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As you will see, this study pertains specifically to institutions other than our own. Nevertheless, as you will see, it has implications for many Jesuit colleges and universities. We are invited to ask, in conversations, whether we recognize ourselves in these pages.

IS THERE A GENDER GAP? YES.

What does it mean?

By Mary Ann Rowan and Jennifer Grant Haworth

In February 2002, Loyola University Chicago's student newspaper, *The Phoenix*, published a cartoon of four female students escorting a young man to the upcoming Valentine's Day Ball.

The caption?

"Loyola's male to female ratio."

While not as exaggerated as this cartoon suggests, a growing "gender gap" is emerging in our nation's colleges and universities. Consider the following figures gleaned from institutional websites. At Santa Clara University, the percentage of women students increased from 49 percent in 1979 to 57 percent in 2004. Fordham University's fall 2004 enrollment figures identify 60 percent of its undergraduate students as women. And at the flagship campuses of the Universities of North Carolina, Delaware, Georgia, and New Mexico, the male/female gender ratio has hovered around 43/57 for the past few years.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 15 million men and 14.2 million women aged 18 – 24 years in the United States currently. Nationally, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has recorded the male/female ratio on campus as 43/57, a significant reversal from the late 1960s and the more balanced ratios of the early 1980s. Several reasons have been offered to explain this shift. Among others, these include a booming high tech job market which has created new opportunities for high school

graduates (with men disproportionately choosing these careers over women) and a growing realization that women may mature earlier than men, perhaps contributing to their tendency to achieve at higher academic levels than men in high school.

Journalists have rushed to tell the story of the "new gender gap" in American higher education, publishing several articles recently in *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Time*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Most have concluded that the increasing female-to-male ratio has begun to change the face of contemporary campus life as we know it, and not always for the better.

As higher education professionals who have spent years observing students on college campuses, our perspective on this issue is a more reserved – and scholarly – one. Yes, recent journalistic accounts are intriguing, but the limited empirical research on the impact of shifting gender ratios on the social lives of today's undergraduates made us skeptical of these claims.

In search of our own answers, in 2001-02, we conducted case study research at three selective, nonsectarian, undergraduate liberal arts colleges with female enrollment levels between 55 and 60 percent (hereafter identified as Colleges A, B, and C). Our purpose was to examine the impact of shifting gender patterns on 1) dating and the social scene, and 2) residential life and athletics.

We met with 63 members of the campus community involved with or affected by gender balance issues, including 17 administrators, 19 faculty, and 17 female and 10 male students. Besides conducting individual and focus group interviews, we also reviewed various institutional documents.

What did we learn?

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Study participants told us that shifting gender ratios had affected the curriculum and co-curriculum at their institutions. Here, we examine the impact of the growing gender gap on campus life, particularly as it affects students' social lives, residential living experiences, and participation in athletics.

Social Life: A Disappointment for Both Genders?

Faculty, administrators, and students were concerned and, in some cases, disappointed, with how changing enrollment patterns had affected students' social lives on their campuses. Their comments clustered around two major components of social life: (1) involvement and leadership in co-curricular activities, and (2) dating and friendships.

Involvement and Leadership

At the three colleges we visited, respondents said that fewer and fewer men were becoming involved in organizations or clubs, and that women were assuming most of the leadership roles in co-curricular activities.

Students were among the first to make this observation. A junior at College C, for example, told us that the "gap with involvement in activities," coupled with the difficulty she and her peers had recruiting male students for clubs and organizations, had been "frustrating" for her. Similarly, a College A female noted that there were "a lot more girl participants in cocurricular activities, peer support networks, and clubs" at her institution. "RA's [resident advisors] are always dominated by female residents. It's disappointing for me on some level that more women are in our clubs. I have never felt angry about it. I just wish there were more men involved." A male student at this same college reinforced this view, saying, "More women are involved in clubs and social activities here, and I see this dominance most in community service type activities and volunteer groups." From his perspective, having "more women on campus" was "affecting friendships, going to parties, and just hanging out."

