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"We Didn't Want the Boys to Decide About Us": The Women Pioneers of Coeducation at California's Oldest Jesuit University

Hannah Hagen*

Today, women make up only 21% of the United States engineering field in the United States, making it the field with the biggest national gender gap. Interviews with some of the women who broke ground in this sphere in the 1970s - when this figure was lower than 1% - reveal that the 'boys club' mentality in engineering still exists. "Progress is slow," one retired chemical and environmental engineer responded when asked if she noticed changes in the challenges she faced over time. Another senior project engineer reflected optimistically that now, "it's easier [for women] to get their foot in the door [because] younger male engineers are also used to working with women because they went to school with them."¹ Her comment astutely draws the connection between women pioneering in academics and then trailblazing in their professional fields.

This academic year (2022-2023), women comprise 48% of Santa Clara University's undergraduate enrollment - 60% of the College of Arts and Sciences, 42% of the Leavey School of Business, and 29% of the School of Engineering. Santa Clara² currently boasts the largest percentage of women engineering faculty in the United States at 30%. Women in engineering remain in the minority in academics, yet these statistics represent a gradual but consistent influx into a traditionally male-dominated subject. When Nancy Streuter graduated as the first female student from

* Hannah Hagen's paper won the Giacomini Prize for the best researched and written paper based on primary sources in 2023.

¹ Laura Ettinger, "Trailblazing Women in Engineering Field Reflect on What Has (and Hasn't) Changed," The Washington Post, November 14, 2021.

² Throughout this paper, I refer to Santa Clara University as "Santa Clara" instead of abbreviating its title. Santa Clara University (SCU), as it is currently named, used to be University of Santa Clara (USC) until 1985.

Santa Clara's School of Engineering in 1968, she was the only female engineering student in her class.³ Only seven years prior, the very notion of women in any undergraduate course at Santa Clara spurred controversy among its historically all-male student body. When President Patrick A. Donohoe, S.J., announced the decision to "go coed" in 1961, the *Santa Clara* school newspaper reported it with the sensational headline "TRADITION SHATTERED." in all capital letters and featured a slew of op-eds from agitated male students complaining about women encroaching on what they viewed as their territory.⁴ Exploring the experiences and contributions of women undergraduates in their first years at Santa Clara reveals the resilient ways in which women gain acceptance and achieve success in academia as a historically marginalized group.

Most of the scholarship on the history of coeducation focuses on structural and institutional changes, as well as discrimination faced by the newly matriculated women. Leslie Miller-Bernal and Susan Poulson's *Going Coed: Women's Experiences in Formerly Men's Colleges and Universities, 1950-2000* explores the transition to coeducation at a wide variety of higher learning institutions from Ivy League to historically black universities, with a chapter focusing specifically on Catholic colleges. That chapter formed the foundational context for my research, along with an article co-authored by Poulson and Loretta P. Higgins: "Gender, Coeducation, and the Transformation of Catholic Identity in American Catholic Education." These sources provided insight into trends specific to this transition at Catholic institutions, as well as the barriers and discrimination faced by women at newly-coeducational universities in general. While the extant research

³ "Facts & Figures: Enrollment," Santa Clara University Institutional Research, Last updated Fall 2022; "The Women of Engineering," Santa Clara University School of Engineering; "History: Engineering with a Mission," Santa Clara University School of Engineering, 2012.

⁴ "TRADITION SHATTERED: Girls To Shatter 110-Yr. Tradition." *The Santa Clara* 29, no. 16 (22 March 1961): 1, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

gives important historical context and draws attention to the sexism faced by women during the transition to coeducation, not much research exists on the perspectives of the women themselves, in particular how they negotiated this sexism to make a place for themselves and future generations of women. My research — based on primary sources such as yearbooks, school newspapers, and interviews — delves into the sexist structures and attitudes during the university's transition to coeducation but gives equal attention to accounts from women on the receiving end of these attitudes.

The Origins of Coeducation at Catholic Institutions of Higher Learning

The 19th century saw a burgeoning coeducation movement beginning in the Midwest. Oberlin College in Ohio opened its doors to both men and women in 1833, making it the first coeducational higher learning institution in the nation. Following the 1862 Morrill Act, which set aside federal land on the frontier for public colleges, a number of coeducational colleges opened throughout the Midwest in the 1860s.⁵ Over the next forty years, hundreds of other institutions followed suit. By 1902, there were 330 coeducational universities nationwide, constituting over two-thirds of all universities.⁶ Catholic institutions, however, lagged many decades behind, with most avoiding the switch to coeducation until the 1960s. The Church's deeply-entrenched traditions regulated gender norms and encouraged women's education only to the extent that it prepared them for marriage, motherhood, and - at most - traditionally feminine careers like teaching. The first Catholic college for women, the College of

⁵ Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, "Putting the 'Co' in Education: Timing, Reasons, and Consequences of College Coeducation from 1835 to the Present," *Journal of Human Capital* 5, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 389.

⁶ Susan L. Poulson and Loretta P. Higgins, "Gender, Coeducation, and the Transformation of Catholic Identity in American Catholic Higher Education," *The Catholic Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (July 2003): 490.

Notre Dame in Maryland, opened in 1895, a full century after the establishment of men's Catholic colleges in the United States.⁷ Much debate occurred in the Church over women's education in general -- access to college could encourage women to pursue professional careers which threatened traditional Church society and family structure. However, when women responded to this restriction by seeking secular college alternatives throughout the 19th century, the Church recognized that it would be better for women to protect their faith at a Catholic college than weaken their faith by seeking education elsewhere. The Church feared secularized women more than educated ones, so "concerns about the piety and morals of Catholic women who might attend Protestant or secular institutions created an [...] incentive for the establishment of Catholic women's colleges."⁸ The compromise of Catholic women's colleges furthered the tradition of sex-segregated education, as the Church granted women access to higher education in regulated, faith-based environments that reinforced gender roles.

These women's colleges were restrictive in many respects, offering a limited selection of degrees and lacking the funding received by Catholic men's colleges from donors and higher tuition. Most suffered financial struggles and weak academic programs. Many also reinforced gender roles with narrow curriculums that prepared women only for housekeeping and traditionally feminine careers. Catholic women's colleges placed "emphasis on vocational training in traditional, low-paying occupations such as nursing, library science, and domestic science."⁹ The notoriously low-quality, underfunded, restrictive status of most women's colleges gave a bad reputation to even the

⁷ Leslie Miller-Bernal and Susan L. Poulson, *Going Coed: Women's Experiences in Formerly Men's Colleges and Universities, 1950-2000* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004): 27.

⁸ Miller-Bernal and Poulson, *Going Coed*, 27.

⁹ Miller-Bernal and Poulson, *Going Coed*, 27.

higher-ranking women's institutions.¹⁰ Women's colleges therefore lacked the prestige and respect of men's colleges, regardless of their quality. The concept of Catholic coeducation, however, remained out of the question for many years.

