A Tradition of Their Own
or, If a Woman Can Now Be President of Harvard, Why Do We Still Need Women's Colleges?

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The naming of a woman president of Harvard is a giant step for womankind and for Harvard itself, long a bastion of white-male privilege. That the new President will cross the street from Radcliffe Yard to Harvard Yard seems especially freighted with symbolic import. Because women are no longer excluded from Harvard and elsewhere in the formerly male-dominated academy, and because, like Drew Gilpin Faust, they are now in greater numbers assuming positions of leadership within it, some might think that women's colleges are now redundant or outmoded and should, therefore, follow Radcliffe's example and either assimilate or co-educate themselves. Yet of the six other "Seven Sisters," only one, Vassar, has gone coed and that a while ago, in 1969. Why are Mount Holyoke, Smith, Bryn Mawr, Barnard, Wellesley and dozens of other women's colleges around the country stubbornly carrying on as single-sex institutions? Indeed, I am frequently asked if Mount Holyoke is *still* single-sex as if somehow Mount Holyoke had missed the coeducational boat and is quaintly out-of-date and out-of-touch.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Mount Holyoke College has never been more robust, nor its mission more resonant, and the same goes for our historic "sisters" and many others which are experiencing record-high numbers of applicants, growing endowments, and a significant presence among the very best liberal arts colleges in the country.[1] We are far from smug, however. The competition for students is fierce and the costs of high quality education are escalating. We have to work harder than one might think necessary, given the quality of these institutions, to get young women to consider attending them (although once they come, most become passionate advocates for women's college education). The prevailing trends towards coed, large, public, urban, professional, nonresidential education are strong; indeed, from high of 300 or so women's colleges before the widespread coeducational movement, there are fewer than sixty women's colleges remaining in the U.S. and every year or so, another coeducates, assimilates, or closes,[2] a move which usually provokes passionate outrage of students and alumnae and speculation in the media about the status of women's colleges. Reports of the death of women's colleges, however, have been greatly exaggerated, to paraphrase Mark Twain. To be sure, they serve a tiny percentage of college-going women students, but their graduates remain significantly overrepresented in academic, professional, and public life. For example, prominent women's college graduates in government today include: Senator Hillary Clinton (Wellesley '69), Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi

(Trinity ’62); and Labor Secretary Elaine Chao (Mount Holyoke ’75).[3] Four of the ten women (40%) who served as CEOs of *Fortune 500* companies in 2006 are graduates of women’s colleges.[4] Indeed, Drew Faust (Bryn Mawr ’68) herself is yet another women’s college graduate who has achieved prominence.

Despite high profile success stories and considerable progress, women have not achieved equity and parity by any measure in the United States and other Western countries, let alone the larger world. Four decades after the Equal Pay Act, women in this country earn on average 77 cents of every dollar of their male counterparts. They are dramatically underrepresented in positions of power in business and government. Not only do women represent only 2% (10 of 500) of CEOs, they held only 14.7% of the board seats at *Fortune 500* companies in 2005. Only one of 9 Supreme Court justices is a women. Of 100 senators in the 110 Congress, only 14 are women, with 3 of those graduates of women’s colleges; of 435 members of the House, only 70 are women including 12 graduates of women’s colleges. In fact, as of March 2006, the U.S. ranks 69th in the world in terms of women's representation in national legislatures or parliaments out 187 countries.[5]

I will argue in this essay that women’s colleges have had a formative role in shaping the history of women’s education and propelling women forward both in the United States and in the larger world, and they, in conjunction with coed institutions, continue to have an important role in the education and advancement of women. As the “founding sister” and as the longest-standing higher education institution for women in the world, Mount Holyoke spawned a distinct, influential, and powerful “other” educational tradition, which, while drawing from the dominant male tradition, bears significant differences from it. This tradition has worked remarkably well in inspiring and enabling women to achieve their fullest potential and to make a positive difference in the world and, as such, it has had influence and reach well beyond what one might expect from the small size and limited numbers of such institutions.