Perhaps not surprisingly, greater female involvement in co-curriculars had led to more leadership

opportunities for women – up to a point. The vice president of student affairs at College B was among the first to observe that while there was "a trend toward more women student leaders" on her campus, "most of the top student government positions were still male." Over at College C, the dean of student affairs likewise noted: "Women dominate membership and leadership in many organizations, yet we still have difficulty having women run for president of the student senate, and we still have difficulty having women run and win the presidency of the senior class."

Dating and Friendships

Students responded differently to questions about the impact that increasing numbers of women were having on campus social life. At College A, both men and women were disappointed with dating opportunities. Their counterparts at Colleges B and C chose to focus more on how increasing numbers of women on campus were affecting their gender related friendships.

Women at College A were particularly bothered by the dating situation. As a sophomore told us, "The whole dating scenario is a big part of social life, but here there is this imbalance so there isn't much dating. It's great for the guys but not for the girls." Another female student was disappointed that there were "no guys at dances," while yet another lamented the college's "nonexistent" dating scene.

Perhaps not surprisingly, young men at College A were less concerned about dating than their female counterparts. Their reasons, however, had far less to do with the number of women on campus and far more to do with their own priorities, which stressed academics over romance.

Faculty and administrators at College A echoed these student views. The dean of residence life noted that enrollment shifts had begun to shape dating patterns, and "that groups were mostly

women when students pulled together." A male faculty member said that while he "hadn't heard many complaints from men," several female students had told him that they "would prefer to go to a college that has gender balance" and "a pool of eligible dating men around." He was particularly concerned that the college's growing gender gap might "dis-

"The whole dating scenario is a big part of social life, but here there is this imbalance so there isn't much dating. It's great for the guys, but not for the girls."



Some of Saint Peter's College's 1966's coeds, with Josefine Castan the college's first Dean of Women.

courage students from enrolling or completing their degrees."

Students at Colleges B and C seldom discussed dating. Instead, they focused most of their comments on friendships, and the lively interactions men and women often enjoy as friends in college.