At the turn of the twentieth century, no coeducation existed within Catholic institutions of higher learning due to gender roles and purity concerns. In 1906, a clerical critic stated, "if our Catholic women are to retain their sweetness and refinement, they must be educated by women in schools for women and along the lines demanded by women's nature."¹¹ Their statements captured mutually exclusive ideas: Women have a different inherent 'nature' than men, but that inherent nature is so easily influenced that it must be protected and cultivated in a gendered environment. As late as 1929, Pope Pius XI perpetuated warnings about the dangers of coeducation in his papal encyclical, calling it "false also and harmful to Christian education" and "founded upon confusion of ideas that mistakes a leveling promiscuity and equality for the legitimate association of the sexes."¹² This certainty of inevitable promiscuity echoed the critics of coeducation at Protestant and even secular universities in earlier decades. However, Catholic institutions held onto this fear for much longer due to the Church's assertion that only sex segregation could adequately protect the religious virtue of women's purity. Coeducation, one critic wrote, is "equivalent to bringing high explosives closely together and expecting them to fuse. Traditionally, education was always conducted on a basis of segregation, except for the elementary years and graduate and professional schools."¹³

By 1940, forty-six of seventy-four Catholic colleges admitted women to some part of their institution, but this was usually limited and/or highly-segregated admittance, such as to a nursing

¹⁰ Miller-Bernal and Poulson, *Going Coed*, 28.

¹¹ Quote in Miller-Bernal and Poulson, *Going Coed*, 29.

¹² Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri*: Encyclical on Christian Education, Sec. 68, 1929, Vatican website.

¹³ Quote in Miller-Bernal and Poulson, *Going Coed*, 29.

school or part of a summer session. Fewer than ten Catholic colleges were fully coeducational.¹⁴ Catholic colleges were faster to accept women into graduate programs than undergraduate because women's age was seen as a factor in their risk for promiscuity. Older women applying for graduate school were viewed as more mature and in control of themselves, "mitigat[ing] fears about moral offenses stemming from immaturity."¹⁵ Accordingly, some Catholic institutions allowed women limited enrollment in select graduate programs but not full matriculation into the undergraduate classes.

Tom Jablonsky, a history professor at Marquette and author of Marquette's history, explained, "the question was never whether women were taking specialized courses somewhere within a Jesuit university's property (usually at a separate site, often in a segregated classroom environment). The question is when did a Jesuit university allow women to sit alongside men in the same regular classrooms with the goal of attaining a Bachelor of Arts degree."¹⁶ Jablonsky specified Bachelors of Arts degrees because Jesuits were more closely associated with arts education than science or business. Most Catholic institutions admitted women in some limited capacity decades before becoming fully coeducational because the latter remained taboo.

Sex segregation in religious orders further perpetuated single-sex colleges, since these colleges' educators were mostly priests and nuns who were products of not only sex-segregated education but entirely sex-segregated lifestyles. Zacheus Maher, S.J., remarked in 1940, "We Jesuits are not qualified educators of women. It is not our profession, nor are we trained for it. The

¹⁴ William P. Leahy, S.J., *Adapting to America: Catholics, Jesuits, and Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991): 76.

¹⁵ Leahy, S.J., *Adapting to America*, 75.

¹⁶ Thomas J. Jablonsky, 2009, internal email correspondence with Department of Special Collections, provided by Katie Blank of Marquette University Special Collections and University Archives.

education of men, which is our real work, is hampered by the presence of women."¹⁷ Maher was assistant to the Superior General of the Jesuits, Wlodimir Ledochowski, at the time of this quote and previously served as Santa Clara's seventeenth president between 1921 and 1926. His view captures a few of the prevailing notions in the Church: Women's pursuit of education was frivolous and undeserving of support from the priesthood, and besides, a priest who spends most of his life and all of his academic career in the company of men simply would not know how to handle a woman in the classroom. The prevalence of these attitudes exposes the pious concerns over women's virtue as a cover for concerns rooted in sexism and lack of exposure to women.

In the summer of 1909, Marquette University was the first Catholic university to become fully coeducational.¹⁸ Coeducation expanded gradually, but it remained the exception rather than the rule throughout the mid-century. Only ten percent of Catholic institutions were coeducational by 1941 which paled in comparison to the 71.3% of all higher education institutions in America.¹⁹ During Ledowchowski's time as the Superior General of the Jesuits between 1915-1942, he remained vehemently opposed to coeducation and denied several universities permission to adopt it. Ledowchoswki maintained this position even during Great Depression enrollment declines, including "when officials at Spring Hill College [in Alabama] pleaded in 1938 that the college must admit women students to survive, Ledowchowski told them to close."²⁰ The vast majority of Catholic universities continued to avoid undergraduate coeducation at all costs, even bankruptcy, throughout the early 20th century.

¹⁷ Susan L. Poulson, "From Single-Sex to Coeducation: The Advent of Coeducation at Georgetown, 1965-1975," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 13, no. 4 (Fall 1995): 119.

¹⁸ Leahy, S.J., *Adapting to America*, 75.

¹⁹ Poulson, "From Single Sex to Coeducation," 118.

²⁰ Leahy, S.J., *Adapting to America*, 79.

In the 1960s, however, this opposition thawed due to nationwide cultural shifts. The women's liberation movement increased personal freedom for women throughout this decade. Such changes directed the nation away from traditional thinking concerning women's roles.

Hence, attitudes became more favorable towards women in the context of college campuses and academia. Campus opinion polls captured these cultural shifts as well. One 1960 study at a private New York university asked male students whether the school's recent shift to coeducation impacted its reputation, admission standards, or class quality. The results found that most survey respondents did not have these concerns, demonstrating increased open-mindedness and even desire for coeducation among all-male university students.²¹

When institutions faced renewed financial challenges again in the 1960s, the nationwide cultural shift prompted a different response from Catholic universities than in prior decades. Coeducation seemed like a better option than shutting down schools, and it now prevailed as a financial strategy because it "enabled these popular institutions to expand and increase the academic quality of their student bodies" instead of lowering academic qualifications to expand the single-sex student body.²² By 1984, all but one Catholic institution founded for the education of men had gone fully coeducational.²³ Remarkably, over half of these institutions made the switch in under a decade, between 1967 and 1975.²⁴ Santa Clara University beat the curve by six years when it began admitting women in 1961.

²¹ Miller-Bernal and Poulson, *Going Coed*, 9.

²² Goldin and Katz, "Putting the 'Co' in Education," 494.

²³ Leahy, S.J., *Adapting to America*, 85.

²⁴ Goldin and Katz, "Putting the 'Co' in Education," 395.

Coeducation at Santa Clara University

Father Gerald McKevitt's account of Santa Clara University history credits "the reforms within the Jesuit order and the Catholic Church resulting from the aggiornamento of Pope John XXIII" for Donohoe's freedom to "introduce changes [that] were the most dramatic that the university had experienced in a hundred years."²⁵ According to McKevitt, however, Donohoe decided to admit women not to spearhead social change, but primarily "for financial stability and academic proficiency" and "to increase its enrollment."²⁶ This motivation is worth noting because it underscores that women's presence on campus was tolerated as a means to increase revenue, rather than an acknowledgment of their rightful place within the academic community. The university lacked a sincere commitment to equal treatment and inclusion. Therefore, the opportunity to enroll - and pay equal tuition - did not guarantee equal treatment on campus.

The edition of *The Santa Clara* that announced Donohoe's decision captured the gritted teeth with which many of Santa Clara's all-male student body reacted to the news. Underneath the "TRADITION SHATTERED" headline, the article made sure to mention that "Fr. Donohoe cited as a reason for the move 'terrific [financial] pressure on Santa Clara'"²⁷ In the op-ed section, one student editor stated outright, "The staff of *The Santa Clara* regrets that the administration has been forced to make this decision."²⁸ Both of these comments frame women's admittance as not a celebration of progress in the eyes of the student body and administration, but a regrettable necessity. Because coeducation was accepted as a lesser-of-two-evils strategy to avoid financial

²⁵ Gerald McKevitt, S.J., *The University of Santa Clara: A History, 1851-1977* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979): 284.

²⁶ McKevitt, S.J., *The University of Santa Clara*, 285.

