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“Freedom from Traditional Prejudice”: Lessons of Educational Equity at a State Normal School in the American West, 1890-1929

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"FREEDOM FROM TRADITIONAL PREJUDICE": LESSONS OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AT A STATE NORMAL SCHOOL IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1890-1929

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has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in Department of Leadership, Policy, and Development: Higher Education and P-12 Education, Program of Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership.

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ABSTRACT

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Despite accounting for a majority of college students in the United States, women fill a minority of professional leadership positions often associated with collegiate success. This suggests that educational access alone does not guarantee equitable societal outcomes after graduation, but rather remains shaped by a patriarchal social order. The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of educational experience on perceptions of social influence and opportunity by identifying the historical precedents for persistent issues of equity within higher education and potential solutions. This narrative case study is guided by three research questions:

Q1 How did institutional curriculum, policies, and procedures explicitly demonstrate expectations for women and gender, particularly in relation to power and opportunity?

Q2 How did social climate and experiences on campus and within the broader community implicitly shape understandings of opportunity for women students?

Q3 How can modern practitioners learn from and implement strategies for educational equity based on models that did, or perhaps did not, work in the past?

Utilizing archival records including administrative papers, student publications, and personal writings from a State normal school in the American West, this qualitative dissertation looks at student experiences at a traditionally women-majority space in the 19th and 20th centuries through an interpretivist, postmodern feminist lens. It finds that an emphasis on the pragmatic needs of local community over traditional societal expectations, combined with

innovative approaches to educational practice, fostered educational and professional opportunities for women that defied norms of the time. Understanding such strategies can assist contemporary higher education practitioners and policymakers to utilize similar approaches in order to foster a more equitable educational landscape for all students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Rush, signer of the American Declaration of Independence and Enlightenment thinker, saw education as key to the creation of a distinct national identity. By 1786, five years after independence, his ideas for regulating primary schools and influential literature on what a good, republican education should look like shaped an early national system, committed to the support of an educated democratic citizenry. In the summer of 1787, Rush turned his attention to the ladies –those of the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia, more specifically – and spoke to them about the honor and patriotic duty within *their* education. To fulfill these obligations, Rush stressed, necessitated knowing some math, enough content to be able to converse about geography, history, and travel, and enough familiarity with other subjects as befitted their virtuous natures. All these things prepared them for the truest duty of all: marriage, being good teachers and mothers to their children, and, he said, to be the "guardians of their husbands' property" (Nash, 1997; Rush, 1787).

More than two centuries after Rush spoke to those students in Philadelphia, the trajectory of women's[1] higher education in the United States remains something of a contradiction. A college degree is historically connected to ideas of social mobility and advancement, fundamentally linked with national identity and democratic participation, and promoted as key to the equalizing force of the American Dream (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2000; McKnight, 2003;

[1]This study defines the term "woman" as any person self- or institutionally identified as a woman in records or archival documents. Additional information is included in Chapter III.

Palmadessa, 2017; Thelin, 2004). On the surface, it appears that educational opportunity has exceeded even the wildest dreams of the first groups of college women, with enrollment data depicting a woman-student majority on campuses across the country. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), female-identified students account for 58 percent of enrolled undergraduates, and 61 percent of students pursuing postbaccalaureate degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). In fall of 2020, American women were the majority of degree holders at all levels and had been for more than a decade (Council of Graduate Schools, 2021). Yet statistics of women's roles in the professional sphere depict a different picture, one which suggests that enrollment alone may not equate to an equitable outcome. In contrast to the high number of women earning college degrees, they account for only 6.4 percent of CEOs in Fortune 500 companies (Catalyst, 2022), and 27 percent of those serving in Congress, arguably the highest position of representative power in the United States (Center for American Women in Politics, 2022).

This trend of imbalance exists among professionals in academia, as well. Women occupy primarily nonprofessional or part-time, no-benefits spots within departments, primarily in the liberal arts and social sciences fields (American Council on Education, 2017; Frances, 2017). Only 44 percent of tenure-track positions are held by women faculty, and that number declines the higher in rank you look (American Association of University Women, 2023). The people in the positions at the top of the academic ladder, particularly administrators and Boards of Trustees, and the perspectives that inform the decisions which impact faculty and student most remain predominantly male (American Association of University Women, 2023; American Council on Education, 2017). These disparities increase to even greater degrees once intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 2013) are considered. Why do women hold the majority of

college degrees

within the United States but a minority of positions which influence higher socioeconomic status? What role does higher education as a system play in perpetuating these realities, and when – and why- did they originate?