It is important to remember just how recent in the millennia of human history are the less-than-two-hundred-year fledging beginnings of women’s education. The weight of the past on the present is often underestimated. One doesn't have to go back very far in time to see how recently women were invited into male institutions: only a few generations. A powerful book on this subject is *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929) by Virginia Woolf, who suffered throughout her life the pain and stigma of being denied a university education. In her wry, polemic book, a fictitious woman, Mary Seton, is invited to a male college one day. And while she is waiting she wanders onto the grass to read a book, onto the beautiful inviting lawns of "Oxbridge." Very quickly a policeman tells her in no uncertain terms that “Only the Fellows and Scholars were allowed” on the grass: and she must return to “the gravel.” The rest of the book is a meditation upon the continuing and repeated examples of being kept off the grass and directed onto the gravel. She is barred from the library as well, metaphorically excluded from the world of learning, because ladies must be accompanied “by a fellow of the College.” She ponders the misogyny across history and imagines it embodied in a insufferable man, Professor von X, who writes a massive work entitled *The Mental,*

Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex. In fact, she wasn't so far off in her caricature: many male authorities of Woolf's period and before did believe women unfit for education. Edward H. Clarke, a Harvard professor, warned in 1873 that medical theories proved that higher education would cause women's uteruses to atrophy.6

Indeed, 370-year-old Harvard, like 800-year-old Oxford and Cambridge, excluded women for the lion's share of its history. In the mid-nineteenth century, a few women actively sought admission to Harvard, but were denied. Drew Faust, in a fascinating essay entitled "Mingling Promiscuously: A History of Women and Men at Harvard,"7 notes that a woman applied to Harvard Medical School in 1847, and even though the Dean assured the Corporation that she was old and unattractive enough to not disturb her fellow students, she was denied. Charles Eliot, president for over 40 years, staked out a position against coeducation in his 1869 inaugural address. Not only would women distract male students, there were inadequate data, he said, about the "natural mental capacities" of the female sex, a remark that has an eerie air of familiarity about it, as a recent Harvard president said almost the same thing in the same words.

Virginia Woolf famously argued that, for their intellectual and creative talents to flourish, women needed rooms of their own. A women's college, as a place for and of and by and about women, is an academic culture of women's own, that functions in some ways as "an alternative small public sphere,"8 a place infused with its own powerful traditions, norms, and values, providing a temporary reprieve from the presumptions of the larger male-dominated society. To understand this "other" sphere and "other" tradition, it is helpful to think about the radically differing histories of Mount Holyoke and Radcliffe because they counterpoint a critical distinction between two models of women's education: a separate and a coordinate institution.

In 1894 Radcliffe College began but with careful perimeters established. It did not have a faculty of its own but was designated an "annex," with its students taught in separate classes by a handful of Harvard faculty members – all male. In 1943 women were integrated into most of Harvard's classes rather than taught separately, and the first lonely female faculty member was hired in 1948, but many central aspects of undergraduate life were closed to women. Indeed, even when I was there as a graduate student in the mid sixties, the reading room of the undergraduate library and the faculty club were closed to women and the faculty was still overwhelmingly male; the English Department had only one female faculty member, who did not get tenure: she went to Wellesley. In countless obvious and subtle ways, women at Harvard were, from the first, made to feel marginalized, on the fringes of an intimidatingly male-centric world, although, to be sure, Radcliffe College was a supportive coordinate sphere where women lived, dined, and studied. Only gradually were women more fully integrated and accorded fuller rights; not until Radcliffe's assimilation into Harvard as the Institute for Advanced Study in 1999 were all distinctions between male and female students abolished. This story of protracted foot-dragging and begrudging acceptance is not, I hasten to say, the best way to develop confidence and to unlock women's potential.

As an aside, let me note that Radcliffe's story reminds me of the experiences of pioneers in coeducation at other institutions I've known, such as the University of Wisconsin, where I was an undergraduate in the early sixties. I remember vividly the story of one elderly alumna who said that in her time, in the first decade of the 20th century, women were expected to go through the side rather than front entrance of the main classroom building, Bascom Hall, and to sit behind a screen in lecture halls, unseen and unheard.9 The same kind of classroom segregation was practiced in the early years of coeducation at the University of Michigan.10 When I was there as a graduate student in the late sixties, the Chairman of English, echoing the habits of male faculty in generations before him11, addressed his departmental colleagues (which included one untenured woman) as "Gentlemen." The English graduate director thought I might be suitable candidate for a job at a "good women's college," but when he heard I had gotten married around the time I was finishing my Ph.D., he (married himself, I might add) said to me: "Buy a station wagon, live in the suburbs!" so disgusted was he with my less-than-nunlike dedication to my profession. And then there's the infamous tale of Wesleyan University (where I served as chief academic officer and interim president from 1990 to 1995) which has the distinction of having coeducated twice: in 1872 and again in 1970. Although the first intrepid Wesleyan women did very well academically, male students, board members and alumni feared that Wesleyan – in having women students while its all-male competitors did not – would be perceived as a "namby-pamby" college: Wesleyan's "pride and boast" was said to be its "masculine virility and strength."12 Because Wesleyan's enrollments decreased while other all-male colleges grew, Wesleyan was said to be victim of "terminal feminization": something had to be done! After the Board's vote ousting women in 1909, the headline of the school paper read: "The Barnacle is at last to be scraped from the good ship Wesleyan!" And finally, my experience as an administrator at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro – which, before coeducation in 1964, had been the distinguished Women's College of North Carolina – drove home for me how long lasting fears about "terminal feminization." When I was there in the late 1980s, the institution in trying to attract more male students was aiming for Division I athletics and deliberately deep-sixing its Women's College associations – much to the chagrin of its passionately loyal and proud alumnae.