²⁷ "TRADITION SHATTERED: Girls To Shatter 110-Yr. Tradition," 1, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

²⁸ P.A.C., "Editorial: End of an Era" in "TRADITION SHATTERED: Girls To Shatter 110-Yr. Tradition," *The Santa Clara* 29, no. 16 (22 March 1961): 2, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

and academic degradation, women's presence was endured rather than celebrated.

While *The Santa Clara* editors maintained a hostile tone, not all the coverage aligned with this attitude. The front-page article mentions that "Father Donohoe termed co-education as progress. 'There is no virtue in age, or tradition itself. There is no virtue in an exclusive school for men for that reason. Catholic lives involve two sexes.'" ²⁹ Other quotes from Donohoe demonstrate his attempts to assuage anticipated criticisms, promising that Santa Clara would not lower its admission standards nor would it accept transfers from nearby Catholic women's colleges. ³⁰ The latter promise was made to protect College of Holy Names, College of Notre Dame, Belmont, Lone Mountain College for Women, and Dominican College from a sudden decline in enrollment if a large percentage of their student bodies opted to attend Santa Clara. ³¹ Concerns and criticisms generally overshadowed the occasional optimistic rhetoric, revealing the specific fears that Santa Clara students harbored about the decision. Most of the critics alluded to Santa Clara's strong "masculine" tradition and mourned what they viewed as its untimely demise. Students lowered the flag on campus to half-mast. ³² This perceived masculine tradition is never clearly defined, but several editors elaborated on how they predicted that femininity would ruin it. One male student was horrified that "*The Santa Clara* eventually may have a female editor" because women will write with "lace borders and pink." A month later, another argued that "the absence of feminine influence on the campus gives Santa Clara the reputation of complete manliness, untouched by frills and softness" and "the invasion of the 'co-ed' state will destroy this reputation" by decorating the

²⁹ "TRADITION SHATTERED: Girls To Shatter 110-Yr. Tradition," 2, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

³⁰ "TRADITION SHATTERED: Girls To Shatter 110-Yr. Tradition," 1, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

³¹ "TRADITION SHATTERED: Girls To Shatter 110-Yr. Tradition," 1-2, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

³² Scott Brown, "O Pioneers!" *Santa Clara Magazine* (Spring 2008).

University with "lace curtains."³³ Critics anticipated a lowering of academic standards despite Donohoe's promises, with one providing a scathing satirical piece about "what will happen with the advent of real life girls as official members of the student body," including "The College of Engineering [...] preparing such courses as Fundamentals of Washing Machine Repair and Basic Vacuum cleaning."³⁴ Men weren't the only ones expressing agitation at the upcoming change. Janice Coleman in Richmond, California felt so scandalized by the news from fifty miles away that she wrote that any woman who enrolled in the institution "should not be considered a member of the feminine sphere!"³⁵ These hostile opinions foreshadowed the negative attitudes with which the upcoming first class of Santa Clara women contended when they arrived at campus. These women faced the challenge of making space for themselves in an environment where many of their male peers - and even other women looking from the outside - viewed them as invaders and destroyers.

This begs the question of why eighty-five women in 1961 sought their education at an institution that disparaged their presence.³⁶ That September, sixty-three women entered the Freshman class, sixteen as Sophomores, five as Juniors, and one - Mary Somers - as a Senior.³⁷ Patricia O'Malley from Phoenix, Arizona led the way as the first female applicant to Santa Clara's undergraduate program. In May 1961, *The Santa Clara* university newspaper published an interview with O'Malley, drawing attention to her physical appearance under the headline "Blonde

³³ S.K., "Essay" in "TRADITION SHATTERED: Girls To Shatter 110-Yr. Tradition," *The Santa Clara* 29, no. 16 (22 March 1961): 2, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

³⁴ S.K., "Essay" in "TRADITION SHATTERED: Girls To Shatter 110-Yr. Tradition," 2.

³⁵ Janice Coleman, "Letters to the Editor...Coed," *The Santa Clara* 39, no. 19 (27 April 1961): 8, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

³⁶ This figure comes from counting the women listed in *The Redwood* 1961-1962 yearbook. Secondary sources gave conflicting numbers for this statistic, most stating 75 for the number of women. Perhaps additional women transferred in throughout the 1961-1962 school year.

³⁷ Santa Clara University, *The Redwood*, 1961-1962 yearbook (Santa Clara, CA: 1962), 52-143, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

Phoenician Visits SC Campus.” In this interview, O’Malley explained, “I didn’t especially want to go to an all-women’s college, yet I wanted the Catholic education. Now that Santa Clara is co-ed, everything worked out wonderfully.”³⁸

By “co-ed”, O’Malley referred to the full matriculation of women into the undergraduate class. O’Malley was technically not the first woman to apply or graduate from Santa Clara. In the 1940s, Santa Clara opened up some graduate courses - albeit not graduate degrees - in engineering, science, and management to women. The first degree-seeking women arrived in the post-war years, when they were admitted to the business school’s evening program. Later, in 1956, Santa Clara partnered with nearby O’Connor Hospital, at that time a Catholic-affiliated hospital, to offer nursing courses.³⁹ These changes signaled a thaw in opposition to women’s academic presence, but the notion of full matriculation into the undergraduate schools remained controversial throughout the 1950s. This trend of limited entrance followed by full matriculation of women in these decades puts Santa Clara on the same timeline as most Catholic institutions in their switch to coeducation. Not surprisingly then, the experiences of Patty O’Malley and her female peers are similar to stories of inaugural coeducational classes at other Catholic colleges throughout the nation.

For some, like O’Malley, the reasoning was as simple as desiring a Catholic education without attending an all-women’s college. Perhaps O’Malley’s desire was influenced by the lack of prestige and funding at these women’s colleges, or perhaps she simply wanted diversity in her academic experience. Other women in her class cited the following reasons for attending Santa Clara: family legacy at Santa Clara, its reputation as an esteemed Jesuit institution, and, often, the same logistical considerations that factored into men’s choice of university, such as proximity and

³⁸ Stephen Kent, "Poolside Interview: Blonde Phoenician Visits SC Campus," *The Santa Clara* 40, no. 20 (4 May 1961): 1, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

³⁹ Brown, “O Pioneers!”

scholarships. Suzanna Russell Hanselaar always wished to attend the same university as her father, but reluctantly accepted the reality that she would likely need to attend a women's college to attend a Catholic university because Santa Clara remained closed to women at the start of her senior year of high school. When she saw Patty O'Malley's photo in the newspaper, however, she recalls, "my father was so excited, and I couldn't believe the adventure I was about to have!"⁴⁰ *The Santa Clara* interviewed four women in September 1961 for an article titled "I Answer That ...': Why Did You Choose SC?" Pat Pepin explained that her "pioneering spirit was awakened" at the announcement of Santa Clara going coed, and Rosette Girolami similarly mused, "I liked the idea of being one of the first girls to complete a college education at the University of Santa Clara." It seems that the task of forging a path for women in new territory was an attraction, rather than a deterrent, for some of these determined women. In fact, two of these women listed an ample man to woman ratio as a benefit in and of itself, presumably for dating prospects. Lindie Frisbie listed "boys, boys, boys!!!" as an enticing factor, and Junona Jonas also surmised, "I guess the boy-girl ratio had a lot to do with it." In a time when rigid patriarchal structures barred women from even opening credit cards in their own name, a male partner often provided valuable financial security that a degree alone could not offer. Practicality also played a role in women's desire to attend Santa Clara. Both Girolami and Jonas looked for colleges close to home with reputable math departments, and Santa Clara fit those qualifications. Notably, all four women cited the desire for a Catholic education at a reputable Jesuit institution as their primary reason.⁴¹ Despite admonishments from coeducation critics, these women saw themselves as worthy as any male student of a quality Jesuit education that fit their practical criteria, and some viewed the pioneering opportunity as an excitement and an

⁴⁰ Brown, "O Pioneers!"

