



Fall 2022

## Complacency and Conformity: The Female Experience at Gettysburg College, 1956-1966

Greer Garver  
*Gettysburg College*

Emily B. Suter  
*Gettysburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\\_scholarship](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship)



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Women's History Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

**Share feedback** about the accessibility of this item.

---

### Recommended Citation

Garver, Greer and Suter, Emily B., "Complacency and Conformity: The Female Experience at Gettysburg College, 1956-1966" (2022). *Student Publications*. 1033.  
[https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\\_scholarship/1033](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/1033)

This open access student research paper is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

# Complacency and Conformity: The Female Experience at Gettysburg College, 1956-1966

## Abstract

Women at Gettysburg College from 1956-66 received unequal treatment at a predominantly male school. Despite the 1960s being seen as a time of radical change, the majority of women on campus were content with the rules and social norms which held them in place. Changes and complaints were not widespread or outspoken, but they did exist in organizations such as the Women's Student Government Association. Examinations of campus policies, dress codes, and dorm regulations illustrate the different standards men and women were held to on campus. Meanwhile Greek life, beauty contests, athletics and first hand accounts of social life reveal a complex relationship between the desires of women at that time, and the world in which they lived. Due to such social rules, Gettysburg College remained cocoon-like for many women. As the outside world and politics began to shift, Gettysburg College would continue to cling to old norms until the last few years of the 1960s.

## Keywords

Women, 1950-1960, Gettysburg College, Inequality, Greek Life

## Disciplines

Higher Education | Women's History | Women's Studies

## Comments

Written for HIST 300: Historical Methods

## Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

*COMPLACENCY AND CONFORMITY;*  
*THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE AT GETTYSBURG COLLEGE, 1956-1966*

Greer Garver and Emily Suter

Professor Michael Birkner: Historical Methods 300

12/06/2022

In a 2020 interview, Gettysburg alumnus Jean Smith states that “although [she] went to college in the Sixties, it was really the Fifties. It was really *Happy Days*. The real world had not come in on us yet.”<sup>1</sup> Despite the common conception of the sixties being seen as a radical era filled with social changes, Smith is correct in stating that the 1960s at Gettysburg College was predominantly a time which adhered to societal norms. During the Arnold Hanson Era of Gettysburg College, the percentage of minority groups on campus never surpassed three to four percent.<sup>2</sup> The Vietnam War, although a topic which was spoken about, was not largely protested until the last few years of the decade. However, no example represents the static nature of the campus during the late fifties into the early sixties better than the experience of women of Gettysburg College and their subsequent treatment. Dress codes, unequal dorm regulations, and an overall lack of representation prevailed. And yet, adhering to societal norms, the women of Gettysburg College largely accepted these rules and did not see them as issues which needed to be changed. Sororities, social life, and grades were their largest concerns, rather than the radicalism associated with the time period they lived in. This static nature of Gettysburg College during the late fifties into the early sixties not only discouraged equal rules and treatment for women on campus, but consequently fostered a mentality which prevented the understanding and desire for change in the first place. It is only through individual thinkers and actions that small changes for women began to take shape, helping to foster a collective consciousness of feminism that later emerged in the 1970s.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jean V. Smith, "Jean V. Smith Class of 1966," Interview by Devin McKinney, June 9, 2020, Oral History Collection, Gettysburg College Archives (Hereafter GCA). <https://cdm16274.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16274coll2/id/3022/rec/122>.

<sup>2</sup> Salvatore Ciolino, interview by Josh Poorman and Johnny Nelson, Gettysburg, PA, April 29, 2011, as found in Joshua W. Poorman, John W. Nelson, *The Minority Experience at Gettysburg College: The Hanson Years (1961-1977)*, (2012), GCA.

## Expansion on Campus

Gettysburg College in the late 1950s was a campus intent on expansion. Willard Paul, president of the college from 1956-1961, had ambitious goals of building and reconstructing various structures on campus. The Student Union Building, a new stadium, and facilities for the arts and drama departments were all constructed in the span of only a few years.<sup>3</sup> Also important were the various new dormitories—two of them coed—constructed with the intent of increasing admission numbers for both men and women. Despite this growth, however, women still remained a minority on campus, equaling 23% of the student body—only 328 women in total—in 1956.<sup>4</sup> Paul also urged the number of faculty members to increase during his presidency. As a result, the total went from 77 to 119 by the end of his administration. Yet, out of these 119 members, only 21 of them were women, with a shocking total of only “one professor, two associates, eight assistants, and ten instructors.”<sup>5</sup> One faculty member, Mary Margaret Stewart, who began her career at Gettysburg in 1959, stated in an interview that “there always has to be a token woman, and... there were so few of us on campus, that I just got called to do all sorts of things, and serve on a lot of committees that I might not have been on otherwise.”<sup>6</sup> President Arnold Hanson, inducted in 1961 after Willard Paul retired due to health issues, continued the action of campus expansion, but faced a similar result in terms of women’s equality. In 1961, the number of female students on campus had increased to a total of 622, over 50% higher than the total in 1956. Hanson and Paul thus recognized the need to make Gettysburg College a more

---

<sup>3</sup> Charles H. Glatfelter, "Serving the Cause in Changing Times (1945-1985)," In A Salutary Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1985, Vol. 2 (Mechanicsburg, PA: W & M Printing, 1987), 792.