Research Problem

American higher education faces increasing public criticism over claims that it remains mired in traditional processes that no longer benefit most Americans. Education-related news seems dominated by headlines like “Is College Worth It?” in Forbes (Cooper, 2024), “Americans are Losing Faith in the Value of College” in the New York Times (Tough, 2023), or “Higher Education in the US Faces a Systemic Crisis” in Bloomberg (Wooldridge, 2023). The epicenter of the crisis tends to vary among its detractors, particularly along political lines as the cultural climate remains significantly divided, but there is always one commonality: a pervasive belief that higher education serves and prioritizes some groups over others. The truth is, American higher education was not designed to benefit all Americans; the primary goal of education was to maintain a citizenry of informed white, male voters (Palmadessa, 2017; Thelin, 2004). As illustrated by Rush in his 1787 speech in Philadelphia, a woman’s education was ultimately intended, and thus limited, to ensure she made a good wife to her husband.

Contemporary educational systems grew from this aim, and many Americans see one of two problems therein: either these structures, steeped in tradition, are unable to support any who do not meet those initial identity qualifications, or too many are trying to dismantle the systems it originally aimed to support. When evaluating outcome over access, it is apparent that historically marginalized groups categorized by gender, sexuality, race, and class seem to benefit less from college than white men. Using gender as a lens to represent the challenges that face many

intersectional identities including race and class, it is apparent that roughly half of the American population is at a disadvantage, in literal spaces in academia and in their perceptions of their places within it. In a society increasingly interested in equity, which this study connects to experience and opportunity, beyond basic equality in admissions numbers, this disparity seems counterintuitive to the declared mission of higher education. It warrants a better understanding of its foundations and asks if, because higher education remains an integral part of America's cultural fabric despite persistent challenges, models exist in which they've been successfully overcome.

Who Higher Education Serves

The debate about the efficacy of higher education is not new – it has ebbed and flowed, sure, but the truth is, people have questioned the value of college – and who it was meant to benefit – since its origins. Historian John Thelin (2004) outlined how the earliest American colleges – Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, and others – which grew from a call for domestic options for education, faced public criticism of institutional interest in only serving the sons of the social elite, even as programs and new schools diversified in the years that followed. The same was true for its overall purpose. Colleges initially arose as a means for training the clergy; each generation after the American Revolution pushed for a more practical purpose for higher education in tune with the economic needs of the growing nation. When combined with the continued inaccessibility for most Americans, this meant that criticisms of higher education always existed. Today's arguments for outcome-based programs and institutionalized equity are just modernized terms for the same concerns.

Long-standing gendered traditions continue to influence an inequitable reality for women that looks not all that different from the 18th-century system, one dictated by the policies and

practices of men. Looking at the disciplines of degrees conferred sharpens the picture of gendered difference even further, with women obtaining most doctoral degrees in fields of education and medical services, but the least in the subjects of math and physical sciences (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Such a drastic divergence in numbers suggests there is more than issues of access at play and leads to the question of what role higher education systems serve in perpetuating or dismantling a traditionally one-sided, patriarchal society. What contemporary ideas continue to encourage women to become nurses rather than doctors, or kindergarten teachers rather than chemical engineers? Studying higher education's past reveals explicit and implicit ways it has, and continues to, perpetuate a patriarchal social structure.

Explicit and Implicit Bias

Explicit bias occurs when certain characteristics or abilities are directly attributed to members of a specific social group (Hurford & Read, 2022). The most obvious examples of this include legislation or institutional policies which openly exclude certain people from activities or spaces, a practice which has become less prevalent in the last half-century; however, they are not a thing of the past, nor are the opinions that inform them. An unedited transcript of a conference speech given by then-President of Harvard Lawrence Summers published in the Harvard Crimson (2005) exemplifies this archaic gender ideology at even the highest rank in higher education. Conference organizers asked Summers to discuss why women remained the minority of tenured faculty and high-level professionals at research institutions within the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), in his keynote address. Summers began the speech with a statement that he found this topic to be neither "the most important problem or the most interesting problem" facing the field, on par with other discussions of the obvious, such as why "Catholics are substantially underrepresented in investment banking," and

"white men are substantially underrepresented in the National Basketball Association." He argued that the issue of concern was not connected to societal hierarchies or institutionalized discrimination, but rather to matters of nature substantiated by his calculations through pure, unbiased statistics.