⁴¹ Jim Bunker, "I Answer That ... Why Did You Choose SC?" *The Santa Clara* 40, no. 1 (21 September 1961): 10, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

honor. These convictions would carry these women through the challenges that awaited them when they arrived at campus.

Several male students met the arrival of women at Santa Clara with outward hostility. During the first few weeks, women heard chants like “Two, Four, Six, Eight, We don’t want to integrate!”⁴² This anti-integration chant carried other problematic connotations due to its racist origins. Protestors notoriously shouted ‘two, four, six, eight, we don’t want to integrate’ at six-year-old Ruby Bridges, the first black student to attend William Frantz Elementary School in 1960.⁴³ A *Santa Clara* article unconvincingly hastened to present such discrimination in a positive light, calling “good-natured” booing a sign of disgruntled men exiting their first stage of grief. The author explained, “in order to needle a girl you have to speak to her. And in speaking to her, you have to look at her.”⁴⁴ The harassment continued even a year later in the winter of 1962, when “it snowed and the boys invaded the Villa [women’s housing], throwing some coeds into the pool, while house prefect Mr. Williman ran around blowing his whistle, trying to round them up.”⁴⁵ The adversarial newspaper articles did not stop either. Gaby Miller, Class of 1965, remembers that “there were concerted efforts on the part of some guys to alienate the women. One guy in my class - his name was Joe Tinney - was always criticizing the coeds in the newspaper.”⁴⁶ There was one arena, however, in which men accepted women more readily. Another alumna recalls: “they threw water balloons at us and wouldn’t allow us in the cheering section at basketball games and football games, but they would date us! (Except of

⁴² Santa Clara University, "Graduation Press Release" (1965), SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁴³ “‘Two, four, six, eight, we don’t want to integrate’: The 60th anniversary of Ruby Bridges and desegregation,” *Penn Live Patriot News* (14 November 2020).

⁴⁴ "A Needle Breaks the Ice," Newspaper clipping featured in *Tradition Shattered: 1961-1986* (1986): 6, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁴⁵ "Recollections and Reminiscences," *Tradition Shattered: 1961-1986*, 25th Anniversary of Coeducation Collection, 1986, 5. SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁴⁶ Gaby Miller, Interview by Hannah Hagen, 12 June 2023.

course, Joe Tinney, who wouldn't go near a coed)"⁴⁷ The men initially viewed their new peers two-dimensionally, as threats to the masculine tradition of their territory or objects of desire.

The same trends appeared at other Catholic universities across the nation as male college students, many of them products of a lifetime of sex-segregation, struggled to know how to conduct themselves with women suddenly in their midst. At Boston College in the 1950s, "the student weekly newspaper published a number of sexist articles in the 'How to Date a Co-ed' series, [in which] the beginner was advised to begin with a 'not-too beautiful specimen' and progress to prettier ones as basic skills improved."⁴⁸ The "co-eds" in question were Education and Nursing school students, since Boston College did not become fully coeducational until 1970, yet these articles demonstrate desperate attempts to assuage the male sexual anxieties about sharing a campus with women. Greg Givvin, who graduated with the second-to-last male-only class at Santa Clara in 1960, surmised that male students' opposition to a coeducational campus stemmed from their insecurities in the presence of women: "It may have something to do with the fact that your appearance and manner of speech would have to be much more appropriate and in-line" than in an all-male environment. Givvin elaborated, "Quite honestly, I would have an 8 o'clock class, and I would put pants on over my pajamas, and a jacket on over my pajamas. I don't know if I would even brush my teeth because there were no women at all anywhere."⁴⁹ Miller noted that sexism was worse among the earlier classes, in part for that very reason: "The men in my class didn't treat us poorly, but the ones in earlier classes - who previously thought they were going to an all-men's college - they were a grungy bunch of guys, let me tell you. They were used to going to class in their pajamas."⁵⁰ Some male students therefore resorted to outward

⁴⁷ "Recollections and Reminiscences," 5, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁴⁸ Miller-Bernal and Poulson, *Going Coed*, 203.

⁴⁹ Gregory Givvin, Interview by Hannah Hagen, 20 February 2023.

⁵⁰ Miller, Interview by Hannah Hagen.

displays of disdain toward their new female peers to compensate for anxieties, reinforced by cultural dating norms, about how to behave around the opposite sex.

Even some faculty members added to the hostility with snide remarks. In 1986, over twenty years after her graduation, one Santa Clara woman mentioned “Jim Sweeters’ Logic class” in an anonymous Class of 1965 reunion interview, recalling that “the professor claimed he accepted coeducation and loved coeds but didn’t believe women could be logical enough for this class.”⁵¹ Another anonymous quote from this reunion revealed that Sweeters made this comment in a class with forty male students and only one female student, making it not only a damaging generalized statement but also a targeted and personal one.⁵² Sue Henderson confirmed this story for *Santa Clara Magazine* in 2008 when she mentioned a logic professor declaring “there is no such thing as a logical woman.”⁵³ (It is unclear whether one or both of the 1986 quotes were from Henderson or another woman in a different class section, but either way, Sweeters’ objectionable comment left a decades-long impression.) The sexist attitude voiced by Sweeters was not unique to him and was reflected in other professors’ treatment of their female students. Gerri Beasley, formerly Gerry Ferrara, recalls her experience with a professor’s reluctance to call on women to answer questions in class: “One day, one of the Jesuits saw my name on his attendance sheet and said, ‘Gerry Ferrara, would you tell us the first cause of being?’ I stood up. And he said, ‘Oh, not you. Thought you were a guy.’ So I changed the spelling of my name to Gerri.”⁵⁴ This discrimination was not universal among faculty, as Gaby Miller recalls, “My teachers were very supportive.”⁵⁵ However, some of these women

⁵¹ “Favorite, Least Favorite Classes,” Newspaper clipping featured in *Tradition Shattered: 1961-1986* (1986): 11, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁵² “Recollections and Reminiscences,” 5, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁵³ Brown, “O Pioneers!”

⁵⁴ Beasley, “TRADITION SHATTERED.”

⁵⁵ Miller, Interview by Hannah Hagen.

faced not only intimidation from their male peers, but also belittlement and rejection from those in positions of authority. They also encountered very minimal female representation in the faculty -- only two out of 120 faculty members, and only one in a teaching position. Ethel B. Meece taught biology, while Peggy Major was the News Director.⁵⁶

Women encountered obstacles within Santa Clara's infrastructure as well, since, for the first century of its operation, the university built and organized its residence halls, restrooms, and other facilities without them in mind. In preparation for the matriculation of women, administration made some updates, but they were limited and last-minute. Initially, Santa Clara did not plan any housing accommodations for women, but "it became apparent that more than half of those applying for admission were not within commuting distance and would therefore need boarding facilities."⁵⁷ This initial oversight is telling considering that the first applicant hailed from Phoenix, Arizona. To compensate, the university acquired a two-story apartment building, called Park Lanai, four blocks away to convert into a living space for seventy-four Santa Clara women. Each four-person unit featured two bedrooms, a bathroom, a study and lounge area, kitchen, brick fireplace, and patio. However, one drawback in otherwise "sumptuous accommodations" was that Park Lanai only offered one phone for all of its residents, creating "traffic jams."⁵⁸ *The Santa Clara* article covering this issue mentions that "more phones will be installed later," suggesting that this dilemma resulted from an initial lack of forethought. One alumna recalls a similar predicament on campus because "the campus only had one women's restroom!!"⁵⁹ The physical placement of Park Lanai on

⁵⁶ *The Redwood* (Santa Clara, CA: 1962): 9-25, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁵⁷ "Co-eds Thrive in Lush Lanai," *The Santa Clara* 40, no. 1 (21 September 1961): 9, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁵⁸ "Because Gals Have Only One: Studies or Not, Phone Stays Hot," newspaper clipping featured in *Tradition Shattered: 1961-1986* (1986): 13, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁵⁹ "Recollections and Reminiscences," 4, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

the periphery of campus, several blocks away, symbolized the metaphorical space that women were expected to hold. Their needs were treated as an afterthought, and their presence considered largely on the margins of campus life.