Luckily these are not the only stories and models in the history of women's education. Sixty years before Harvard tolerated the tentative beginnings of coordinate education, an important development in the history of higher education was taking shape, thanks to the dream of an impoverished female educator from the hills of Western Massachusetts, Mary Lyon. Quite unlike the Radcliffe annex, Mount Holyoke, Lyon insisted, would be an entirely separate and independent institution with its own buildings, endowment, faculty and values. While Mount Holyoke relied on male supporters and professors from Amherst and elsewhere in its earliest years, women were from the start in leadership positions – forming an unbroken succession of ambitious and visionary female presidents for the first 100 years – and women scholar/teachers very quickly took over completely the academic program. Because women scholars were largely excluded from institutions like Harvard and most of higher education, Mount Holyoke had a pick of the outstanding women for administrative and faculty positions, such as Mary Woolley, Emma Carr, Lydia Shattuck, Cornelia Clapp, Anna Jane Harrison, and many others. Together they

shaped a vision of education that was and remains remarkably coherent and resonant and in keeping with Lyon's original vision.

In order to get a sense of the radicalism of this vision, I find it instructive to compare Mary Lyon's ideas of education with those of Ralph Waldo Emerson who addressed the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard the very year Mount Holyoke was founded, 1837.

Emerson characterized the student or the "American scholar," as he called him, as "Man Thinking." Above all, the scholar-student trusts in himself, in his own critical thinking. He is, according to Emerson, "that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another which should pierce his ear, it is, The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature . . . it is for you to dare all." Mary Lyon is equally bold in her educational expectations for her aspiring scholars. "Attempt great things. Accomplish great things," she exhorted. She too is a proponent of rigorous study, the "university of knowledges." But there the similarities end and the Mary Lyon revolution began.

What is revolutionary about Lyon's thought? A number of key things – that women – especially women of modest means – mattered; that they would profit every bit as much as men from rigorous study in all fields, including the sciences; that education was of the whole person connecting mind, body, and spirit and connecting the individual to the larger human community, indeed, to the larger world community; that the end of education is about making a difference in the world. "Great privilege brings great responsibility," she insisted.

In contrast, not only do Emerson's assertions about universal man simply ignore women, so too are his presumptions about the sanctity of the individual absolutist and untempered by an awareness of otherness, difference, social complexity and community. Indeed, in "Self-Reliance" (1841), Emerson is downright dismissive of social connection. "Do not tell me, as a good man did to-day, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they *my* poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong."

Of course, we mustn't forget that Mary Lyon was part of an evangelical missionary tradition which had its share of naiveté and chauvinism in sending emissaries out to "do good" in the world. Some of her followers ventured foolishly into hostile territory and met a disastrous end. Nonetheless, overall the record of accomplishment of intrepid Mount Holyoke women, particularly in founding schools and colleges and in pioneering work in science and other disciplines, is nothing short of astonishing.