Based on his "personal" research, Summers presented three main theories. The first, which he called the "high-powered job hypothesis," claimed that women were not in the higher-level positions in STEM fields because most understood the commitment required and preferred to save it for their future families. Thus, there existed a "general clash between people's legitimate family desires and employers' current desire for high power and high intensity." Summers said this explained why those at the top levels were predominantly men regardless of marital status, and a select few older, unmarried women – they married the job, and "expectation is meeting with the choices that people make."

His second theory pertained to a "variability of aptitude" as demonstrated in standardized testing among high school seniors. While he acknowledged reading research on how these tests were not always "a very good measure" of actual ability, he said numbers do not lie, and male students outscored female students in math and sciences five to one. This revealed the "unfortunate truth" that most women lacked "whatever the set of attributes are that are precisely defined to correlate with being an aeronautical engineer at MIT or being a chemist at Berkeley." Why did their IQ, like other qualifiers such as BMI and height, vary from that of men? Nature. Summers, a father of twin daughters, prided himself on not "socializing" his daughters through play or dress, and yet:

> I guess my experience with my two and a half year old [sic] twin daughters who were not given dolls and who were given trucks, and found themselves saying to each other, look,

> daddy truck is carrying the baby truck, tells me something. And I think it's just something that you probably have to recognize.

As further proof, Summers recounted his time in a kibbutz in Israel where, despite a requirement that all people do all types of work equally, the women almost exclusively preferred the days when they worked in the nurseries, whereas men felt most capable doing mechanical duties.

Although Summers is only one person, albeit a powerful one, in the world of higher education when he made these comments, they serve to illustrate not only a continued presence of explicit bias in academic circles, but also its widespread impact. Myriad outlets highlighted his comment, including the New York Times and NPR, and many people within and outside of higher education encountered his arguments. The authority of his position undoubtedly lent weight to his words for some. Furthermore, they continue to be discussed almost twenty years later, revisited any time he is interviewed or publishes works, typically prefaced with a tongue-in-cheek "no stranger to controversy" introduction (Coyne, 2024).

Summers's comments also demonstrate how socialization shapes discourse outside of the better-known influence of parent and child, and how these concepts continue to be distributed. Socialization through higher education, defined as "the process by which college students develop proclivities toward certain values, aspirations, and career and lifestyle choices" (Weidman et al., 2001) and discussed further in Chapter Two, goes a long way in maintaining existing systems through norms and pressures perceived by students and faculty. The influence carried by the "faces" of higher education -- advising, curriculum, faculty hired, and extracurricular opportunities –also show rather than tell what the "ideal" academic looks like (Fox, 2020).

Summers's current academic position provides another example: he still teaches economics as the Charles W. Eliot University Professor and Director of the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at Harvard. Of the thirty tenured professors within his program, six are women (Harvard, 2024); though the number of women receiving PhDs in STEM fields has increased to 40 percent since he shared his thoughts in 2005, the number of women faculty in STEM programs has consistently remained at or below 25 percent (American Physical Society, 2024; Fry et al., 2021; Gray, 2023; National Science Foundation, 2023). While earning a PhD suggests a certain aptitude among degree holders, regardless of identity, the ongoing lack of representation in the workplace suggests a continued belief in who is best suited for those jobs. As Summers himself argued, the numbers don't lie.

Outcome-Based versus "Traditional" Higher Education

Arguments about the purpose of higher education and how it is most beneficial are also historical in nature. Much like debates over who higher education should or should not serve, public opinion about what colleges should emphasize versus what they typically do are often at odds (Thelin, 2004). In its modern context, this divide centers on global trends toward a "knowledge economy" (Levine & Van Pelt, 2021) over one based on manual labor and production. Some supporters of traditional higher education assert that holding tight to the monolith that is the four-year "Great American University," with its curriculum emphasizing a liberal arts core and field-specific theory, is integral to preserving a democratic society (Thelin, 2004). Others contend that the educational system must reshape or perish, and the only way forward is expedited, often digital, outcome-based institutions focused on teaching career-specific skills and delivering a rapid-fire succession of tech-savvy professionals into the global economy (Levine & Van Pelt, 2021). These institutions are often private and tend to focus on the