Double standard expectations seeped into every aspect of university life for women at Santa Clara due to its adherence to the *in loco parentis* system typical of Catholic institutions. This Latin phrase translates to “in the place of parents” and refers to a system in which institutions of higher learning acted as parental figures for their students with strict behavioral regulations. The regulations differed to enforce gendered expectations, and hence, women encountered stronger sanctions. In general, *in loco parentis* regulations for women required greater cleanliness, modesty, and sexual restraint.⁶⁰

The official *House Rules and Regulations For Women Students Living at Park Lanai* reveal that the residents were not permitted to leave their apartments during four-hour long study periods four nights per week, leave their apartment overnight without parent permission, or entertain male guests. Additionally, room checks for cleanliness were performed four days per week.⁶¹ By the time that Marie Elena Barry, class of 1968, attended Santa Clara, women’s dorms existed on campus, but she recalls that strict rules carried over, including a 10:30 PM lights out time with no exceptions for studying. These rules created not only social but academic restrictions for women with less flexibility in their study schedules. It was not until 1970 that Santa Clara’s Board of Review approved reform of women’s residence hours and made sign-out sheets a voluntary safety precaution. A *Santa Clara* issue from 1970 revealed that Assistant Dean of Students, Patricia McCarthy, “regards the abolition of hours as a positive step,

⁶⁰ Poulson and Higgins, “Gender, Coeducation, and the Transformation of Catholic Identity in American Catholic Higher Education,” 503.

⁶¹ Santa Clara University, “House Rules and Regulations for Women Students Living at Park Lanai,” *Broncos Handbook: Student Directory 1961-1962* (1961): 2, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

freeing the prefects from paperwork," with, significantly, no mention of the decision as a positive step toward liberating the women subjected to those hours.⁶²

Meanwhile, men's housing regulations were nearly as flexible as they are today. Givvin recalled that with respect to strict rules in men's dorms, there were "zero, absolutely zero! We came and went anytime we chose, and we didn't check in with anybody."⁶³ Men's dorms in Givvin's time used a Resident Assistant system similar to the one used in both men's and women's dorms today. In his Freshmen dorm, "there were male upperclassmen that were designed to keep things in order more or less," but adult house prefects had little to no presence. While the *Redwood* yearbooks after 1961 do not mention hall prefects, the page dedicated to them in the 1960-1961 edition corroborates Givvin's account. It shows eleven student resident assistants outnumbering seven priests, with O'Connor Hall having only one priest prefect compared to four student ones.⁶⁴ Givvin was amazed to learn that the women admitted a year after his graduation faced strict restrictions because "it was my experience in those days that women were so much more mature, so much more capable of managing themselves than we were. We had no clue, absolutely no clue." Givvin spoke from his own personal experiences, so his views cannot represent those of every male student at Santa Clara in the early 1960s. However, his response at least demonstrates that the conservative *in loco parentis* values perpetuated by Santa Clara's administration were not universally supported by the male student body.

Despite these challenges, individual women's experiences were mixed. There is also evidence of a relative softening in men's attitudes toward their female peers within the first few years of

⁶² Carrie Kalb, "Board of Review Approves Reform of Women's Hours," *The Santa Clara* 48, no. 18 (30 January 1970), SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁶³ Givvin, interview by Hannah Hagen.

⁶⁴ Santa Clara University, *The Redwood*, 1960-1961 yearbook (Santa Clara, CA: 1961): 27, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

their presence on campus. The same alumna who remarked about the dearth of bathrooms remembered “how the sophomore male students initially disliked us,” but “after the first year, we were friends.” She also noted that “Seniors, Juniors, and frosh were more accepting” from the beginning, implying that Sophomore men were the main issue, although other accounts do not make this distinction.⁶⁵ Berry, the woman who recalled the 10:30 PM lights-out time, when asked if she had any “disagreeable experiences” on account of her gender, stated “no, not at all.” She acknowledged that “some individuals may have been disenchanted with women on campus. Yet, no one was overly ugly or awful,” and, overall, “everyone was so very open, considerate [and] understanding of student backgrounds” when it came to race, culture, and religion.⁶⁶ Berry herself was a woman in the Class of 1968, arriving only three years after the first class of Santa Clara women. Her perceptions of widespread open-mindedness suggest that progress was made during that time. Berry recalls that her now-husband, Douglas, “confirmed that some of the early Santa Clara women heard some slurring remarks. In fact, he told me ‘how easy I had it!’”⁶⁷ Douglas was just two years older than Marie, so a noticeable change was achieved in only a few years' time.

Poulson and Bernal's *Going Coed* reveals that this pattern of softening attitudes within the first few years of coeducation was in fact common to newly coeducational universities, whether Catholic or secular. Rutgers University women reported a similar trend of the men warming up to them within a year of their public university becoming coeducational in 1972. One female Rutgers student reported in a 1973 *New York Times* article, “Last year, when you walked on campus, the fellows eyed you. Now, you can walk around without feeling like they're grading you.” Another

⁶⁵ "Recollections and Reminiscences," 4, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁶⁶ Norman F. Martin, S.J., "SCU Oral History Transcript - Interview with Marie Elena Barry, Class of 1968," 26 SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁶⁷ Martin, S.J., "Interview with Marie Elena Barry," 26, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

student corroborated, "Last year, the men would hardly say hello to a woman on campus. This year, they are friendly and less defensive. It's a lot more normal."⁶⁸ This trend does not mean that sexism completely disappeared at these universities after a few years. In fact, Berry acknowledges several times in her interview that just because she did not personally experience what she considered to be sexist attitudes, that doesn't mean they didn't exist. Overall, reactions from Santa Clara men ranged from condescending and hostile to friendly and supportive, with the latter becoming increasingly common in a few years' time.

Accounts from the early women that pioneered female presence at Santa Clara reveal that, just like the range of male attitudes they encountered, their strategies for gaining acceptance were diverse. Women at Santa Clara were pressured to achieve academic excellence but to also adhere to gender roles in their academic pursuits. They sought to disprove stereotypes about women's incompetence, a task that was magnified for women studying concentrations that defied gender roles. Most of the early Santa Clara women majored in humanities with the aim of being teachers. Women who majored in traditionally masculine fields faced more isolation and backlash. One alumna recalls that "as one of only three women in the Business School, classes were very difficult" because "several professors took great pains to put me 'on the spot' regularly. Our skills had to be perfect, or we were embarrassed because 'why would a girl want to be in Business?' It was not her place."⁶⁹

Regardless of their academic field of study, however, women rose to the challenge of proving themselves by high academic performance. When reminiscing about a Logic class, presumably the same course taught by the professor who did not believe in female logic, one alumna said she felt that "I had to get an 'A' in class to show Female logic."⁷⁰ Women responded to sexist notions

⁶⁸ Quoted in Miller-Bernal and Poulson, *Going Coed*, 230.