<sup>4</sup> Glatfelter, A Salutary Influence, 910.

<sup>5</sup> Glatfelter, A Salutary Influence, 810.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Margaret Stewart, "Gettysburg College from 1963-1973: An Interview with Mary Margaret Stewart Ph.D.," By Alyson Reichgott, November 3, 1993, GettDigital: GCA. <https://cdm16274.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16274coll2/id/2699/rec/180>.

diverse campus in terms of gender, yet fell short on making it truly equal. Despite the large increase of women students by 1961, they still only made up 32% of the student population. Further, the societal norms and standards of the 1950s would prevail on campus, and create a collective acceptance in not only men, but the women at Gettysburg as well. Therefore, when they were treated unequally, some women on campus would lack the vision to notice the inequality in the first place. When asked if she felt that the college being dominated by men was an issue, Carol Bream of '58 stated that the “biggest concern we had was that there was more men, so you got more of a chance to pick somebody to go out with.”<sup>7</sup> In contrast, when her husband was asked if he believed there was a big difference in the way that women were treated on campus, Jack Bream responded with “absolutely.”<sup>8</sup> The collective consciousness of the 1950s was so present in women on campus, that the unequal rules in place would continue to be accepted throughout the next decade.

### **Rules and Regulations**

When freshmen first arrived on campus, they were given a comprehensive list of rules in what was called a “G-Book.” Inside were helpful tips, as well as somewhat amusing customs which the freshmen, both men and women, were required to follow. Shown in G-Books throughout the entire decade, a small hat known as a “dink” was required to be worn for the duration of customs, except on weekends. A sign was additionally required to be worn, detailing a woman’s name and hometown. Freshmen were also required to carry matches for upperclassmen, hold doors, attend all home football games, and were not allowed to walk on the

---

<sup>7</sup> Carol Bream, "Carol Bream Interview," By Leslie Vargas, November 10, 1992, Oral History Collection, GCA.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Bream, "Jack Bream Interview," By John Buskirk, November 2, 1994, Oral History Collection, GCA.

grass.<sup>9</sup> The customs of these times are reflective of the 1950s and early 60s, as the freshmen were required to earn their rights and respect on campus. The yearly tug-of-war exhibits this, allowing customs to end once the freshmen men succeeded in beating the sophomores. What is interesting, however, is not only the customs which the male and female students shared, but the disconnect and unfairness between those which differ. Custom seven in the mens section of the 1956 G-Book is indicative of the relationship between men and women at the college. It states that “freshmen will not date or converse with coeds during the custom period.”<sup>10</sup> There is no such reference made in the women’s customs. Either according to social norms it was not necessary to tell women they could not date men—because women were not expected to initiate relations—or it was a way to proffer freshmen girls to upperclassmen during their first month on campus. Not only are women left with no active role in deciding their own availability or intentions, but at a school with a relatively small number of females, they are viewed as a limited commodity by the men on campus. Further, all G-Books throughout the decade highlight the expectations for women’s appearances, and the regulations—some absurd—which they must follow. The 1956 and 1957 G-Book state that “no make-up, nail polish, or jewelry (except watches, engagement rings, wedding rings, or fraternity pins)” were allowed to be worn while wearing the sign.<sup>11</sup> Even more absurd, the 1956 G-Book states that “only ONE bobby pin, clip, or comb could be worn to hold the hair in place.”<sup>12</sup> This second rule does not even include a time stipulation. Presentation was therefore important as a female student at Gettysburg College, and the ideals of that presentation were based around modesty, simplicity, and formality. It is important to note that the male freshmen of Gettysburg College also had rules regarding clothing in the 1956-57 G-Book. Yet it

---

<sup>9</sup> “G-Book 1961: Gettysburg College,” GCA.

<sup>10</sup> “G-Book 1956: Gettysburg College,” GCA.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

is the distinctions between their requirements which highlights the social norms of the time. While the men were required to wear bright orange socks and ties during the weeks of customs, women in contrast were told to blend in.<sup>13</sup>

### *Dress Code*

The rules and emphasis on women's appearances only continued throughout the early 1960s. While the men and women's customs were combined into one section beginning in 1959, now excluding the customs based on appearance, the G-Books found other ways to include regulations and suggestions of clothing for women on campus. The 1959 G-Book and onwards has a section dedicated to advising freshmen on what to bring to campus. Ranging from a rug for your dorm to budgeting advice, the section is largely dedicated to both men and women. A "What to Wear" section is also included, but rather than suggesting proper clothing for both men and women, the section begins with the sentences "'What shall I wear?' Girls always seem to be preoccupied with this question."<sup>14</sup> The paragraph continues by suggesting skirts, blouses, sweaters, heels, and dresses. Tellingly, the paragraph states that overall, "the well-dressed coed is not a clothes-horse, but a girl who is well groomed and neatly and appropriately dressed at all times."<sup>15</sup> This clothing section, only for women, continues throughout the decade, but as the times change, so does the wording of the G-Book. The 1960 G-Book, in exact contrast to last year's statement of girls being preoccupied with clothing, begins the section with the sentence, "you will be glad to hear that girls at Gettysburg are not overly clothes conscious."<sup>16</sup> A "neatless,

