

An Intimate Revolution in Campus Life? Gender Roles and their Impact on Dorm Coedification: A University of Illinois Perspective

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Abstract

At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, ground-up change helped achieve the coedification of the residence halls. Students themselves lobbied for new residential policies and crafted the “Proposed Undergraduate Residence Hall Flexible Living - Master Plan” (referred to as “the Master Plan” for convenience) in the summer of 1970, which, after careful revisions from university administration, set the guidelines for the university’s first genuinely coed dorms. The “Flexible” aspect of the program represented the dorm-by-dorm process by which it operated. Because each dorm created its own unique coedification plan, some interesting patterns arose between the male and female houses. These patterns serve to highlight larger gender stereotypes and differences typically perceived by early-year undergraduate students in the late sixties and early seventies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Before Coedification: 1930-1968

Before male and female students began to live together in the dorms at U of I, most students lived in sororities or fraternities and in off-campus certified housing. According to a housing report from 1930, 50% of female students lived in sororities, 26% lived in “twin city homes for student roomers” (these were local families who hosted students in their homes), 16% lived in one of the three women’s residence halls, and 8% lived in co-ops or houses managed by church boards (Housing Reports, 1929-30). According to another report from 1940, most female students still lived in “student roomer” homes, with their parents, or in sororities (Housing Reports, 1939-40). This meant that female students at U of I in the 1930s resided in a completely sex-segregated living arrangement. Female students only saw males in class, at parties, or in the library. Males and females never interacted with each other on a consistent day-to-day basis (unless they were dating, married, etc.) until the implementation of coed dorms.

For the few female students who did live in the sex-segregated residence halls during this time, harsh rules governed their private lives. Dorm officials locked the doors at 10:30pm every weeknight and at 1am on Fridays and Saturdays. Quiet hours began at 7:30pm every night except on Fridays and Saturdays.

Men weren’t allowed inside the women’s halls and vice-versa, and even phone calls from men were restricted to the hours after 4pm on all days except Saturday and Sunday (Housing Reports, 1939-40). If male and female students wanted to meet each other at all, they had to plan it ahead of time and do so at a coffee shop or in the library; male and female students never got a chance to interact with each other without being able to prepare themselves first. “Self-regulated women’s hours” helped to gradually lift these restrictive rules in the women’s halls between 1940 and 1960. Female students were given keys to access the dorms after they were locked, and phone call bans were eventually lifted (Background for Proposed Recommendations 1969). University policy still prohibited unmarried men and women from living together or even visiting each other’s university-approved residences until the late sixties. However, the Pennsylvania Avenue Residence Hall (PAR) acted as the sole exception to this rule.

The university constructed PAR in 1962 with the goal to create an ideal coed dorm. The Daily Illini called the new dorm “An Experiment in Co-ed Living” (Watson 1963). This experiment was conducted relatively early compared to the rest of the nation—mass coedification nationwide (and at UIUC) didn’t occur until the late sixties and early seventies, however, PAR wasn’t exactly revolutionary. In designing the building, the university completely segregated the building’s four

halls, with women living in the two halls in the northern half and men living in the two halls in the southern half. The two groups interacted explicitly in common lounge areas and the cafeteria, where hall authorities could keep a close eye on them. For the students living in PAR and their parents back at home, there wasn't much to complain about with the new arrangement because not much had changed. As a result, males and females still only interacted in public spaces. The establishment of PAR didn't symbolize anything special for the student body; it didn't mark the beginning of the end of sex segregation on campus. Thus, the dorm operated without protest until pressure for further integration shook things up later in the sixties.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Student Groups and Ground-Up Change

A student-powered rhetoric began to develop on campus in the mid-sixties – in fashion with the revolutionary youth culture of the time – that challenged the university's restrictive policies. Students formed new coalitions and criticized the administration's practices of *in loco parentis*, or policy acting in place of students' parents (Hackmann 1965). In regards to the residence halls, students wanted desperately to implement optional coed living and visitation, and they took action to accomplish this. Higher-ranking members from sex-segregated student groups like the Men's Residence Hall Association (MRHA) and the Women's Independent Student Association (WISA) began to join together and form new coed groups, like the Inter-Dormitory Communication Council (IDCC) and the South West Campus Federation (SWCF)—the latter of the last two producing the Master Plan that eventually enabled coedification on campus (Vaughan 1969).