⁶⁹ "Recollections and Reminiscences," 5, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁷⁰ "Recollections" and "Reminiscences," 5, SCU Archives and Special Collections

by using them as motivation to disprove them, although this created a disproportionate amount of pressure for women in the classroom environment. They faced the task of not only performing well for themselves and their own futures but also as representation for all women and the future of women at Santa Clara. The alumna from the Business School recalls that “every day was a challenge and I hope we paved the way for women’s success in that college.”⁷¹ Women’s performance at Santa Clara fit with the national trend of women outperforming men at newly coeducational institutions, as “the initial group of women had academic qualifications that were significantly higher than the men and achieved on average a higher GPA in their first year.”⁷² Women at Santa Clara and across the nation subverted male expectations that their presence would lower academic standards by instead raising them.

Women also subverted expectations in the area of active involvement and participation in extracurriculars, both co-educational and single-sex. *The Redwood*, the Santa Clara yearbook, shows women assimilating into most clubs soon after matriculation - theater, yearbook, academics, even class officer positions. The vast majority of clubs and organizations welcomed women in 1961, with the only exceptions being fraternities, the Block Sweaters club for Varsity athletes - there were no Varsity women’s sports at Santa Clara until 1986 - , Glee Club, and the BAA for men interested in business. In their first year, women trickled into just over a quarter of the twenty-four clubs available to them. They joined the *Redwood* yearbook committee, the Mendel Society (a club for those interested in health-related careers), the Forensic Society (a debate club), the IRC (a club that discussed problems and solutions in world affairs), the Archaeology Society, and the Clay M. Greene theater club which put on two productions. In these clubs, women comprised 24% of

⁷¹ "Recollections and Reminiscences," 5, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁷² Goldin and Katz, "Putting the 'Co' in Education," 505.

membership on average, an impressively high proportion considering the low ratio of women to men (one to fifteen) on campus, which made them only 6.67% of the student body.⁷³

Involvement nearly doubled the following year, with women participating in over half of the twenty-six clubs available to them. New additions to their clubs of choice included the Chemical Society (a chemistry club), Math Club, the Society for Advancement of Management (a business club), *The Owl* (a student-run literary magazine), the Catechetical Society (a faith-based volunteer organization for working with children), Hawaiian Club, Irish Club, and Ski Club. That year, they comprised roughly 28% of club membership on average, a slight increase from the year previous. Much to the probable chagrin of the student who lamented the potential of a female *Santa Clara* editor, the school newspaper had two female editors - and six out of the fifteen Santa Clara student staff members were women - by 1962. By 1965, nearly two-thirds of clubs had women participants, including Physics Society and political groups like Young Democrats, and Young Republicans, and the Catholic's Interracial Council (Catholics against Jim Crow). In each of the sixteen clubs with female presence, women comprised an average of 33.8% of membership.⁷⁴ Contrary to one male student's prediction that "I don't think there will be a great influx at once" of women's participation in extracurriculars, and "they will not assume positions of leadership in campus organizations for some time," the yearbooks show that early Santa Clara women did not shy away from making space for themselves alongside the men both inside and outside the classroom.⁷⁵

⁷³ *The Redwood* (Santa Clara, CA: 1962): 176-205, SCU Archives and Special Collections. In the absence of recorded data, I calculated these statistics on women's club involvement by counting the women listed/pictured in each organization in the yearbooks. These figures may not be exact in cases where the yearbooks incorrectly listed or omitted information.

⁷⁴ *The Redwood* (Santa Clara, CA: 1965): 52-89, SCU Archives and Special Collections

⁷⁵ P.A.C., "Editorial: End of an Era" in "TRADITION SHATTERED: Girls To Shatter 110-Yr. Tradition," 2, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

Women met the challenge of integrating themselves into the informal social sphere as well, building friendships with men. The 1965 Graduation Press Release that reflected on the first four years of coeducation explains that the women “did many things then to try and win the boys over” with one woman graduate reflecting that “We felt we had to be active at every level. We didn't wait for the boys to decide about us. We baked cookies for them at Christmastime and caroled outside their dorms. When we saw a fellow who was chairman of some campus activity, we would go up to him and ask if we could help in some way.”⁷⁶ Women took it as their responsibility to make “peace offerings” and extend social graces to the men to win their favor. This power imbalance also manifested in men viewing their existence as a privilege for the women to enjoy. One *Santa Clara* article noted that “the co-eds get to eat their meals in the campus cafeteria with the men and have refreshments with them at the snack bar in the Bronco Corral.” Female students “also find they enjoy a ratio of one woman for every 15 men,” implying that women were lucky to experience the disproportionate male presence on campus due to the larger dating pool that it provided.⁷⁷ The women themselves recall more mixed emotions about integrating themselves into social spaces. One alumna described that “the first ‘days of the coeds’ was rather tense times ... but also very exciting. The Bronco Corral was the place to meet.”⁷⁸ This ambivalent emotion stemmed from the fact that social experiences for women doubled as social tests to prove themselves.

Elements of Santa Clara remained sex-segregated, with a few women-only spaces existing in athletics and residence life. These spaces were vital to fostering a sense of community and belonging

⁷⁶ Santa Clara University, "1965 Graduation Press Release," SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁷⁷ "Because Gals Have Only One: Studies or Not, Phone Stays Hot," newspaper clipping featured in *Tradition Shattered: 1961-1986* (1986): 13, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁷⁸ "Recollections and Reminiscences," 5.

for the women. Critics against coeducation included supporters of Catholic women's colleges who feared that coeducation would put them out of business. While, sometimes, desire to preserve all-women universities came from conservative purity or gender role concerns, they also came from those who recognized the importance of women-only spaces for female empowerment. Elizabeth Tidball, a physiologist and strong advocate for women in academia, conducted studies in the 1970s to prove that female graduates of all-women undergraduate programs were twice as likely "to receive their doctorates, enter medical school, or become recognized leaders in their fields" than female graduates from coeducational colleges.⁷⁹ Tidball and other researchers in her field pointed out that all-women's colleges offered more role models of successful women in teaching and administrative positions, more leadership opportunities for female students, and overall more supportive environments for women. These benefits allowed women to reach their full potential without the hindrances of daily discrimination.⁸⁰ Although these studies took place a decade or two after women's admittance to Santa Clara, their findings are relevant in highlighting the potential drawbacks for women who chose Santa Clara over a Catholic women's college. There were likely some women's rights advocates who felt dubious toward this Santa Clara milestone for its potential to have a regressive effect, bringing women to an environment where they would struggle for equal opportunities. It could also reduce the prestige of nearby women's universities where these opportunities remained accessible for them. These worries were validated to an extent by the discriminatory attitudes and actions that early Santa Clara women faced, but all-female spaces on campus offered female solidarity, respite from misogyny, and some of the easier access to

⁷⁹ Leslie Miller-Bernal, "Single-Sex versus Coeducational Environments: A Comparison of Women Students' Experiences at Four Colleges," *American Journal of Education* 102, no. 1 (November 1993): 24.

⁸⁰ Miller-Bernal, "Single-Sex versus Coeducational Environments," 26.

the kinds of leadership positions afforded at all-women's universities.