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "G-Book 1959: Gettysburg College," GCA.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "G-Book 1960: Gettysburg College," GCA.



good groomed and appropriate” style is still emphasized, with nothing in the later G-Books touching on the subject of ideal dress for men.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, the G-Book clearly states what women on campus *cannot* wear. The 1956 G-Book has a section titled “Limitations on Dress,” which talks about the strict regulation of bermuda shorts and nothing else. Over a decade later, the 1967 G-Book suggests that while bermuda shorts are now allowed to be worn to classes, they are still heavily regulated. Women were not only prohibited from wearing them to assemblies and evening meals during the week, but also strongly recommended that they “do not wear bermudas, cut-offs, or slacks uptown after 6 p.m,” nor in the living room common areas as well.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, while both men and women were required to dress formally for Tuesday and Thursday meals in the dining hall, women were encouraged to continue to dress formally for each meal. In contrast, the men had the freedom to wear “shorts, t-shirts or sweatshirts, beards, and no socks.”<sup>19</sup> A 1966 *Gettysburgian* cartoon depicts a woman at the dining hall in heels, a dress, and an overcoat, with a man behind her in the exact attire written above. The food in the picture is depicted as questionable, and the caption of the cartoon summarizes the growing thoughts of women at the time: “Dress up?...For this?”<sup>20</sup> The incentive thus existed on Gettysburg Campus for women to become clothes and appearance conscious, even without an explicit rule telling them to do so. And while there were individual thinkers who published cartoon which questioned these norms, the construct of the “ideal woman” was still largely present on campus. A 1959 *Gettysburgian* article states this clearly, by listing some good qualities which women should have: “[a] good figure, beautiful posture,

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “G-Book 1967: Gettysburg College,” GCA.

<sup>19</sup> Bette Frick, “Food for Thought,” Excerpt from *The Gettysburgian* (Gettysburg, PA), October 7, 1966, 70th edition, GCA.  
<https://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/apa/gettysburg/?href=GT%2F1966%2F10%2F07&page=3&entityId=Ar00301#panel=document>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

shining and well-kept hair...individuality in her use of color and accessories, a workable wardrobe plan, a neat use of make-up, and an appropriate look for off-campus occasions.”<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, while the men could comfortably walk around campus, women's customs and social norms bound them to modesty and propriety.



“Food For Thought,” Bette Frick, *The Gettysburgian*, 1966.

<sup>21</sup> “Campus Girls Will Select the Best Dressed Coed,” *The Gettysburgian*, February 12, 1959, GCA.

### *Dormitory Regulations*

The women of Gettysburg College were not only faced with the inequality of the dress code, but also with strict regulations with dormitory life. There was an unspoken *loco parentis* with the college and the women students, almost assuring the parents that their “little girl” would be safe with them.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, under a section written by the Women’s Student Government Association (WSGA) themselves, each G-Book dedicates pages to the list of rules that coeds must follow. It was not only essential that women were in their dormitories by 10:30 p.m and by midnight on Saturdays, but each woman had to individually sign out before leaving, watched by their housemother to ensure the rules were followed.<sup>23</sup> Bonnie Bankert Rice, class of 1958, explains that “you know how you remember your teachers? I remember [my housemother], Mrs. Detrick. She had a rule: all feet on the floor. You couldn’t sit on the couch with your feet underneath you. All feet had to be on the floor.”<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, men had complete freedom with dorm life, with no restrictions on hours or requirements to sign in and out. Jack Bream ('57) when asked if men had any dormitory restrictions, stated that, “men were adults. They were allowed to do things. In those days, and I don’t mean to say this nastily...there were very strict restrictions on women on this campus.”<sup>25</sup> In addition, the rules for visitors were even more strict. Suzanne Shealer, who graduated in 1957, stated that women “weren’t allowed to have men in [their] rooms at all. The only place they could be was in the living room or the entranceway. If somebody would come in, the monitor would call or buzz somebody on the phone. So, it was pretty restricting. But, you know, what did we know any different?”<sup>26</sup> If these rules were

---

<sup>22</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>23</sup> “G-Book 1956: Gettysburg College,” GCA.

<sup>24</sup> Bonnie Bankert Rice, telephone interview by Emily Suter and Greer Garver, December 3, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Jack Bream, Interview by Buskirk, GCA.

