Late 1950s', *History of Education*, 33:4, (2004), pp. 437-49.
- Spencer, S., 'Women's Dilemmas in Postwar Britain: Career Stories for Adolescent Girls in the 1950s', *History of Education*, 29:4, (2000), pp. 329-42.
- Stuart, M., 'You're a Big Girl Now: Subjectivities, Feminism and Oral History', *Oral History*, 22:2, (1994), pp. 55-63.
- Summerfield, P., 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1:1, (2004), pp. 65-93.

Thane, P. 'Girton Graduates: Earning and Learning, 1920s-1980s', *Women's History Review*, 13:3, (2004), pp. 347-61.

Thane, P. 'Scholars or Amazons?', *Oxford Review of Education*, 23:2, (1997), pp. 253-8.

Todd, S. and Young, H., 'Baby- Boomers to 'Beanstalkers': Making the Modern Teenager in Post-War Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 9:3, (2012), pp. 451-67.

Wallace, R. G., 'The Origins and Authorship of the 1944 Education Act', *History of Education*, 10:4, (1981), pp. 283-90.

Worth, E., 'A Tale of Female Liberation? The Long Shadow of De-Professionalization on the Lives of Post-War Women', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, 23:1 (2018), pp. 1-18.

Chapters in Edited Volumes

Abrams, L., 'Mothers and Daughters: Negotiating the Discourse on the 'Good Woman' in 1950s and 1960s Britain', in N. Christie and M. Gauvreau (eds.), *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*, (Toronto, 2013), pp. 60-83.

Brock, M., 'The University since 1970', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, pp. 739-744.

Cook, M., 'Sexual Revolution(s) in Britain', in G. Hekma, and A. Giarni, (eds), *Sexual Revolutions*, (London, 2014), pp. 121-140.

Curtis, S., 'Origins and Outcomes', Penny Griffin (ed) *St Hugh's: One Hundred Years of Women's Education in Oxford*, (Oxford, 1986), pp. 244-283.

Danke, J., 'Women, Architects and Feminism', Matrix Organisation (ed), *Making Space: Women in the Man Made Environment*, (London, 1984), pp. 11-19.

Dyhouse, C., 'Education', Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*, (London, 2014), pp. 119-133.

Greenstein, D. I., 'The Junior Members, 1900–1990: A Profile', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 44-77.

Halsey, A. H., 'The Franks Commission', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 720–736.

Halsey, A. H., 'Further and Higher Education', A. H. Halsey and Josephine Webb (eds), *Twentieth Century British Social Trends*, (Oxford, 2000), pp. 221-255.

Hicks, M., 'Integrating Women at Oxford and Harvard 1964-1977', Laural Thatcher, Ulrich (ed), *Yards and Gates: Gender in Harvard and Radcliffe History*, (New York, 2004), pp. 245-270.

Howarth, J, 'Women', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 344-375.

Kay, D., 'Architecture', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 491-518.

Kelly, J., 'The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History', Joan Kelly, *History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*, (Chicago, 2014), pp. 1-18.

Newnham, J., 'The Architectural Setting', in Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume IV Seventeenth-Century Oxford*, (Oxford, 1997), pp. 135-177.

Segal, L., 'Jam Today: Feminist Impacts and Transformations in the 1970s', Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane (eds), *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, (Manchester, 2013), pp. 149-166.

Thane, P., 'The Careers of Female Graduates of Cambridge University, 1920s-1970s', in D. Mitch, J. Brown, and M. H. D. Van Leeuwen (eds.), *Origins of the Modern Career*, (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 207-224.

Thane, P., 'Women and the 1970s: Toward Liberation?', Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane (eds), *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, (Manchester, 2013), pp. 167-186.

Thomas, K., 'College Life, 1945-1970', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 189-215.

Tinkler, P. 'Girlhood and Growing up' in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (ed), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain: Social, Cultural and Political Change*, (London, 2014), pp. 35-50.

Wenden, D.J., 'Sport', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 519-539.

Unpublished Theses

Aiston, S., 'The Life Experiences of University-Educated Women: Graduates of the University of Liverpool, 1947-1979', (PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, 2000).

Deslandes, P. R., 'Masculinity, Identity and Culture: Male Undergraduate Life at Oxford and Cambridge, 1850-1920', (PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 1996).

Eccles, K., 'Women Students at the University of Oxford, 1914-1939: Image, Identity, and Experience', (DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2007).

Hicks, M., 'The Price of Excellence Co-residence and Women's integration at Oxford and Harvard Universities 1964-1977', (BA Thesis, Harvard University, 2000).

Mills, H., 'The Experience and Memory of Youth in England c.1960-c.1969', (DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2016).

Wakeling, J., 'University Women: Origins, Experiences and Destinations at Glasgow University, 1939-1978', (PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1998).

White, B 'Working-Class Women's Experiences of Higher Education in Post-War Britain', (DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2019).

Worth, E., 'The Welfare State Generation: Life Histories of Women Born in Britain c.1938- 1952', (DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2018).

Websites

Hillary Clinton, 'Women's History: The Future, Roundtable Discussion followed by Address by Sec Hillary Rodham Clinton', University of Oxford, (recorded and uploaded 26 October, 2021)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WiVyTifjwEU> (30 Sept 2023).