needs of local communities by making the knowledge and skills they offer available at the opening of a laptop; the other side, often public state universities, maintains that their worth is justified through its prestigious history, based in revolutionary ideals, and committed to social mobility. Both claim to have cracked the code on the educational crisis, but without much in the way of concrete strategy beyond ousting the other as the root of the problem. I argue that the solution lies somewhat in the middle and the blueprint already exists.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of educational experience on perceptions of social influence and opportunity by identifying the historical precedents for persistent issues of equity within higher education and potential solutions. Through narrative case study, explained further in Chapter Three, my work examines the early history of the State Normal School of Colorado – a coeducational institution focused on training teachers – from its creation in 1889 through 1929 when it became a state college. Its goal is to better understand the connection between policies that challenge traditional norms, educational experiences of women, and resultant opportunities. It utilizes what John Thelin (2004) refers to as "vertical" and "horizontal history," (p. xx) which integrates the history of the development of higher education structures and its foundational values, the focus of Chapter Four, with the contemporary issues they continue to influence as a means for identifying potential strategies for change (see Chapter V). Through analysis of institutional records, public documents, and student and faculty publications, this study argues two essential ideas. First, policy makers at normal schools in the West made decisions based on local necessity and inspired by perceived freedoms from traditional societal expectations in the eastern United States. Second, those needs and beliefs,

which superseded cultural norms and even egalitarian ideologies, fostered innovative approaches to education that leveled a field traditionally restricted by gender.

Contemporary practitioners can learn much from the successes and failures of these institutions. The successes are evidenced in the educational and professional opportunities created for women on par with those that existed for men; the failures lay in the societal structures unchallenged, allowing for the perpetuation of class, gender, and racial hierarchies that still linger. This work aims to fill a gap in the scholarship of American education, which tends to promote its history as a matter of great pride and connected to its continued relevance, yet selects which versions to tell or to hide, partly due to a lack of institutional knowledge of what that history really looked like (Robertson & Zimmerman, 2017; Thelin, 2004; Zimmerman, 2022). The histories institutions do or do not tell, and how they can be weaponized toward one another, is as significant to understanding contemporary societal views as the factual history itself – so much as can really be told – and also influences current policy and practice. As educational scholar Jonathan Zimmerman (2020) wrote, “you can’t say that things will be better – or worse – unless you know something about what preceded us” (p. x). There needs to be an honest accounting of what higher education really looked like, valued, or created from its beginnings if its practitioners are to better understand the influence of the legacies of its past and identify solutions for its survival into the future.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Despite the challenges facing American higher education and the associated concern of scholars and practitioners for finding a solution, the field of the history of higher education is still small and in development. What exists often focuses on the origins of institutions and their ideals, while student experience and how that impacted educational success or failure is only beginning to receive attention. The following literature discusses the broad development of higher education, followed by the history of access for women, and how their experiences continue to influence socialized ideals of gender and identity.

Development of American Higher Education

Beginning in the late 19th century, as centennial celebrations approached, colleges and universities in the United States began to praise their storied pasts as beacons of grand democratic education dating back to the inception of the nation in 1776. In truth, the celebrated American "collegiate way," referenced by its founders as a means for social mobility not based in class like its predecessors, was a European creation; colonial colleges were extensions of British systems, with later curricular developments pulled from Germanic models (Thelin, 2004). The American model emerged later as the nation expanded its borders and its populations demanded preparation for futures more aligned with their regional realities.

Early colleges were not grand at all. They typically promoted local religious or philanthropic missions, invested in either the creation "good" Christians or to "civilize" non-English populations in the area with little interest in civics – often times the two overlapped in

the same institutional mission. Schools were small and catered to a very local student body; instructors were paid less than a typical artisan salary and their position carried very little intellectual or societal prestige. Only Presidents made a livable salary, partly because it included a house and grazing rights for their livestock in college yards (Geiger, 2016; Thelin, 2004). Early curriculum was fluid and generalized, as a reliable primary and secondary school system did not yet exist, which required that many college students focus on "catch up lessons" to address basic literacy rather than research or high-level academics (Thelin, 2004). Art and athletics had no place on campuses, and an educated-sounding populace, one which could recite the classics if not analyze them, was more the priority than one made of independent thinkers (Thelin, 2004).