In general, Santa Clara did not offer female-only clubs. Upon admission, women were automatically enrolled in the Women Student Society, a society that "was founded to provide those services and activities which cannot be carried out by previously existing organizations," according to its description in the 1963 yearbook.⁸¹ This was the only club exclusive to women offered between 1961 and 1965, and no further information about its accomplishments or activities is available. There were, on the other hand, a handful of clubs exclusive to men during those years, whether by rule or by their nature. Glee Club and the BAA business club were explicitly called "men's clubs" in their yearbook descriptions. Other clubs indirectly excluded women simply because they based their membership on larger male-only spheres. The Block Sweater Club for Varsity athletes and Sanctuary Society (for students assisting at the altar during Mass, an activity reserved for men in Catholicism) exemplify this. Hence, aside from their residence building, very few female-only spaces existed on campus for women to seek solidarity with one another and respite from the male-dominated environment. The most prominent women's organization on campus, the Women's Recreation Association (WRA), granted women access to athletics years before Title IX and decades before the establishment of women's varsity teams at Santa Clara in 1986.⁸² The Santa Clara chapter of this organization began in 1963, two years after the first women undergraduates arrived. Miller recalls that, before then, "they had nothing for women athletically. We could stick our toes in the pool at the Villa Maria [another name for Park Lanai], and that was it. The pool on campus was restricted for women because

⁸¹ Santa Clara University, *The Redwood*, 1962-1963 yearbook (Santa Clara, CA: 1963), 177, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁸² "Santa Clara University Archives & Special Collections, "About this Collection: Women's Recreational Association Scrapbooks."

the men often swam naked.”⁸³ The WRA changed this, and its competitive sport offerings garnered campus-wide attention due to their success within the WRA’s first decade of operation.⁸⁴ They provided female athletes an opportunity to break the mold of femininity, make themselves visible, and garner the respect of male peers by winning competitions against other universities. The WRA offered five intramural sports (volleyball, basketball, softball, bowling, and tennis) and three intercollegiate sports (volleyball, basketball, and tennis).⁸⁵ In its first year of operation, the intercollegiate women's teams placed second in a tennis tournament in Ojai, California and took fifth place in a national swim meet.⁸⁶ Women’s success in the sports sphere translated to their empowerment in other spheres because “women’s participation in the institution [of sport] disrupts gendered power relations” and challenges conventions of femininity and masculinity.⁸⁷ Women could translate their confidence to other arenas such as university classrooms or society at large. In this way, the WRA facilitated an atmosphere that taught women to balance assertiveness, confidence, and cooperation instead of socializing women to develop passive traits for the sake of male company.

Outside of organized activities, women leaned on one another in informal social situations. During the first few weeks, one alumna reminisced, “we were so scared” that “we used to band together to walk to the dining hall. It must have looked like a

⁸³ Miller, Interview by Hannah Hagen.

⁸⁴ Segments about the WRA (pages 26-27 of this essay) also appear in an article I wrote and published: "Tradition Shattered: How Women’s Recreation at SCU Aided the Acceptance and Assimilation of the Santa Clara Woman," *Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History*, Series II, Vol. 22 (December 2022): 6-22.

⁸⁵ Marygrace Colby, *Women’s Recreational Association Scrapbook I, 1963-1972* (1973): 72. SCU Archives & Special Collections.

⁸⁶ Marygrace Colby, *Scrapbook I* (1973): 13, 93, SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁸⁷ Cheryl Cooky and Michael A. Messner, “No Slam Dunk: Gender, Sport, and the Unevenness of Social Change,” *Athlete Activism: Contemporary Perspectives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 81.

parade.”⁸⁸ In this tense environment, the women developed fiercely loyal friendships with one another that helped them through difficult times. Their small numbers and concentration in a single residence hall fortified this social network. Sue Henderson recalls with gratitude the support from her friends after her husband, whom she met at Santa Clara, died in Vietnam while she was pregnant with their child and still studying at the university. Henderson remembers that ““afterward, the ladies just came to my apartment and didn’t leave,” with one friend, Linda Biber Triplett, moving in with her permanently and driving her to the hospital three months later when her daughter was born. Henderson’s tragedy garnered support from unexpected sources as well: “The first person at my door the day my husband died? The Jesuit who told me there were no logical women.”⁸⁹ The tight-knit female community provided a silver lining, as Patricia O’Malley mentioned that whenever she asked herself ““Why am I here?”” she remembered that “I loved the other women. We managed to have a lot of fun sticking together. And if we didn’t break the mold, who would?”⁹⁰ It seems these women did find a way to enjoy the one-to-fifteen ratio of women to men -- not because of the quantity of men but because it intensified the quality of their relationships with other women. This solidarity helped them feel less isolated and “othered” in an environment where peers viewed them as invaders, fostering the resilient attitudes necessary to resist and subvert the sexist attitudes surrounding them. Mary Somers Edmunds, the first woman to graduate from Santa Clara after transferring for her senior year, demonstrated this resilience at the 1962 graduation ceremonies. When 250 of her male classmates offered to pay her one dollar each to not walk at graduation because they felt

⁸⁸ Santa Clara University, "1965 Graduation Press Release," SCU Archives and Special Collections.

⁸⁹ Brown, "O Pioneers!"

⁹⁰ Brown, "O Pioneers!"

embarrassed to share the stage with a woman, she refused, stating, "I worked too hard for this."⁹¹

Female enthusiasm, humor, optimism, and determination pervaded the Santa Clara class of 1965. Despite their male peers' best efforts at ostracism and intimidation, these alumni look back fondly on their college years, recalling more excitement than fear. Leanne Karnes Cooley said, "the road less traveled was very exciting," while Patricia Dougherty (formerly "Pat Pepin") recalled, "we liked that it was going to be hard to get." Dougherty adds, "plus, we had great senses of humor" to cope with discrimination and hardship. Even though these women were treated as though they did not belong at Santa Clara, they made space for themselves by knowing their right to that space and carrying themselves accordingly regardless of external opinions.

It took a pioneering spirit for these women to apply to an all-male institution in the first place, but they left the experience with that spirit strengthened. According to Gerri (formerly Gerry) Beasley, "Santa Clara made me a stronger person spiritually, academically, and socially. Certainly as I raised four children and saw their educational and other opportunities, I could encourage them to press into areas that other people hadn't gone before." Gerri's statement exemplifies her multifaceted success on both traditional and nontraditional life paths as a woman. She highlights her childrearing experience as one of the important facets of her strength, implying that for her, education and a career were not mutually exclusive with her role as a mother.

Notably, the professor who refused to call on Gerri to answer questions failed to stifle her sense of belonging in male-dominated environments. Beasley notes that, in her professional career, "I had no qualms about walking into a room filled with male doctors and telling them to put out their cigarettes and pay attention, so we could get to work planning the next medical conference."⁹² Gerri

⁹¹ Brown, "O Pioneers!"

⁹² Beasley, "TRADITION SHATTERED."

was one of many women in her class who went on to achieve career success. A *Santa Clara Magazine* article from 2008 reported that these women became “bank presidents, homemakers, corporate executives, social workers, educators, volunteers, real estate agents, department heads, artists, actresses, lawyers, entrepreneurs, ranchers, contractors, and flight attendants, to name a few.”⁹³

In a Catholic environment that deeply valued traditional gender roles, the resistant attitudes and structural barriers to coeducation at Santa Clara University placed responsibility on the newly matriculated women to earn space for themselves in the eyes of their male peers and faculty. Women met this challenge by either exceeding expectations in academics, athletics, and extra-curriculars or appeasing their male counterparts in the social sphere by appearing to internalize prescribed gender roles. Mixed experiences reveal a variety of assimilation strategies and resilient attitudes from the women who pioneered female presence at the university.