<sup>26</sup> Suzanne Shealer, "Interview with Suzanne Shealer," By Nancy Griffiths, November 4, 1992, Oral History Collection, GCA.

violated, women were required to appear before what was called a House Council, and their punishment was decided. Jean Smith was president of the WSGA in 1966 and largely dealt with these violations. Telling however, is the students' reactions when such violations were committed. Smith states that she found it amazing, looking back on it, that she “never heard anybody say, ‘These rules are crap! Why do the boys not have any hours, and we have to be in at ten-thirty? What’s that about?’ Nobody ever said it during the time that I was a student.”<sup>27</sup> And despite the 1960s being viewed as a radical time period of change, the unequal rules of dormitory life would continue into the late 1960s. The 1967 G-Book clearly indicates that, while the hours were slightly extended, the strict regulations on women’s dormitories were still in place.<sup>28</sup> It would not be until 1969 that women as a larger community not only recognized the inequality, but began to protest and make change. President Hanson, when asked why the women were required to be “locked up,” stated that it was to protect them from the men.<sup>29</sup> People began to question that, if such *loco parentis* existed, why are the women locked up, while the men run free?

## **Social Life**

There is a reason why Sue Sober DeVries ('62) refers to her time at Gettysburg and the 1950s and early 60s as “camelot,” and it is largely due to the social life of Gettysburg College.<sup>30</sup> Despite the unequal rules and regulations which women faced, DeVries and other women think of their experience fondly as a “perfect four years.”<sup>31</sup> Women were not mainly concerned about politics or the outside world. DeVries adds that “World War Two was over, the United States was

---

<sup>27</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>28</sup> “G-Book 1956: Gettysburg College,” GCA.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>30</sup> Sue Sober DeVries, phone interview by Emily Suter and Greer Garver, December 3, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

thriving...it was just a good time to live.”<sup>32</sup> Shealer goes further, stating that living at Gettysburg College was “more like being in a cocoon...you were in your own little world...I always felt very much insulated or isolated from the outside world.”<sup>33</sup> Rather than worrying about outside politics and events, DeVries summarizes women’s main concerns of the time, fondly stating that “it was scholastic, it was friendship, and it was boyfriends and getting pinned and being in love.”<sup>34</sup> Social life was therefore essential to Gettysburg College, and women were a large part of what made this aspect so crucial. Contrary to the restrictions they faced, women found many ways to become involved with the campus community. Athletics, clubs and government associations, and most notably sorority life provided an opportunity for women to exert influence and create positive experiences at Gettysburg College.

### *Athletics*

Outside of sororities, athletics were an important way for women to become involved within the campus community. Sports were an essential part of social life on campus, with football, soccer, basketball, cross country, swimming, wrestling, lacrosse, baseball, tennis, and golf being offered on campus.<sup>35</sup> However, from 1956 to 1958, women were offered a total of two sports: basketball and field hockey.<sup>36</sup> Both were provided varsity teams, and often excelled in competitions during the decade. Smith recalls field hockey coach Grace Kenney being extremely dedicated to not only the sport, but the girls as well.<sup>37</sup> Smith adds that “there was some bitterness in her—and why not—about how women’s sports were treated relative to men’s sports. I went all

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Shealer, Interview by Griffiths, GCA.

<sup>34</sup> DeVries, interview by Suter and Garver.

<sup>35</sup> *The Spectrum*, 1960, Musselman Library, 129-153.

<sup>36</sup> “G-Book 1956 1957 and 1958: Gettysburg College,” GCA.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

through high school practicing basketball in the cafeteria, where there were no baskets, because the boys had to have the gym, and I didn't resent it. That was just like a given of the air: the boys needed the gym. I was disappointed that I couldn't be in the gym, but I wasn't angry. Miss Kenney had a lot of feelings about that."<sup>38</sup> If a woman was interested in pursuing other sports, such as tennis, she had to have the willingness and skills to join and compete on the men's team. Carol Bream stated that she never had the idea that the women "were fighting against the men to be equal. We had nice uniforms, we had bus trips. We accepted the two sports and we were just glad to have them."<sup>39</sup> Even within the two sports offered, women continued to face challenges with social norms. Smith stated that during her four years on the field hockey team, there was "a lot of worry that women athletes would be seen as gay or as unladylike... It was very important to [Kenney] that we dress up and wear stockings and heels and skirts to every game, and then get changed [into uniform], and then get changed back into our traveling gear."<sup>40</sup> Finally in 1959, swimming, tennis, and softball were added to the list of women's sports offered.<sup>41</sup> While softball and tennis were at first managed on an "informal basis," it not only provided women greater opportunities and forms of expression, but began to pave the way for greater equality on campus. Women began asking for *more*.

### *Beauty Contests*

After a quick perusal of the *Gettysburgian* or the *Spectrum* yearbook, it is impossible to disregard the amount of beauty contests which took place on campus. Each year, there was a Homecoming Queen, Interfraternity Council (IFC) Weekend Queen, Military Queen, May

---

<sup>38</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>39</sup> Carol Bream, Interview by Vargas, GCA.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>41</sup> "G-Book 1959: Gettysburg College," GCA.