The history of higher education is a growing field, with relatively niche scholarship focused explicitly on a comprehensive overview. An example of this includes work by Christopher Lucas (2006), who outlines major themes in brief sections, painting the challenges which chronically impact education in broad strokes. John Thelin's 2004 work *The History of American Higher Education* is the preeminent account by a historian of how higher education developed in the United States and its social impacts. Thelin builds on the work of Hoftstadter and Smith (1961), whose documentary history emphasized the institutional and intellectual origins of American higher education, by adding more diverse social groups and issues into the narrative. Thelin also aims to dispel some of the inaccuracies in the histories told by higher education institutions, as well as challenge claims that contemporary issues facing education are new or without precedent. In 2020, the Core Concepts in Higher Education textbook series, which targets new professionals in fields of higher education and student affairs, released *A People's History of American Higher Education*, a collection of essays that connect struggles faced by contemporary students relating to diversity and inclusion to their past precedents. The

most work on the development of higher education in America is a smaller part of much larger social and cultural histories of the United States (see: Lepore, 2018; Zinn, 2003).

Educational scholars argue that despite assertions to the contrary, college attendance was never particularly democratic (Goodchild & Wrobel, 2014; Robertson & Zimmerman, 2017; Thelin, 2004). College students in early American societies were an extreme minority; they accounted for less than one percent of the population, and few stayed longer than one or two years. Even though most did not obtain an official degree, attendance itself was a sign of class, with students listed by family rank rather than alphabetically. The gowns or robes worn by students on campus varied in color and length based on socioeconomic status (Thelin, 2004). Campuses worked to foster interest among students in republicanism and political savvy, and the connections between class and attendance led to a connection between the sons of wealthy merchants and politicians and the future leadership of the developing nation (Palmadessa, 2017; Thelin, 2004).

Though there were a few scholarship opportunities for young men from lower-class families, their labor typically couldn't be spared from the farm. Small local colleges offered an option for a younger son who would not stand to inherit the farm but could pursue work in the ministry or teaching, while older sons were expected to focus on the family business. The ideal student body was white and male; women and People of Color were excluded by practice if not by statute. Universities like Yale sometimes allowed women to take the entrance exam and receive a certificate in acknowledgement that she scored high enough to be admitted, if she was a man (Thelin, 2004).

American Higher Education really started to look distinct from its British roots only when the population pushed westward, and livelihoods diversified. Every locale had different

needs, and the colleges and universities created programs and ways of survival to answer them. New programs and "useful arts" (Thelin, 2004, p. 58) were added frequently to accommodate new trends and student interests, based in the white-European cultural norms that shaped them. "Booster Colleges" became common in newly claimed territories as founders and businessmen pushed for schools in their towns and fostered a connection between colleges, consumerism, and colonization (Thelin, 2004; Zinn, 2003). Higher education remained a state issue rather than a national endeavor, with the exception of military academies like West Point in 1802 and the Naval Academy in 1843. Academies, seminaries, science institutions, and Normal schools developed to accommodate specific communities and vocational needs, though much professional training was still gained through apprenticeship after completing coursework. For most people, individual merit was more highly valued than the degrees themselves. Only after the American Civil War did an interest in the professionalization of higher education begin to take shape. Buildings became grander – monuments to the elevated American mind – and presidents became more prominent figureheads of the mission of the university. Professors, once qualified by only some college-level education of their own, became experts in their fields, published their work, joined national associations, and pushed for protection for their academic rights that kept them and their work immune from the will of administrators and governments (Thelin, 2004). These broad histories illustrate that the great American university is more modern than historical, challenging many existing narratives.

Standardized Education and Teacher Training

As American interest in more standardized education spread, so did an interest in formal training for teachers. The longstanding societal view on teacher preparation was if you completed some college-level work in a subject area, you were an expert, and as an expert you

could teach it to others (Ogren, 2013; Thelin, 2004). Yet the new theories about the science of education developed in Prussia and other parts of Europe began to spread to American colleges, and some administrators pushed for change in how the profession of teaching should be taught (Ogren, 2013; Zimmerman, 2020). This culminated in a demand for schools dedicated to training teachers. These teaching colleges –typically called Normal schools in the 19th century –usually offered certifications or licenses rather than bachelor's degrees, though these options expanded over time (Ogren, 2005; Thelin, 2004).