University administration also played a hand in motivating the formation of coeducational student groups, mostly as a result of a policy proposed in the summer of 1969 by Arnold Strohkorb, then director of housing. The policy, if passed, would have raised rent for all students living in the residence halls by \$100. During this summer, the SWCF and the IDCC formed to combat the rent increase and also hash out the logistics of a coedification plan with a combined effort from the male and female halls. However, the male members of these groups still held most of the power and controlled most of the group's decisions. For example, members of the MRHA also participated within the SWCF and thus gained double representation at meetings between students and the university housing association (Vaughan 1969). Female student leaders from the halls on Fourth

Street and at Allen and Lincoln Avenue (LAR), as well as members of WISA, were selected to represent female student interests in the SWCF because a female version of a residence group like the MRHA didn't exist. Despite this coed cooperation, the student groups lost the battle against the rent increase in the negotiations that followed. The MRHA (the SWCF and IDCC had just been formed and couldn't participate) did succeed in another one of their goals, though — getting Strohkorb to establish the Student Housing Advisory Committee (SHAC) (Vaughan 1970). SHAC was created as a subsidiary of the office of housing. Male and female student dorm leaders – resident advisors, hall presidents, members of hall student governments, etc. – comprised the members of SHAC. The office of housing created the group as a response to pressure from students for the ability to lobby for student interests from within the administration's infrastructure.

Students' increased representation within the housing office, coupled with Strohkorb's implementation of militaristic procedures, led to the further criticism and eventual resignation of the director of housing. The most militaristic and widely criticized policy Strohkorb enacted during his short tenure happened during the 1969-70 school year. Strohkorb began to seek out students who had left the dorms before completing the 75-hour (5 semester) in-residence requirement, forcing students to break or pay their way out of apartment contracts. This ramping up of the persecution of students who left the halls early drew heavy condemnation even from administrators under his employ. Housing administrator Robert Gruelle, for example, called the persecution of students living in illegal housing a "crack down," and labelled the University's housing regulations as "the most archaic in the nation," (Schwartz 1970). Later that year, on Friday March 20th 1970, Strohkorb resigned from his position as director of housing after a tenure of only 2 years. His replacement, Sammy Rebecca, would prove to be much better at communicating with students and working with them to implement the policies they desired.

Coeducational Visitation: 1968 - Visitation Test Run

Before the university put full coedification into effect, they first wanted to test a coeducational visitation policy. Beginning in February of the spring semester of 1968, the university implemented an experimental coeducational visitation plan that would allow men and women to visit each other's residences from noon to one a.m. on Friday and Saturday and noon to midnight on all other days of the week. The plan also laid out rules for guests

within the dorms, for instance: “Rooms shall be unlocked and available to access at all times when a guest is present in a host’s room,” and “A procedure [must exist] for escorting guests to and from private areas of the living unit,” (Peltason to President Henry 1969). The administration left these rules intentionally vague because the specifics were to be voted upon by the residents of each dorm, with a two-thirds majority required for approval. The university’s administration considered the experimental semester of the plan a success, and it they permanently implemented it at the start of the 1969-70 school year.

1969 - Full Implementation

This implementation did not come without controversy, however, as conservative members of the Board of Trustees forced a split decision on the vote for whether or not to continue the experiment after its trial year. The board president, Earl M. Hughes, was concerned for freshman women’s safety and wanted a stipulation in the plan that limited their visitation hours. This limitation was impossible, though, because dorm rooms were not assigned by class. Other board members, like trustee Ralph Hahn, were concerned that if visitation did not pass that it would deteriorate student-staff relations and “put the chancellor in an almost intolerable situation come September,” (Daily Illini 1969). The board ultimately remained divided on the issue and decided not to vote, and a no-vote meant that the plan would move forward through the 1969-70 school year (Daily Illini 1969).

The rules laid out for the visitation program took a fairly standard approach when compared with other colleges’ policies from around the same time. Some had more relaxed rules, (Oberlin had unlimited visitation hours) and some were more restrictive (some schools still required that doors remain open if a guest of the opposite sex was present); still, universities had been rapidly becoming more coedified across the nation as a result of the social revolutions of the late sixties, which pressured them to establish coed dorms and more liberal visitation hours (Ray and Thorsen 1970). This change from the segregation of sexes across the board to relatively sudden coedification shocked members of the generation who had gone to college prior to the sixties.