Queen, and Spectrum Queen. Frequent front page articles of the *Gettysburgian* displayed a posed lineup of the girls nominated for these events.<sup>42</sup> Beauty contests were a part of the culture, not just on campus, but throughout the United States. Sue DeVries, who was Spectrum Queen her sophomore year (1960), said that at the time she never questioned the practice because, “back then, Miss. America was a big thing, beauty contests were accepted, and it didn't feel like it was being a “womanizer type of thing.” It was a part of society.”<sup>43</sup>

Most of the beauty contests were a popularity competition as well. Bonnie Bankert Rice ('58) was May Queen her senior year. She believes she won the honor because the May Queen was selected by the entire student body, and she was the president of the WSGA. “It didn't have to do with beauty or personality or anything,” she said. “It's just somebody whose name is known.”<sup>44</sup> In contrast, the IFC Queen catered to fraternity men and Greek Life on campus. Each sorority, and the Independent Women, would nominate a girl. This group of girls would then visit all thirteen fraternities on campus for dinner over the course of the next two weeks. Finally, the fraternity men would vote for the queen.<sup>45</sup> At the Military Ball, ROTC members nominated their favorite girls to the court.<sup>46</sup> If there was an overarching theme which united these contests, it was men and sororities. Most of the girls who participated and won were from a sorority, and usually it was the men making the decisions over who would win.

If there was any event that was an exception to the rule of popularity and exemplified the prominence of the male gaze it was the Spectrum Queen. Every year the Spectrum Queen was chosen not by the student body, or even the men on campus, but by a male celebrity. The girls

---

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Graves Scrapbook, 1962, GCA.

<sup>43</sup> DeVries, interview by Suter and Garver.

<sup>44</sup> Bankert, interview by Suter and Garver.

<sup>45</sup> Prudy Stahl Runyon Scrapbook “Eight Candidates for Queen Position Dine at Thirteen Fraternity Houses,” 1965, GCA.

<sup>46</sup> “ROTC Nominates Seven Candidates for Military Court,” *The Gettysburgian*, March 11, 1966, GCA.

who were nominated would have their photos taken and then sent to the chosen celebrity of the year to pick which student he thought to be the most beautiful. Without being given the chance to meet the girls, this contest was based on beauty and looks alone.<sup>47</sup> Sue DeVries was not entirely sure how she got nominated to be Spectrum Queen, but she believes it was the fraternities which made the nominations. The year she won the position, the celebrity who chose the most beautiful student was Charley Weaver, a famous American actor and comedian. At the time, she was happy to be chosen and didn't give the situation much thought. It made her "feel good" and she took it as, "a nice compliment from different groups and different organizations on campus." It also made her father immensely proud.<sup>48</sup> Looking back on it sixty years later, she views things somewhat differently. DeVries stated, "as I've matured and gotten older I'm thinking, "that's so frivolous; that's so silly." It's not right. A woman should not just be recognized for her beauty."<sup>49</sup> It reminded her of an experience she had her senior year when her English professor started talking negatively in class about the beauty courts. She felt uncomfortable and upset, wondering why he would say such things in front of her. Now she says, "he was right."<sup>50</sup> DeVries wondered if she might have questioned it earlier, had she not been selected.<sup>51</sup> However, the culture of beauty contests in the 1950s and 1960s was instead completely accepted.

---

<sup>47</sup> Bankert, interview by Suter and Garver.

<sup>48</sup> DeVries, interview by Suter and Garver.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.





Sue Sober DeVries, “The Spectrum,” 1960.

### *Sororities*

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Greek life was the system that held together and dominated social life on campus. Almost every social event and organization was tied to Greek life, if not directly a part of it. There is a trend to associate Greek life with an upholding of traditional values, frivolity, and its negative side effects: hazing, male dominated events, and a culture of partying. However, for many of the women at Gettysburg, Greek life, specifically sorority life, was an important and positive part of their experience. The majority of girls on campus were involved in a sorority. It is significantly easier to find the accounts of those who were a part of Greek life rather than those who weren't.

Jean Smith joined Gamma Phi Beta when she came to Gettysburg College. Perhaps indicative of an attitude against Greek life at the time, she had not been planning on joining a sorority because her hometown minister had warned her against it, telling her it was “the one thing [he] won’t be able to countenance.”<sup>52</sup> After dropping out of rush when she arrived on campus, Smith changed her mind when she was approached directly by Gamma Phi Beta. They were eager to induct her and she wished to make more friends. Even though she still sometimes worries she could go to hell for joining, she does not regret her decision, stating that being in a sorority was extremely important to her. Through the sorority she was able to volunteer, attend fraternity parties, dances, and other events.<sup>53</sup> She met some of her best friends in her sorority, and even though she did not enjoy the process of rush, she believed all the girls were respectful about it. Unlike the fraternities on campus, sororities never seemed to have issues with hazing. Smith described that “in [her] sorority...[they] didn’t spend any time at all making fun of people or cutting people up. That wasn’t the way girls were then, at least at Gettysburg.”<sup>54</sup>