Normal schools opened opportunity to more diverse student bodies, particularly along class and gender lines, while racial diversity was slower to develop (Havira, 1995; Ogren, 2005). Not all were coeducational, though. Some remained open only to men, particularly in the eastern United States, with states offering incentives to students who promised to teach in primary schools after graduation, in hopes it would attract interest in a profession traditionally seen as the realm of women (Thelin, 2004). Scholarship on normal schools specifically is limited, and typically focuses on the midwestern states. Christine Ogren (2005) documents the history of normal schools across the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries, focusing on the appeal of obtaining middle class status through employment they offered to their lower-class students, particularly men. Ogren accounts for general gender dynamics, specifically in relation to sports and in-town activities female students participated in and the segregation of genders at certain school events.

Scholars of women's education in America overwhelmingly argue that Victorian expectations for women followed them to school, and as a result many women saw their opportunity in finding social mobility as connected to their husbands rather than through independence, or possible only through the perpetuation of behaviors and interests deemed

socially acceptable. These scholars do not provide as much analysis on what motivated the women to come to the schools in the first place, their nuanced experiences while there, or professional paths followed after graduation (Havira, 1995; Ogren, 2005). This is a key way my work differs from most of the existing scholarship. I focus on how women at normal schools conceptualized their experiences, expectations, and opportunities in these unique realms of coeducation when concepts of what American higher education as a national endeavor looked like were still developing. I argue that these things together allowed for those women to push beyond existing social boundaries in many ways.

Education and American Identity

Scholarship also identifies a historical connection between access to higher education and concepts of American national and social identity. The Puritanical roots of education in America evolved into an Anglo-Protestant, middle class ideology that promoted education as a means for social stability through cultural and linguistic hegemony (Hoftstadter & Smith, 1961; Hutcheson, 2020; McKnight, 2003; Palmadessa, 2017). These concepts were spread through popular media ranging from advertisements to songs, emphasizing the white, male collegiate ideal – a self-made man from humble beginnings benefiting from the American Dream (Robertson & Zimmerman, 2017; Thelin, 2004; Zinn, 2003). This translated into a society influenced by modernizing northeastern values but "still insecure enough to feel threatened by socially disruptive forces (the matter in need of controlling) prevalent in the late 19th century – industrialization, immigration, and urbanization" (McKnight, 2003). For the nouveau riche families of the Gilded Age, sending their children to school with the children of the longstanding elite offered an opportunity toward increasing social standing and socioeconomic mobility that money alone did not offer (Thelin, 2004; Zinn, 2003).

Ideas of morality remained front and center, and federal interest in higher education grew alongside endeavors to escalate national pride and civic participation (Hutcheson, 2020; Palmadessa, 2017; Robertson & Zimmerman, 2017). During World War I, for example, many schools became training campuses for the Student Army Training Corps (SATC) in an effort to combat potential declines in enrollment. This further linked national interests in education to national service and pride, a trend that continues to influence higher educational policies (Palmadessa, 2017; Thelin, 2004). Scholarship into the 21st century increasingly emphasizes minority experiences and how an integral element of higher education as part of American identity hinged on concepts of whiteness (Hutcheson, 2020). Racial segregation was law in the South following the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era, and accepted practice in the North. As immigration increased, there was also a simultaneous interest in using educational access to maintain racial purity, and religious and ethnic identities played a part in determining who could attend which institutions (Thelin, 2004; Zinn, 2003).

For recent immigrants, education for their children offered hope for social mobility not accessible through work opportunities alone; however, the lessons they received often remained limited to concepts of "Americanization" and loss of ancestral culture (; Palmadessa, 2017; Robertson & Zimmerman, 2017; Thelin, 2004; Zinn, 2003). This practice of using educational access to produce a homogenous American identity defined by its white creators evolved from methods used for the forced assimilation of Native Americans, and even with the resultant educational access, most Native Americans and children of immigrant families did not have the option to attend college (Hutcheson, 2020). Education as a means for "Americanizing" others was as much about exclusion as acceptance; Native Americans were explicitly excluded from

higher education, and immigrant children often stayed in school only until they reached an age where they could enter the work force, a more advantageous option for their families (Belew & Rury, 2022). The legacies of the foundational connection between higher education ideology and whiteness continue to shape contemporary issues facing institutions in America.