As Miriam Levin demonstrates in her book, *Defining Women's Scientific Enterprise: Mount Holyoke Faculty and the Rise of American Science* (University Press of New England, 2005), Mount Holyoke's first hundred years "is very different from the narrative that most feminist historians of science have written about women in science – these have concentrated on outsiders trying to get in, on individuals making significant

contributions in the face of discrimination…What I saw at Mount Holyoke was the continual calibration of the relationship between the goals of an institution and the goals of ambitious women in light of market demand for science. As a result the story is that of the way women became participants in shaping the American scientific enterprise through their work at Mount Holyoke." 13 Only later, in the 1940s and 50s were male professors invited back in, and for a period of time, from 1937 to 1980, Mount Holyoke was led by three male presidents, as the institution sought to bolster its prestige and credibility in the larger male-dominated academic culture. Throughout its evolution, though, the institution has remained grounded in its identity as a women's place with a robustness to its culture, a sense of its wholeness *sui generis* and fundamental to its separateness from the male tradition, its continuity, and its alternative nature.

Mount Holyoke College of today retains a striking and energizing sense of mission and an *esprit de corps* among all its constituents: students, faculty, staff, and alumnae. Indeed, if I had to isolate one thing that gives Mount Holyoke its distinctive edge and sets it apart from other colleges and universities I have known, I would say it is a powerful and pervasive sense of connection to the generating energies of the place: we are still about linking academic excellence and purposeful engagement, still carrying on in the great tradition of propelling women forward to make a positive difference in the world. And, in a world of daunting disconnection, this is highly valued by all who experience the ethos of the institution, especially alumnae, who give back in time, in spirit, and in money – an extraordinary 81% of them contributed to our last fund-raising campaign. While American culture, including its institutions of higher education, has profited enormously from the emphasis on individualism and Emersonian self reliance, this emphasis has not, perhaps, been sufficiently balanced with communal values, and so it has helped to produce a culture of competitiveness, fragmentation, isolation, narrowness, me-ism. Without engaging in essentialism, one can see that the tradition of women's leadership started by Mary Lyon, in contrast, stresses connection, caring, community, self in relationship, service, social responsibility – the very stuff of "social capital."14

In a world shaped and dominated by men, this female tradition, this "alternative small public space," stands apart and has ramified out into the world having an influence disproportionate to its size. Experiencing a culture in which many of the norms of a male-dominated world have been lifted, students typically grow in self sufficiency and, when they leave, they are often more able to see gender-repression when they encounter it and more able to distinguish between personal and systemic barriers to success. "Go where no one else will go. Do what no one else will do," Mary Lyon urged her students, and in a missionary spirit successive generations of graduates heeded her call becoming pioneers in a number of fields and founding well over forty schools and colleges across this country and in Canada, Argentina, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Armenia, Persia, India, China, Japan, Hong Kong, and South Africa and serving as president or principal of over a hundred others. Several of the schools they founded served people excluded from traditional educational systems: Native Americans, African Americans, the blind, the deaf, the educationally impaired.

And, if the early impulses of the institution were towards inclusive education, that spirit is even more vital today. From the beginning, Mount Holyoke was a school of access – "for the daughters of farmers" – quite unlike the stereotype of the elite women's college as a bastion for the wealthy and privileged. To be sure, some of the "Seven Sisters" were less egalitarian in their founding ethos and did, in their early years, draw students from well-to-do families; and Mount Holyoke too, as it developed a reputation for academic excellence, drew its share of such students. Today, however, the Sisters stand out among elite liberal arts college peers both for the economic diversity of their students – drawn from the entire socioeconomic spectrum – and for the comparatively large percentage of students drawn from the lowest socio-economic strata,[15] which include older women recruited through such programs as the Frances Perkins Scholars at Mount Holyoke and the Ada Comstock Scholars at Smith. So too have these colleges made substantial commitments to generous financial aid policies with tuition discounts among the highest of peers – commitments which put considerable pressure on institutional budgets. And likewise other women's colleges in the country have adapted their missions and expanded their reach from traditional markets to attract older women, part-time, working and evening students, those within neighboring communities, ethnic minority populations, and women from lower socio-economic strata – usually with sizable financial assistance and concomitant budget challenges. Some institutions have added professional, graduate, and weekend programs, and a number over the years have, in order to survive, gone coed or assimilated into other institutions. Such decisions make sense. I don't think we can hold to the adage: better dead than coed. One can only hope, however, that these institutions are not subjected to the same pernicious pressure – that has so insidiously characterized women's entry into the academy – to eradicate so-called "terminal feminization."[16] Rather, they should hold on to their historical legacies. "Feminization" of a male-dominated tradition is *good:* an opening up to fuller human potential for *all* students.[17]