In 1959 there were six sororities on campus: Alpha Xi Delta, Delta Gamma, Chi Omega, Gamma Phi Beta, Phi Mu, and Sigma Kappa.<sup>55</sup> Sorority activities included, “Tuesday night meetings in the chapter room, participation in an intramural sports program, service projects in the community, and a social program of parties, dances, and other activities.”<sup>56</sup> Rush took place prior to the start of classes first semester. This was not altered until the 1967-68 school year, when it was delayed to the second semester based on a recommendation from the Student Affairs Committee.<sup>57</sup> This meant that many friend groups were formed around sorority life. However, it

<sup>52</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>55</sup> Before 1962 Alpha Delta Pi was added as well.

<sup>56</sup> “G-Book 1962: Gettysburg College,” GCA.

<sup>57</sup> “College Faculty Approves Rushing Proposal; Students to Form Rules for New Program,” *The Gettysburgian*, October 7, 1966, GCA.

was not all encompassing, because the girls were required to live in dorms rather than sorority houses. Friendships were formed because of dorm life as well, and most girls seemed to have a variety of friends in different sororities. According to Smith, “the sororities were not all that different from each other.”<sup>58</sup> Out of the three other girls Smith lived with in her first year, everyone joined a different sorority but remained, “best friends to each other.”<sup>59</sup> Sue DeVries lived on the fourth floor of her dorm with 40 other girls she was friends with, and they made up “a cross section of all the sororities.”<sup>60</sup> Rice, a member of Alpha Xi Delta, lived all four years with her best friend who was a member of Phi Mu.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, it did not seem to be much of a concern which sorority a girl joined as long as she was in one. Because of the way social life was organized around Greek organizations there was also an organization for “Independent Women.” Essentially an anti-sorority, women who joined the organization would have access to intramural sports like the sorority girls did, could be informed of campus activities, and attend weekly meetings. The organization held its own banquets, helped to design a homecoming float, and was represented in the student senate.<sup>62</sup> In many ways it worked as another sorority, but with fewer commitments.

What’s important to realize is that these different sororities did not just regulate social obligations, but played a role in student government and representation. Bonnie Rice was president of the WSGA her senior year and found that, “the people in Women’s Student Government sort of went from sorority to sorority like ‘it’s your year this year.’”<sup>63</sup> Bonnie also describes how she thought the WSGA was important because it represented *all* women on

---

<sup>58</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>60</sup> DeVries, interview by Suter and Garver.

<sup>61</sup> Bankert, interview by Suter and Garver.

<sup>62</sup> “G-Book 1962: Gettysburg College,” GCA.

<sup>63</sup> Bankert, interview by Suter and Garver.

campus, even those not involved in sororities. Therefore, it seemed that being in a sorority could help position one more easily into a representative role. The fact that the Independent Women's Organization advertised their representation in the Student Senate may indicate how difficult it was to find representation without the assistance of a sorority group.

### *Fraternity Relations*

When asked if sorority life was a big part of the campus experience at Gettysburg, Sue DeVries immediately replied “no.” She “didn’t think they were that important,” and that, “it was just one section of campus life.”<sup>64</sup> However, when asked about fraternities, DeVries had a different reaction. “The fraternities ruled the social life,” she said. What first seems like it could be a contradiction, may actually be extremely indicative of the experience for sorority women on campus. Greek Life seems to have been centered around fraternities, and not necessarily sororities. If anything, sorority life revolved around fraternity events and the decisions of fraternity men.

Carol Bream stated that Greek life, “was a big part of college,” and that “it was a big [deal] to be invited to the [fraternity] house,” because an invitation was required.<sup>65</sup> It was common for fraternity houses to invite sororities over for events. Sometimes it was a dinner or a dance, but more often it was a smaller event like dessert and tea.<sup>66</sup> Carol Bream described how, “if you were invited to dinner on Sunday, [it] was a really big deal because it was dress up. You did not go in your jeans. It was a sit down meal, in which you were waited on by the pledge brothers and served.” It seems like most of the girls largely enjoyed these types of events, and they were something to look forward to in the social calendar. Fraternities hosted around two

---

<sup>64</sup> DeVries, interview by Suter and Garver.

<sup>65</sup> Carol Bream, Interview by Vargas, GCA.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Kenworthy, interview by Brian Riegel, October 29, 1992, Oral History Collections, GCA.

dances each year. As mentioned earlier, there was the IFC weekend—the biggest weekend in the Greek life calendar—which even allowed the women’s curfew to be extended by an hour, while all the fraternities hosted parties. Additional fraternity events were more sporadic, but in comparison to the three to four school hosted campus wide dances, fraternities were the ones hosting the majority of the social events.<sup>67</sup> Fraternity events also offered a way to interact with men in a more casual setting than at a school organized dance, something which was difficult to attain at a time of strict regulations. However, fraternity house events were not an unregulated environment. Events seemed to be kept relatively docile because of dry campus policies and the existence of “house moms,” a monitor which was required in each fraternity house.<sup>68</sup> Despite this, drinking did happen both on and off campus and frequently at fraternity events.