Concerns for Female Students’ Security

Changes in visitation policy and increased coedification occurring at universities across the country especially irritated parents and alumni, and

this was no different at UIUC. The previous generation attended a school where the sexes lived on opposite ends of campus and weren’t allowed to visit each other’s residences at all, and they felt that the separation was beneficial to their academic studies. Parents feared that if their children lived in close proximity to, or were allowed to visit members of the opposite sex freely, that they would undoubtedly lose focus on their school work. Furthermore, parents viewed their daughters as being particularly vulnerable in coed living situations because men were viewed as a constant threat to their belongings and personal well-being.

Robert G. Brown, Associate Dean of Student Programs and Services, expressed a fear for female students’ safety in one of his memos on the new visitation system. He argued that a centralized registration system was essential for male visitors in the female halls. He justified this by stating: “I felt that we would have great difficulty in rationalizing central registration for the men’s halls as the male students and staff did not view women visiting men’s residence halls as a big threat to security,” (Brown 1969). In another instance of concern for female students’ safety, a U of I alum voiced his concern about coeducational visitation and residence in a letter to university president David D. Henry. He stated that the university wasn’t being fair to its female students by forcing them to live in coed dorms, and that because of this, “Our daughters themselves are complaining that their privacy is denied them,” (Sacadat to President Henry 1969). This statement is in line with female students’ opinions of coedification: according to a survey conducted by the Housing Division on Coedification and Visitation (they established a special division just to gauge student’s perceptions of the new policies), 70% of female students responded yes to the question, “Would you prefer to live in a hall segregated by sex?” compared to 29% of men. Furthermore, 61% of women and only 18% of men responded yes to the question, “Do you think, in principle, the University should provide a residential area (House/Floor) in which NO visitation would be permitted?” (Satterlee to Strohkorb).

National Attitudes toward Gender

As stated earlier, visitation policies were voted on by each individual residence, and as a result many dorms decided not to make use of the full range of hours offered to them. The dorms that limited their visitation hours the most were the all-female ones. Of the fifty-one female units who reported, four chose not to have any coeducational visitation program, forty-four established visitation hours only during

allotted times on the weekends, and only three allowed weekday visitation. Of the residences that chose to allow visitation, none of them were for more than four hours a day, and they always ended at 5p.m., although there was one uniquely lenient hall that allowed visitation from nine to twelve forty-five a.m. on Saturdays (Peltason to Levy and Millet 1969). The men's halls, on the other hand, unanimously voted in favor for the full range of visitation hours, from noon to two a.m. on Friday and Saturday, and noon to midnight on all other days.

This raises the obvious question: why did the female students vote for restricted visitation hours? First, they were very clearly concerned about their safety, and legitimately so. Men had never been allowed to enter the women's halls before without special permissions, and the students living there were understandably concerned with the threat to personal security and privacy that male visitors posed. Second, the nature of sexuality and gender roles in the sixties, despite its apparent advancements, also motivated this fear. By 1968, the National Women's Organization (NWO) had been founded, the Civil Rights Act had been put into effect (which banned discrimination against women in employment), and pro-abortion sentiment had been growing preceding the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision in 1973. By all historical accounts, gender roles were being radically redefined in the public sphere. The fight for equal civil rights for all races, ethnicities, and genders carried out by the "baby boomer" generation had been active for at least a decade, which would lead one to think that women entering a public university in 1968 would be sensitive to these issues and desire greater freedoms for themselves as they became adults. What actually transpired, though, was that daughters internalized and retained the conservative definitions of gender roles instilled in them by their parents, friends, and peers upon entering college.

A survey conducted in 1976 by the University of Michigan asked its participants to rate themselves on a scale of one to seven, with a one indicating they completely agreed with the statement "men and women should have equal roles," and a seven indicating a complete agreement with the statement "women's place is in the home." The responses were then collected and used to rank white and black males and females as either "liberal," "neutral," or "conservative" depending on what numbers they chose. The results showed that white females were 26.3% conservative and 51.5% liberal on this issue, the most conservative and least liberal out of all of the groups surveyed. White males were the second least liberal group at 58.7%, and black males and females were the most liberal, holding identical

percentages at 63.4% (Mason, Oppenheim, and Czajka 1976). There are a few different factors that played a part in why white females clung to values of traditional gender roles more than their male counterparts, even after the height of the sexual revolution. According to French and Nock, these views depended on three different factors: whether or not the female was a housewife or a working woman (working women were more liberal), educated or uneducated (educated women were more liberal), and a blue-collar or a white-collar worker (white-collar female workers were more liberal) (French and Nock 1951). Before the revolutions of the sixties, one could imagine, the general population held on to traditional gender role beliefs more strongly, and consequently among working, educated, and white-collar women who sent their children to college.