Higher Education and the American West

American Higher Education developed in tandem with the West itself, as the nation's borders expanded alongside demands for the development of more colleges and universities. Motivated by desires to educate their own children and bring more people – and capital – to the region, boosters, businessmen, and evangelists pushed for higher education institutions in their western territories (Goodchild & Wrobel, 2014). The book *Higher Education in the American West* (Goodchild & Wrobel, 2014) discusses the broad history of the development of higher education systems in the trans-Mississippi West from 1818 to 1945 and declares that it is the "first regional history of western higher education in the United States" (p. 4). That is not an overzealous assertion, as little scholarship exists on higher education in the American West, particularly the Mountain West. Goodchild and Wrobel (2014) define the West as the fifteen states that make up the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), established in 1951: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. A significant portion of their work focuses on the Pacific states of California, Oregon, and Washington; my study speaks to a gap in the literature by focusing on the less-studied Mountain West communities in Colorado, whose development mirrored that of most states within the region.

Historians argue that the history of Western higher education reflects the legacies of the conquest of lands and cultures within the geographic region of the West by Euro-Americans who

created their own “western” culture, often through education. The major trails that served as highways bringing people westward also spread educational values, with schools taking shape often before other infrastructure, and those schools were predominantly open only to the new arrivals to the area, not those already living there (Goodchild & Wrobel, 2014; Limerick, 2014; Radke-Moss, 2008; Thelin, 2004). To many of the planners pushing for settlement, a college or university was seen as a herald of civilization, on par with a prison and a capitol building. Churches and boosters alike saw opportunity in offering education to its future citizens, and as an opportunity to “civilize” Native American and Mexican American people who historically called the region home. Some territories chartered official universities before they were even a state, and once statehood was achieved, most states wrote higher education provisions into their constitutions (Cohen, 2014).

Historians also connect the development of the West to the expansion of federal involvement, particularly with higher education after the Civil War. The war itself paused most educational interests and opportunities, especially in the South. In an effort to foster continued investment in education and to encourage westward movement, Congress passed legislation aimed at higher education specifically. The Morill Land Grant Act of 1862 heralded the beginning of a democratic educational system in the United States, and fundamental in the expansion of the West (Geiger, 2016; Goodchild, 2014; Palmadessa, 2017). The act provided incentives for each state to sell lands allotted to them based on the number of congressional representatives and use the proceeds for creating instructional programs in areas useful to the development of the nation, specifically agriculture, mechanics, military sciences, and mining, fields viewed as vital to the continued growth and support of the nation (Radke-Moss, 2008; Thelin, 2004; Zinn, 2003).

Due to their nationwide prominence and role in expanding federal control of higher education, significant scholarship exists on these institutions (Geiger, 2016; Radke-Moss, 2008; Stein, 2017). Many of these land grant institutions were celebrated for their role in diversifying educational access across race and gender, particularly in the West (Franklin et al., 2019; Radke-Moss, 2008). The focus of these new land grant institutions kept them in close connection with the Departments of Agriculture, the Interior, and War, which in turn kept the government in close

connection with the West (Palmadessa, 2017). As a result, state systems of higher education continue to be connected with political reform ideology and national interests (Palmadessa, 2017).

Just as the ideal of social mobility through college education did not necessarily translate to reality, many of the perceived opportunities offered by the West were exaggerated, if not entirely imagined. Even in coeducational institutions, the curriculum and life after admission tended to remain separated by gender, with women students and faculty left out of many events and spaces, despite paying the same fees as men; in many cases, the women had to create their own organizations, such as the Association of American University Women in 1881, which had membership over 2,000 by 1900 (Thelin, 2004). The second Morill Land Grant Act in 1890 gave state institutions funding for better facilities, personnel, and research projects, and opened the doors to more diversity, particularly African American institutions not eligible for funding in 1862, but it did not establish requirements for tangible action toward these changes (Geiger, 2016; Thelin, 2004).