Jack Bream was a member of Phi Gamma Delta during his time at Gettysburg. In a 1994 interview, when asked if his fraternity had any drinking parties on campus, he replied, “as far as you're concerned, no.”<sup>69</sup> He described off campus parties with drinking, such as at a fraternity cabin, but on campus drinking was a secret that needed to be kept well guarded. The women on campus, and other fraternity men who were interviewed, for the most part corroborated this story. Sue DeVries explained that, “rules were followed. Sometimes they were broken, but it was very secretive and very much kept quiet. People were on really good social behavior. It was a perfect, perfect time to be a young person.”<sup>70</sup> While on campus events largely remained a model of good social behavior, this was not always the case for those that took place off campus.

Rather than preventing drinking, dry campus policies created an incentive to drink off of campus, sometimes creating potentially dangerous and unsupervised situations. “Most of our

---

<sup>67</sup> Jack Bream, Interview by Buskirk, GCA.

<sup>68</sup> DeVries, interview by Suter and Garver.

<sup>69</sup> Jack Bream, Interview by Buskirk, GCA.

<sup>70</sup> DeVries, interview by Suter and Garver.

parties were off campus; they were in rented facilities,” said DeVries. “We would go out and have cake parties. Mostly the drink of choice was beer.”<sup>71</sup> Jean Smith described the same; especially heading into the later 1960s, fraternity men frequently hosted events at nearby motels.<sup>72</sup> Despite having 11 p.m or midnight curfews on the weekends, women still found ways to attend these parties. Often they would manage to sneak in late and avoid a penalty. Occasionally they could obtain an overnight permission and wouldn’t have to worry about getting back to their dorms.<sup>73</sup> The men, of course, did not have to worry about such consequences.

The dangers of such off campus parties are highlighted in an experience which Jean Smith shares in an interview. In her freshman year, the Gamma Phi Beta pledges got “hooked up” with Lambda Chi pledges and went to a motel party. Smith ended up in a motel room alone with one of the men, and in her words, “he was sort of all over me...I was like, ‘No. I don’t even know you.’” He pushed further, even asking her, “do you like to fight?” It took her saying no three times to finally get the man to stop.<sup>74</sup> At the time, Smith did not discuss the events seriously with anyone, or ask her friends if they had experienced something similar. She just took it as “boys being boys.”<sup>75</sup> It is only during the interview decades later that she realizes the event could be considered sexual assault. She was alone, and he was bigger than her, there wouldn’t have been anything she could do. Due to the stigma of the time, it is impossible to know the reality of the situation on campus regarding sexual assault and harrasment. To most women, such situations were perceived as normal and more acceptable than they really were. One of the words women used most commonly to describe the mentality of the 1950s and early 60s was

---

<sup>71</sup> DeVries, interview by Suter and Garver.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>73</sup> Jack Bream, Interview by Buskirk, GCA.

<sup>74</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

complacency. There was a sense of acceptance over the rules they needed to follow, and that mentality of acceptance spread further than just college regulations. Multiple women would even mention how they appreciated their curfew, because it gave them an excuse to leave difficult situations, and manage their interactions with men. However, as Ken Mott asked, if the women had a curfew to keep them safe from the men, “why don’t we lock the men up and let the women out?”<sup>76</sup>

### *Women’s Student Government Association*

The 1956 G-Book defines the Women’s Student Government Association as “the group which governs coeds on campus.”<sup>77</sup> Each woman enrolled at the college is automatically a member of the WSGA, created with the intention of giving women a voice on campus. Meetings were monthly, and they not only created the rules which women had to follow, but dealt with “all cases of infringements upon the rules and regulations concerning coeds.”<sup>78</sup> The WSGA was essential to not only social life, but to women’s representation on campus. Independents could have their voice be known through the WSGA, as it provided a group where sororities must work with them equally. Further, the WSGA provides a voice for the collective community of women who are surrounded by a dominating male presence. Bankert wrote an open letter to the women on campus in a *Gettysburgian* article in 1957, informing them that “when [they] are weak and indifferent, [they] make WSGA and Council in turn weak and indifferent. The women of Gettysburg speak through WSGA and the voice is as loud or as soft, as weak or as strong as

---

<sup>76</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA.

<sup>77</sup> “G-Book 1956: Gettysburg College,” GCA.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

[they] make it...Let's get on the ball. We are adult college women, aren't we?"<sup>79</sup> In a time of inequality, the WSGA served as their outlet and their voice.