Thus, it can safely be assumed that white women entering UIUC in 1968 (the vast majority of students were white at this time, although "Project 500" had tripled the amount of African American students that very year), whose parents were trained in more traditional beliefs when it came to gender roles, were inclined to side with their parent's views rather than the radical ideas that were vying to change the definitions of these roles. The parents of young adults of the late sixties were raised to believe in prevailing gender stereotypes, like the idea that women were more influenced by their emotions than logic, or that they were more interested in the frivolous and aesthetic aspects of life. As a result of their perceived emotional and materialistic nature, members of the generation preceding the baby boomers – the silent generation – largely believed that women were inherently intellectually inferior to men. What is most important in helping us understand the motives of our female UIUC students in the late sixties, however, is the fact that these ideas were endorsed by both men and women of the previous generation (Kitay 1940). These negative stereotypes of women were so prevalent, and so well-advocated by men, that many women had adopted and acted in accordance with them, or were at least discouraged from defying them for fear of being ostracized by society at-large.

Now, with the perspective of these new students' parents in mind (as well as the administration and alumni, who were also a part of the previous generation), we can more fully understand why these female students unanimously voted for strict visitation policies: they were just as concerned about their safety from male students as their college administrators, parents, and alumni were. Who could blame them? They were understandably afraid that the male students would take advantage of them if they were given such

unrestricted access to their residences. This is why the administration deliberated most about the central registration policy for the female dorms. One letter stated, “In addition, women’s residence halls are encouraged [it was later clarified that this was not optional] to develop a central hall registration system to provide better security for residents and their possessions and to make it possible to close the hall at an earlier time during the evening hours,” (The Office of Student Programs and Services to All Head Residents and Advisors 1969). These restrictive policies, influenced by traditional gender roles and voted into practice by the residents themselves, would not last forever.

The Master Plan

The influence of the sexual revolution that swept the country didn’t take exception to the campus in Champaign-Urbana, and its effects were felt directly through changes to university policy regarding gender. The SWCF, in association with multiple other student groups (MRHA, WISA, IDCC, and SHAC), crafted the Master Plan during the first semester of the 1969 school year. The plan was comprehensive: it laid out the details of flexible coedification for each hall on campus, described orientation and social programs to help students adjust to the new living arrangements, estimated the costs of necessary renovations, established added security measures, examined the plan in relation to others in the Midwest, and defined new coed hall student government structures. The Master Plan was submitted to then Director of Housing Arnold Strohkorb on February 23rd, 1970 (Satterlee to Rebecca 1970). Strohkorb had little influence on the plan, however, as he resigned only a month after its submission. His successor, Sammy Rebecca, handled the evaluation and revision of the plan in cooperation with the SWCF and SHAC.

After minor revisions – the Office of Student Housing’s main concern was producing an accurate cost analysis – Rebecca sent the plan to Dean of Students Hugh Satterlee on July 20th, who approved it and subsequently sent it to Chancellor Jack Peltason and President David Henry. After discussion, the Chancellor and the President agreed not to inform the Board of Trustees of the full cost and necessary tuition raises required to implement the plan: “In view of the Board’s interest in all matters touching upon student affairs, however, you may wish to consider the extent of the detail regarding physical modification the Board wish to be concerned with in considering this plan,” (Peltason to President Henry 1970). The plan was then sent to the Board of Trustees who formally accepted it at their meeting in

January 1971, allowing it to be implemented in the fall of the 1971 school year. The approval of the Master Plan even garnered coverage from the local Channel 3 News team; anchor Don Wilcox reported in a two-part piece about the creation of the plan, the struggle to get it past the Board, and the students’ refusal of in loco parentis policies (Wilcox to Rebecca 1971). The promise of increased competition with the apartment and off-campus housing markets and the belief that students would stay in the dorms longer ultimately convinced the Board to approve the plan. The Board’s only stipulation was that the plan establish more stringent security measures that were not specified in the original draft, such as locked doors between male and female sections of the dorms and locked stairwells to prevent non-students from entering buildings.