Mount Holyoke College – I hasten to say – is not contemplating coeducation, but, like other women's colleges, it too has made a virtue of necessity to some extent, which is reflected in the changing demographics of its student body. But I wish to emphasize that the College's commitment to access, diversity, and affordability is deeply felt, widely shared, and repeatedly affirmed in institutional planning. Intentionally, the student body and faculty are notably diverse along multiple lines: race, class, age, socioeconomic status, religion, region and country of origin. The faculty is nearly evenly divided between men and women with 30% foreign born and 24% people of color, the highest of all peers, coed or single sex. The College has embraced its long-standing international reach. Our student body is the most internationally diverse among our peers, with 15% of our students from approximately 70 countries around the world. Many of our students from underdeveloped countries come thousands of miles and overcome daunting barriers on their astonishing journeys towards self-actualization. They bring to our campus a cosmopolitan diversity that enriches and expands learning opportunity for all students. Indeed, our goal is to internationalize the education of all students and to develop in them a nuanced appreciation for the complex, globalized world of the twenty-first century, so that they can take their place as leaders and change agents within it; so too has the

College itself taken up with renewed dedication its historic role in advancing women's education worldwide.

To this end, we along with Smith College held in June 2004 the first ever gathering of presidents and chief academic officers of women's colleges from around the world. We called our incipient organization Women's Education Worldwide (WEW). With no comprehensive data on women's colleges of the world to aid us, we know our approach was far from systematic or comprehensive.18 This we know: that the model of single-sex education pioneered at Mount Holyoke and other women's colleges in the United States was in the mid to late 19th century replicated in Europe and Australia and imported to the Far East, to Southeast Asia, to Africa, and the Middle East. Given the variegated history of women's education in each country and region of the world, one must be tentative in generalizing about the current state of affairs. In some countries and regions (India, Japan, Southeast Asia) single-sex institutions have a continuing strong presence in numbers and influence even though coeducational models are becoming more numerous; in others (China, South America, Europe) coeducation, with a few notable exceptions, is now nearly universal. In yet others (Korea, North America) a small but significant number of historic women's colleges remain in a predominantly coeducational educational landscape, and in some countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kenya, Sudan, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe) new women's colleges are emerging where limited opportunities for women's higher education existed before.

We were heartened by the response we received in our call to meeting: we drew together 47 leaders from 29 different countries spanning 5 continents.19 We focused our discussion on two topics: sharing the critical issues for each of our institutions and defining challenges and best practices for the education of women in science. While recognizing not only the wide variances among our institutions in age, size, wealth, and circumstances, but also differences in the severity and nature of the challenges to women's education and advancement in our countries, we nonetheless found much common ground. We could agree, for example, on the need to develop students' self-confidence and leadership and to combat gender inequity, discrimination, and cultural and financial barriers to women's access to education. A highlight of our second meeting in January 2006, at Dubai Women's College in the UAE, was that a delegation of Mount Holyoke students had been invited to conduct a week-long leadership training workshop for DWC students, and they shared their compelling experiences and learning outcomes with the WEW participants. A third WEW conference is scheduled to be held in Italy in the summer of 2008.20

We believe that the collective power of our institutions is great. By working together, we can encourage progress on crucial social issues affecting women. We are pleased that in the past two decades, new women's colleges are springing up in parts of the world in which women have historically had less access to education and, as in the earliest days of women's education, American women's colleges are again serving as models. And we are learning a great deal from these emerging institutions as well. An enduring partnership among women's colleges will benefit all of us, providing tools to make our institutions better and increasing our understanding of each other, and we welcome

engagement of coed institutions as well, provided they share our commitment to advancing women's education.

Along with Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen who was the keynote speaker at our first conference, we believe that "few subjects match the social significance of women's education in the contemporary world." As he has conclusively demonstrated in his research, when women are educated, all of society benefits – whether in terms of economic productivity, public health, or an engaged citizenry. Women are still the world's greatest underutilized natural resource. Education is the key to unlocking that potential. It is a disgrace that 800 million of the world's people are illiterate with 67% of them women and that in virtually every country of the world women are consciously or unconsciously subjected to sexism, discrimination, or worse.21 From the beginning, women's colleges have functioned as "alternative spheres" that helped to instill in women a sense of competence, confidence, and agency. Indeed, women's colleges have a distinguished heritage and a continuing stake in advancing the great unfinished agenda of the 21st century: the education and advancement of women across all ethnic, racial, age, and socioeconomic groups both within our country and around the world. We are compelled by this agenda as never before.