Today, women comprise half of the undergraduate student body and half of the faculty at Santa Clara University. They are represented in every major, virtually every campus organization, and ten varsity sports teams. The especially successful Santa Clara women’s soccer team became the university’s first women’s team to attend an NCAA tournament in 1989, and they have remained undefeated in every tournament for the past eleven years.⁹⁴ In September 2022, the university inaugurated Julie Sullivan as the first female president in its 171-year history. Still, there is progress yet to be made, as evidenced by the extant low ratio of women to men in the School of Engineering, a statistic in line with the nationwide trend of women’s slow but steady advancement into this field.

⁹³ Scott Brown, "Tradition Shattered," *Santa Clara Magazine* (Spring 2008),

⁹⁴ WCC, "The Staying Power of the Broncos," *West Coast Conference Sports News*, 11 November 2022.

In 1990, women received 15% of engineering bachelor's degrees in the United States, a figure that rose to 22% by 2018, the most recent year for which data is available.⁹⁵ Although coeducation is widely accepted at both religious and secular institutions now, male-dominated disciplines like engineering pose similar adversities to the male-dominated campuses of yesteryear. Likewise, women continue to “shatter traditions” in response to these barriers. In interviews for the Washington Post, women trailblazers of engineering recently offered advice to younger generations of women in the field. A retired aerospace engineer said, “You can do the job, [but] it takes strength and perseverance to do so while ignoring the naysayers.” Another returned nuclear engineer advised using “the ‘Old Girls’ Network’ — it does exist. . . . Don’t isolate yourself. You are not the only one with your issue.”⁹⁶ These pieces of wisdom echo the experiences of the pioneers of women’s education at Santa Clara University. Women at Santa Clara in the 1960s made the most of their “Old Girls’ Network” through strong bonds with one another and spaces like the WRA. There is no need to become “one of the boys” to achieve success. While there is no single, foolproof solution to overcoming sexist attitudes in male-dominated environments, progress is grounded in women’s resilience and recognition of self-worth.

⁹⁵ The Conversation, chart made from National Science Foundation and Engineering Workforce Commission data, “Only about 1 in 5 engineering degrees go to women,” *Technical.ly* (2 March 2023).

⁹⁶ Ettinger, “Trailblazing women in engineering field reflect on what has (and hasn’t) changed.”

Class of 1965 Women



Linda Biber Triplet, mention on pg 29



Gerry (now Gerri) Ferrara Beasley, mentions on pgs 17, 30



Lindie Frisbie, mention on pg 13



Rosette Girolami, mention on pg 13



Mary "Sue" Jertson Henderson, mentions on pgs 16, 29



Leanne Karnes Cooley, mention on pg 30



Gaby Miller, interviewee, mentions on pgs 15-17, 27



Patricia "Patty" O'Malley, first woman applicant, mentions on pgs 12, 13, 29



Patricia "Pat" Pepin Dougherty, mentions on pgs 13, 30



Suzanna Russell Hanselaar, mention on pg 13

All photos are from *The Redwood* yearbooks in SCU Archives and Special Collections. Some Class of 1965 women did not have senior photos, so headshots are from various *Redwood* editions between 1961 and 1965. I encountered many name spelling variations, even within the same yearbook edition.

Other Notable Santa Clara Women



Mary Somers Edmunds, Class of 1962, first woman to graduate Santa Clara's undergraduate program, mentions on pgs 11, 29



Ethel Meece and Peggy Major, the only female faculty when women undergraduates arrived in 1961, mention on pg 17



Marie Elena Berry, Class of 1968, mentions on pgs 19, 21



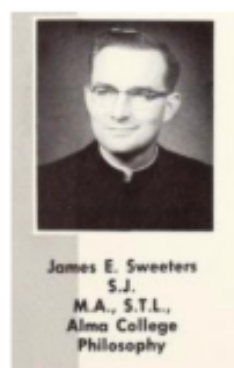
Nancy Jane Streuter, Class of 1968, first woman to graduate from Santa Clara's School of Engineering, mention on pg 1

Yearbook Photos of Men Mentioned:

Greg Givvin,
Class of 1960,
Interviewee,
mentions on pgs
15-20



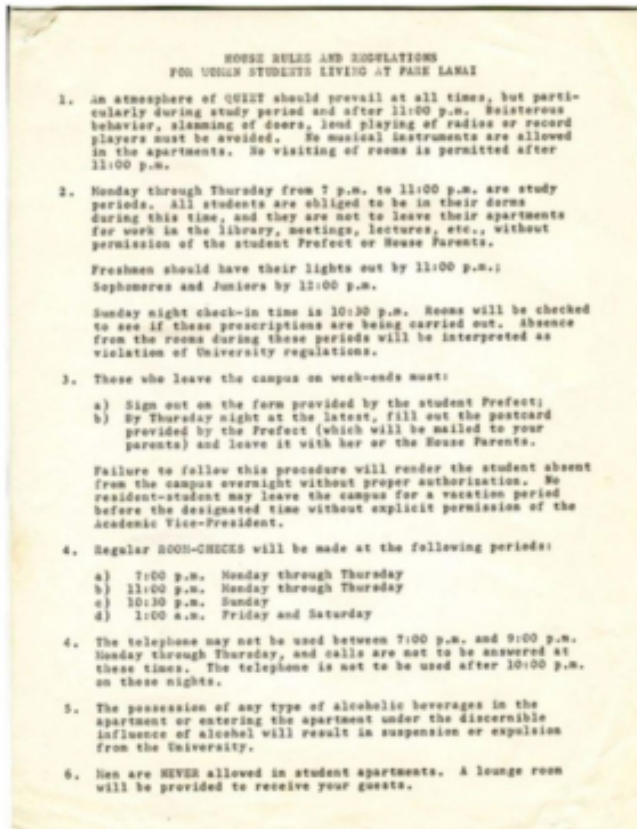
James "Jim"
Sweeters,
Logics
Professor,
mentions on
pgs 16, 17



Joseph "Joe"
Tinney, Class
of 1962,
mention on
pg 15



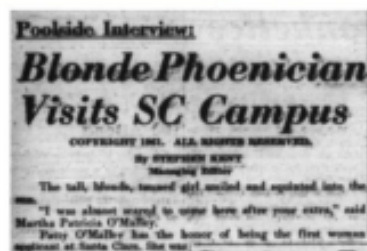
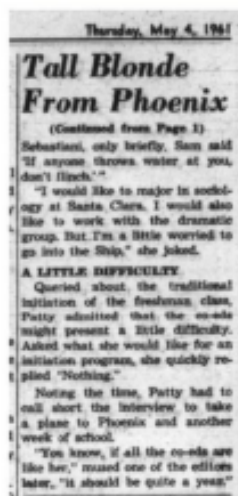
From the Archives



"House Rules and Regulations for Women Students Living at Park Lanai," 1961 pamphlet, SCU Archives and Special Collections



Park Lanai (AKA "Villa Maria"), four blocks from campus, where 74 Santa Clara women lived until undergraduate housing was arranged for them.



The Santa Clara newspaper articles on Patty O'Malley's first visit to campus as the first female applicant to the undergraduate program



Patty O'Malley holding the "Tradition Shattered" newspaper that announced the arrival of women undergraduates

Mary Somers celebrating her accomplishment of becoming the first woman to earn an undergraduate degree from Santa Clara



A group of women walking to class together



Yearbook photo of *The Santa Clara* newspaper team which included a female staff member by 1962

The WRA women's basketball team holding first place trophies, with Director Marygrace Colby on bottom right, 1964



All photos are from the SCU Archives and Special Collections