According to the Master Plan, each dorm chose if and in what way they would be coedified. All of the previously female dorms’ votes resulted in a decision to either go coed by wing (PAR-style) or to remain all female (most common). The male dorms’ votes resulted in a decision to either have a split-floor living plan (most common), a floor-by-floor living plan, or to remain all male (least common). A split floor plan meant that men and women lived on the same floor separated by a lounge area and locked doors, and a floor by floor plan meant alternating floors of male and female rooms. The female students voted for more strict gender segregation mainly due to privacy concerns. Sammy Rebecca was quoted in 1975 saying, “The students resisted going coed. It got a lot of negative reaction from the women. They were afraid that if guys moved in they would lose their privacy. The girls who live there [ISR] are happy with it [the split-wing coedification layout],” (Colander 1975). The trend of female halls remaining more segregated than the male halls would not last, however, as over time a majority of the all-female halls petitioned to coedify, some by wing and some by floor (Gehring 1972).

III. METHODOLOGY

I conducted the research for this paper mainly at the University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives. My main sources for information about coedification and coeducational visitation on campus came from the archives’ collections about these processes. These collections consisted mostly of correspondence between a variety of administrators, student groups, and alumni, but there were also documents like the Housing Reports from 1929-40 and the Coedification Master Plan. I also used the University of Illinois Library’s digital newspaper collection to locate Daily Illini articles related to

coedification. For a wider perspective and information about other campuses, I studied Chicago Tribune and national newspaper/magazine articles (like the Life article referenced in the title).

In terms of structure, I tried to strictly organize my paper by date for maximum readability, but I had to keep some themes together that overlapped with other themes' dates. For example, the "Student Groups and Ground-Up Change" section of this paper includes Housing Director Arnold Strohkorb's resignation even though it happened in 1970, and the next section, "Coeducational Visitation," begins in 1968. Some dates will overlap like this in the paper, but I felt that keeping themes together and breaking the consistency in date order improved readability in these instances.

IV. CONCLUSION

The coedification process at U of I and across the nation may not have been the "Intimate Revolution in Campus Life" claimed by the 1970 LIFE article that covered the process at Oberlin, but rather a more nuanced and gradual progression of gender integration. Differences perceived by the female and male students enforced a situation in which the men's dorms took no issue with integrating women, and the women's dorms most certainly did take issue with integrating men. Male students saw no reason to oppose coedification because female students weren't perceived as a threat. The female students, on the other hand, carried legitimate concerns about privacy and safety, as well as more complicated anxieties about the disruption of the types of traditional male-female interaction that their parents and society expected of them. However, fully coeducational dorms did not result in breaches of security or personal privacy, but rather a relaxed and diverse environment for students to live in. Pat Colander states, "Clark hall is one, big, happy family and—like most coed dorms—largely devoid of 'incest'," [emphasis added] (Colander 1975).

Looking at where we are today, the dorms at UIUC are just as diverse as they were in the sixties. Incoming freshmen can choose whether to live in single-sex or coed living arrangements, and the dorms are still widely varied in their forms of coed living. Students can live in coed-by-wing dorms in Barton and Lundgren, split-floor halls in LAR, PAR and many others (this is now the most common method of organization), or numerous all-female or all-male halls across campus. Looking ahead to the future, the new Wassaja hall will allow mixed-sex apartment-style suites at UIUC in fall 2016. Whether coedification takes the form of men and women living together in the same room, on the same floor,

or even just in the same building, it is important to understand how the students at U of I and at campuses across the nation in the late sixties and early seventies broke down barriers and fought for the students' right to choose whether or not they want to live coeducationally on campus.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Groups

MRHA: Men's Residence Hall Association
WISA: Women's Independent Student Association
SWCF: South West Campus Federation
IDCC: Inter-Dormitory Communication Council
SHAC: Student Housing Advisory Committee

Residences

PAR: Pennsylvania Avenue Residence Hall
LAR: Lincoln Avenue Residence Hall
ISR: Illinois Street Residence Hall