So, let me say in conclusion that in surveying the now 170-year-history of women's colleges, one cannot help but be struck by continuity of the tradition and its power to engender a palpable coming-to-selfhood among students and a passionate loyalty and gratitude among alumnae. The experience of being part of this "alternative sphere" of unlimited female possibility binds graduates across the generations into an affirming sisterhood. Despite their small size, fewer numbers, and counter-cultural proclivities, Mount Holyoke, its historic "sisters," and the hundreds of institutions founded in their likeness here and across the world, have had a radically disproportionate effect in generating "social capital" and in propelling women forward as change agents in the larger world that devalues them. Now more than ever the world needs them.

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1. There are about 17.5 million total undergrads in the U.S., and 187,000 of these are students in liberal arts colleges, about 1% of total; of this about 50,000 are in about 25 "research liberal arts colleges" (less than 1/5 of 1%); and of them about 10,500 (20%) are in the five remaining Seven Sisters: a large share of a top group, a tiny share of total US population of undergraduates. "Research liberal arts colleges" are those which have scholar/teacher faculty with strong research profiles. See Robert McCaughey, "But Can They Teach: In Praise of College Professors Who Publish," Teachers College Record (Winter 1993), Vol. 95, Issue 2, pp. 242-257.
2. A substantial portion of those closed, going coed, or assimilated--perhaps as high as two-thirds – were Catholic colleges, but many of these did not have robust collegiate models but were rather "sister formation" institutes. When religious orders of women went through their declines after Vatican II, the majority of their colleges experienced economic distress because the nuns were the "living endowment" i.e. – they worked for free to keep the place going. A number survived by going coed or

merging into their coordinate male universities. I am indebted to Patricia McGuire, President of Trinity University (DC), for these observations based on her analysis of IPEDS data.

3. The first woman to serve in several high-level government positions were women's college graduates. They include Frances Perkins (Mount Holyoke '02), Secretary of Labor; Ella Grasso (Mount Holyoke '40), first women governor (Connecticut) in the US elected in her own right; Madeline Albright (Wellesley '59), Secretary of State; Donna Shalala, (Western College for Women '62), Secretary of Health and Human Services; Christine Todd Whitman (Wheaton '68), Head of the EPA.

4. Mary F. Sammons (Marylhurst College '70), Rite Aid (No. 129); Anne M. Mulcahy (Marymount College '74), Xerox (No. 142); Marion O. Sandler (Wellesley '52), Golden West Financial (No. 326); Paula G. Rosput (Wellesley '58) Reynolds, Safeco (No. 339).

5. http://www.thewhitehouseproject.org/v2/researchandreports/snapshots.html

6. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts' Advice to Women* (Anchor, 1979).

7. A lecture delivered to the Harvard Class of 2005: http://www.radcliffe.edu/about/leadership/DeanLecture.pdf

8. Phrase used by my colleague sociologist Eleanor Townsley in "Re-membering 1955," a reflective essay based on her research methods course (Sociology 224) at Mount Holyoke in 2005 where students used archival, interviewing, and survey methods to help to illuminate the collegiate experience of the Mount Holyoke Class of 1955. Townsley suggests "that the college functioned historically and continues to do so as an *alternative small public sphere* in U.S. society, and the world more generally" and that the College is a "strong, ongoing, valuable, coherent project grounded in the higher education of women."

9. I have found no corroborating accounts of her assertions, but they do resonate with the debates about women's presence and the alternating separate and merged models of coeducation practiced at the University of Wisconsin in the late decades of the nineteenth century. It's possible that the sexist code she described morphed into the playful admonition to women students of my time: it was said that Abraham Lincoln – memorialized as a sitting sculpture in front of Bascom Hall – would stand up for any virgin that crossed in front of him.

10. Dorothy Gies McGuigan, *A Dangerous Experiment: 100 Year of Women at the University of Michigan* Center for Continuing Education of Women, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1970).

11. At Michigan in the early years of coeducation one instructor addressed his "mixed class of men and women as 'gentlemen,' and, in calling on a woman student addressed her as 'Mr. so-and-so,' as though he were still teaching an all male class." Rosalind Rosenberg, "The Limits of Access: The History of Coeducation in America," *Essays from The Mount Holyoke College Sesquicentennial Symposia*, eds. John Mack Faragher and Florence Howe (New York: Norton, 1988).