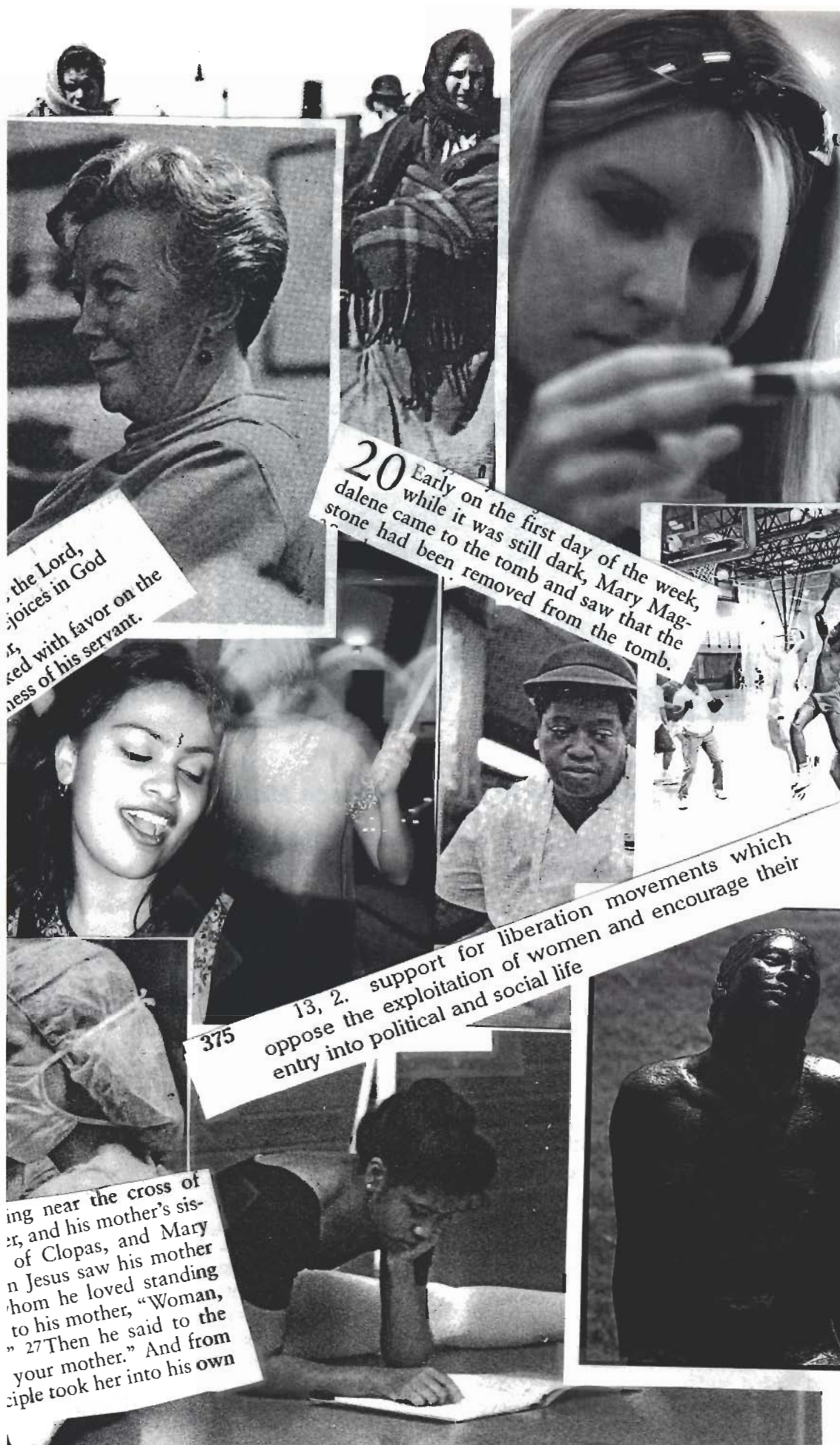
At College B, for instance, students – regardless of gender – were quick to mention that most of their friends were women. Female participants often wondered if their difficulty in developing friendships with men started in their first year. "I lived on an all female floor as a freshman, although I wanted a coed floor," a senior shared, "and I had a hard time meeting guys." A male biology/economics major offered a different twist on his initial housing assignment: "During my first two years in the dorms, I was around many women. I never felt isolated, which was great, but my friends at larger schools had more friendships with both men and women [than I have]."

While students at Colleges B and C never complained about having women friends, both were disappointed that they did not have more male friends. A senior female summed up the feelings of many of her peers when she said, "I hadn't really noticed it [that more friends were women] as a freshman, but now I've come to realize it more and wish I had more male friends. That is one disappointment I have about this college."

Challenges in the Residence Halls

Creating healthy coeducational residential living environments emerged as another campus life challenge at each of the colleges we visited. Administrators spoke most directly to this topic, raising the difficulties they were experiencing (1) creating housing assignments that encouraged healthy gender relationships among students and (2) recruiting and selecting Resident Assistants (RA's).

Every student affairs administrator we interviewed stressed that his or her role was to help create a healthy residential environment for both male and female students on campus. As the vice president for student affairs at College C shared: "We want men and women to live together successfully and to have really strong friendships here. We [want them to] do good work together and [be] great pals, which is part of the healthy gender relationships that we want to see develop." But meeting this challenge, he conceded, had become "more challenging" with the increasing number of women at College C. The dean of students at College A concurred. While convinced that gender-balanced residential living arrangements helped students build "healthy relationships with members of the opposite sex," she conceded that housing assignments were becoming harder to make in light of the college's growing gender gap.



Administrators also struggled with recruiting a balanced staff of male and female RAs on their campuses. As the person responsible for cultivating leaders from the residence halls to become RA's, the director of residence life at College A said that shifting enrollment patterns had made this responsibility more difficult, especially since the residence association was "mostly women, which is strengthening the women's experience but is not good for men."