## Conclusion

Jean Smith, after graduating in 1966, returned to the college a year later as the Women's Residency Advisor, and claims that without such experience, her transition into feminism would not have been the same. Smith states that she feels "there was a generation between the people who graduated in '66 and the people who graduated in '68. And the people who graduated in '68 took me with them. They made me make those bigger steps...Every night, there was somebody else in my apartment blowing my mind."<sup>80</sup> It is this distinction between the early 1960s and the "radical" 1960s which explains and defines the female experience at Gettysburg College during this decade. The 1950s and early 1960s are defined in many eyes as a comforting and peaceful time. Young individuals were *allowed* to enjoy their youth and partake in a college experience based on friendship and fun. Thus, when the rules were strict, they were easily followed. The complacency and satisfaction of the time prevented them from realizing there was an injustice in the first place. As Bankert of '58 states, "we were just happy, satisfied, and docile...[Betty Friedan] hadn't published her book yet."

## Bibliography

Bankert, Bonnie. "Letter to the Editors: Open letter to the upperclass women of Gettysburg College," *The Gettysburgian*, October 10, 1957, GCA,

---

<sup>79</sup> Bonnie Bankert, "Letter to the Editors: Open letter to the upperclass women of Gettysburg College," *The Gettysburgian*, October 10, 1957, GCA.

<sup>80</sup> Smith, Interview by McKinney, GCA



<https://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/apa/gettysburg/?href=GT%2F1957%2F10%2F10&page=2&entityId=Ar00202#panel=document>.

Bream, Carol. "Carol Bream Interview." By Leslie Vargas. November 10, 1992, Oral History Collection. Gettysburg College Archives.

Bream, Jack. "Jack Bream Interview." By John Buskirk. November 2, 1994. Oral History Collection. Gettysburg College Archives.

"Campus Girls Will Select the Best Dressed Coed," *The Gettysburgian*, February 12, 1959, GCA,  
<https://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/apa/gettysburg/?href=GT%2F1959%2F02%2F12&page=1&entityId=Ar00103#panel=document>

Ciolino, Salvatore. Interview by Josh Poorman and Johnny Nelson. Gettysburg, PA, April 29, 2011; as found in Poorman W. Joshua, Nelson W. John, *The Minority Experience at Gettysburg College: The Hanson Years (1961-1977)*, (2012)

"College Faculty Approves Rushing Proposal; Students to Form Rules for New Program," *The Gettysburgian*, October 7, 1966, GCA,  
<https://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/apa/gettysburg/?href=GT%2F1959%2F02%2F12&page=1&entityId=Ar00103#panel=document>.

DeVries, Sober Sue. Phone interview by Suter, Emily and Garver, Greer. December 3, 2020.

Frick, Bette. "Food for Thought." In *Gettysburgian Newspaper Archive*. Excerpt from *The Gettysburgian* (Gettysburg, PA), October 7, 1966, 70th edition.  
<https://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/apa/gettysburg/?href=GT%2F1966%2F10%2F07&page=3&entityId=Ar00301#panel=document>.

*G-Book 1956: Gettysburg College*. Gettysburg College Archives.

*G-Book 1957: Gettysburg College*. Gettysburg College Archives.

*G-Book 1958: Gettysburg College*. Gettysburg College Archives.

*G-Book 1959: Gettysburg College*. Gettysburg College Archives.

*G-Book 1960: Gettysburg College*. Gettysburg College Archives.

*G-Book 1961: Gettysburg College*. Gettysburg College Archives.

*G-Book 1967: Gettysburg College*. Gettysburg College Archives.

Gettysburg College, *The Spectrum* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: 1960), Gettysburg College Archives.

Glatfelter, Charles H. "Serving the Cause in Changing Times (1945-1985)." In *A Salutary Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1985*. Vol. 2. Mechanicsburg, PA: W & M Printing, 1987.

Kenworthy Robert. Interview by Brian Riegel. October 29, 1992. Oral History Collection. Gettysburg College Archives

Rice, Bankert Bonnie. Phone interview by Suter, Emily and Garver, Greer. December 3, 2020.

"ROTC Nominates Seven Candidates for Military Court," *The Gettysburgian*, March 11, 1966, GCA,  
<https://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/apa/gettysburg/?href=GTY%2F1959%2F02%2F12&page=1&entityId=Ar00103#panel=document>.

Shealer, Suzanne. "Interview with Suzanne Shealer." By Nancy Griffiths. November 4, 1992. Oral History Collection, Gettysburg College Archives.

Smith, Jean V. "Jean V. Smith Class of 1966." Interview by Devin McKinney. June 9, 2020. Oral History Collection, Gettysburg College Archives  
<https://cdm16274.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16274coll2/id/3022/rec/122>.

Stewart, Mary Margaret. "Gettysburg College from 1963-1973: An Interview with Mary Margaret Stewart Ph.D." By Alyson Reichgott. November 4, 1992. Oral History Collection. Gettysburg College Archives.  
<https://cdm16274.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16274coll2/id/2699/rec/180>.

*The Gettysburgian* (Gettysburg, PA). "Campus Girls Will Select the Best Dressed Coed." February 12, 1959, IXI edition, 1.  
<https://digital.olivesoftware.com/olive/apa/gettysburg/sharedview.article.aspx?href=GTY%2F1959%2F02%2F12&id=Ar00103&sk=49AFA0E4&viewMode=image>.