12. Indeed, this "virility" was displayed when male students beat any men seen talking to a female student, barred women from appearing in the yearbook, and excluded them from membership in student organizations. Here too classroom segregation was practiced with women seated on one side of the room, men seated on the other. Louise Wilby Knight, "The 'Quails': The History of Wesleyan University's First Period of Coeducation, 1872-1912" (Honors thesis, Wesleyan University, 1972): 30-47, 117-22.

13. As quoted in an interview, February 22, 2005 http://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/comm/press/releases/Levin.shtml. Mount Holyoke College's distinction in the sciences continues: it ranks first among all liberal arts colleges in producing women who went on to receive U.S. doctorates in the life sciences (356) and in the physical sciences (109) from 1966 to 2004. This puts Mount Holyoke in the top 2% of all colleges and universities – even major research universities with at least double the enrollment and faculty. *(Source: National Science Foundation Survey of Earned Doctorates)* Since 2000, Mount Holyoke science faculty have been awarded more NSF grant money – $8,122,015 – than any other leading liberal arts college: *(Source: National Science Foundation http://nsf.gov/awards/about.jsps)* Other women's colleges, particularly the historic Sisters, also have impressive records in producing scientists.

14. The intellectual and moral associations that foster norms of civic engagement and participation, Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

15. In 2004, among the nation's 30 highest-ranked liberal arts colleges, the five historic Sisters have the five highest percentages of low-income students enrolled in undergraduate programs with Smith at 25.9%, Mount Holyoke 20.5%, Barnard 17.9%, Wellesley 17.0%, and Bryn Mawr 16.3%, according to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* analysis of data from the Department of Education (Autumn 2006), p. 56.

16. It is worth noting that fear of "feminization" across human history is complex and multifaceted, and sometimes it is a guise of homophobia and sometimes women's colleges are disparaged as bastions of lesbianism. In fact, while women's colleges are typically nonjudgmental about sexual orientation and supportive of all students, it is not at all clear that lesbianism is any more prevalent at women's colleges than at coed ones. As Jill Ker Conway has trenchantly argued, underneath the concern is the view that "the life of the mind was a male activity to which women were lucky to be admitted. . . . So if women chose to be educated separately from men, their reasons couldn't be intellectual – they must be sexual and involve sexual rejection of men." *A Women's Education* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 121-22.

17. The Women's College Coalition – a thirty-five-year affiliation of North American women's colleges – has in recent years been energized by focusing less on women's colleges *per se* and more on the tradition and mission which animate them. It has invited back into the Coalition those institutions with historic roots as women's colleges and it is reaching out to organizations and institutions committed to women's education and advancement.

18. Data on women's colleges and universities of the world are spotty and unreliable. *Women's Colleges and Universities in International Perspective: An Overview,* by Francesca B. Purcell, Robin Matross Helms, and Laura Rumbley (Center for International Education, Boston College, 2004) is a start, but more and better research is needed.

19. This historic meeting included not only long-established institutions such as our American "sisters," the women's colleges of Cambridge University and the University of Sydney, but also newly emerging ones such as then two-year-old Kiriri Women's University of Science and Technology in Kenya, five-year-old Effat College in Saudi Arabia, and in the planning stages, Asian University for Women to be located in Bangladesh. (Intending to come, but unable to get a visa was the president of Ahfad University for Women in Sudan.). At our subsequent meeting, we were joined by the newest women's university in the world, the Royal Women's University in Bahrain. See our website at: http://www.mtholyoke.edu/go/wew/

20. Recently, WEW was awarded a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for a planning group to meet in Bellagio this summer to establish a firmer organizational foundation for the group, to establish a template for sharing data about our institutions and about women's education in our countries, to share best practices, to develop models for joint programs and for multiple forms of exchange among our students and between students and alumnae, and especially to become an internationally recognized voice for women's education worldwide.

21. On International Women's Day, March 8, 2006, *The Independent*, a U.K. newspaper, published a bleak status of women around the world: 1% of the titled land in the world is owned by women; 70% of the 1.2 billion people living in poverty are women and children; 21% of the world's managers are female; 62% of unpaid family workers are female; 67% of all illiterate adults are female; 1440 women die in childbirth each day (one every minute); 35% of lawyers are women, but only 5% of them are partners in firms; 4% of girls in Chad go to school; 85 million girls worldwide are not able to attend school, compared to 45 million boys.