College B's director of residence life had similar problems. She admitted that if they did not begin to receive "more RA applications from men," they might "have to accept all men who apply." And over at College C, the director of residence life told us that he had to staff "four all male floors with female RA's" for next academic year. He didn't know "how this would be received by students or parents": "I'm worried that men will need support and that [the College] will not know about their needs because they won't talk to women RAs."

According to the ADs, the increasing enrollment of women at each campus also made it difficult to recruit male athletes.

Athletics: Hit Hard by Changing Demographics

Respondents talked at length about the extensive impact that increasing numbers of women were having on their college's athletic program, particularly regarding the challenges this raised for maintaining Title IX compliance. Related issues included financial pressures and recruitment challenges.

All three athletic directors (AD's) underscored the difficulty of meeting Title IX stipulations, noting that their colleges had dropped a few male sports and added a few women's sports within the last few years to remain in compliance. For example, College B's AD related that "One issue [about changing enrollment patterns] is gender equity, and our ability to meet one of the three measurement legs of gender equity." He indicated that College B was striving to achieve the "second leg of the measurement stool" by providing the government with a "history and continuing practice of adding more teams and roster spots for women."

In contrast, Colleges A and C had chosen to maintain the proportionality stipulation, which requires "having roughly equal percentages of female athletes and female undergraduates." A primary concern of the AD's here was the feasibility of retaining football at their institutions. College A's AD explained that because of the number of players needed, maintaining an adequate roster for a football team would become a problem for the College "unless it added another woman's sport to its athletic program," something, he acknowledged, would be fiscally difficult for the institution.

According to these AD's, the increasing enrollment of women at each campus also made it difficult to recruit male athletes. The AD at College C made this point matter-of-factly: "The coaches find it difficult to attract males and to get enough numbers for the teams. Recruiting males is a real challenge for them."

College A confronted a recruitment problem not mentioned by the other institutions. According to the president, the College was losing academically strong male applicants to other institutions because they were being awarded "scholarships in schools that we were playing against": "Competition for the diminishing pool of male students is becoming increasingly expensive."

On a positive note, each college spoke proudly of the increased interest in intramural sports. As part of campus life, men and women were becoming

actively involved with these opportunities on campus, sporting overall participation rates of 50, 65, and 70 percent, respectively, at Colleges A, B, and C.

Shifting Gender Ratios at Jesuit Colleges and Universities

While the schools we studied were all private, non-sectarian liberal arts colleges, the reality of shifting gender enrollments is not unique to these institutions.

Is it accurate to say that Jesuit colleges and universities fit this national pattern?

Earlier, we noted the increasing ratio of women to men at three Jesuit, Catholic universities: Santa Clara, Fordham, and Loyola Chicago. What is the reality on other Jesuit campuses? A colloquy may, indeed, be fruitful on this topic, as well as research that provides explanations for shifting gender enrollment patterns in some – if not most – Jesuit colleges and universities. Our own hunch is that the faith and justice missions of Jesuit schools as well as their emphasis on "*cura personalis*" may be especially attractive to women students in the college choice process.

If Jesuit institutions are reflective of broader national trends, then an effort must be made to explore the impact that shifting gender ratios may be having on student life. The research literature on student engagement, satisfaction, and retention underscores that what happens outside the classroom is as important for students' personal and intellectual growth as what happens inside it. Intercollegiate and intramural athletics and co-curricular activities are significant elements in the fabric of campus life. Our own research suggests that shifting gender enrollments have the potential to alter these experiences for students, sometimes significantly.

While we recognize that our study included only three institutions, it provides one of the first empirically-based "pushing off points" for future discussion and research on the impact of changing gender ratios on campus life. Particularly since NCES projects that women will continue to increase their share of the higher education enrollment and degree completion pie over the next decade, continuing dialogue and further research into the effects of the "growing gender gap" is needed if institutional and faculty leaders are to provide equitable and engaging learning experiences for all students. ■