The idea of the West itself is a paradox explored by scholars who often argue that the societies that developed in the western regions of the United States were hardened versions of

their eastern predecessors, not the opposite (Cohen, 2014; Limerick, 1996, 2014). They contend that education in the West was an imitation of what already existed (Cohen, 2014; Limerick, 2014); however, some acknowledge that its innovations to accommodate a drastically different landscape made it unique (Limerick, 2014), and the solutions to these new problems – governance, access, housing, funding, etc. – actually seem to support that contemporary higher education found its footing in the West. My work aligns most with this perspective and fills a gap in western scholarship by exploring the ways that people's *belief* in the opportunity offered in the West was enough to promote significant innovation, even if some realities in the West were not what pioneers imagined.

Women in American Higher Education

The history of women's higher education in America tends to focus on the ways in which ideologies of what constituted "appropriate" womanhood, including the degree of access to education, were dictated by those of men in power. Like all fields of history, the existing scholarship also reflects the stages of change in women's rights and gender paradigms over time. Scholars of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s worked to identify women in historical eras and spaces previously dominated by men. Linda Kerber looked at expanded educational opportunities for women following the American Revolution, as the patriotic duty of women required educated enough to raise good citizen-sons as Republican Mothers (Kerber, 1976). Additional works looked at the legacies of the Victorian Era in the 19th century, when expectations for women followed the ideology known to historians as the Cult of True Womanhood (Welter, 1966), in which "good" women were pious, pure, domestic, and submissive (Cogan, 1989; Norton, 1980; Welter, 1966). Thus, even as educational opportunities for women increased, they were always linked to concepts of domesticity.

In line with feminist paradigms of the Civil Rights era, scholarship from this period highlighted the ways that archaic patriarchal values shaped and limited educational opportunity for women. What 'lady'-appropriate education looked like or where it took place was not standardized, though it would typically occur within their homes or in women-only institutions and curriculum tended toward topics believed to support what male administrators viewed as the delicate realities of female mind and body (Howe, 1977). Scholarship from this era also emphasized that as opportunity and enrollment numbers grew, so did social resistance against the presence of women outside the home; in the latter portion of the 19th century, scientific theories emerged suggesting that exposure to too much intellectual activity would lead to mental illness (Cogan, 1989; Horowitz, 2008; May, 2008), and could potentially prevent them from reaching the most important role of womanhood: wife and mother. These messages sanctioned by higher education professionals further influenced societal perspectives of women's education.

The role of coeducational institutions in perpetuating these gender roles through programs and campus experiences remains a consistent theme in academic scholarship. In her book *In the Company of Educated Women,* Barbara Miller Solomon (1985) tracked the evolutions of access to higher education for women from the Revolutionary Era through 1980. Solomon argued that the definition of what good education for women looked like was directly influenced by the expectations of women more broadly. As women continued to attend in greater numbers, institutions made the effort to modify their curricular and extracurricular activities in order to maintain the assertion that women's usefulness to society did not exist in the professional field (Solomon, 1985). This influenced the restriction of female participation in professional development activities, and shaped modern liberal arts curricula. Universities began

to emphasize disciplines like English and literature – subjects considered to be appropriately feminine – for women students, while programs in law and the sciences were reserved for men (Cogan, 1989; Solomon, 1985).

Even women who obtained doctoral degrees, a phenomenon that increased following World War Two, did so with the understanding that the use of their degree would be limited, and that their husbands' careers, even if in the same field, took precedence over their own (Eisenmann, 2016; Peril, 2006). Solomon concluded that it was ultimately the expansion of public institutions that allowed women more opportunity to attend higher education in the latter part of the twentieth century, yet the gendered expectations of program choice and post-collegiate occupations remained consistent. Higher education institutions perpetuated these expectations through the opportunities for women as academic professionals, as well.

The education of women after World War Two has often been the basis for works that juxtapose increasing opportunity with stagnant gendered expectations for women, particularly the move toward coeducation among American Ivy League institutions like Harvard and Princeton in the 1960s. In the face of civil rights movements and concerns about competition, the Ivys opened their doors to women, though their facilities and programs often remained separated by gender (Howe, 1977; Malkiel, 2016). The experiences of college women in this era were not about academic opportunity. Babette Faehmel (2011) explained that the expectation of the post-war coed was not about excelling in classes so much as being "a fun-loving young thing who did not have to work for a living and who enjoyed the extracurricular and social offerings of campus life alongside college men" (p. 135). It wasn't a matter of intellectual enlightenment; she was there to find a husband – at least according to administrators and often her parents (Faehmel & Project Muse, 2011; Friedan, 1964; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990).

Faehmel's research showed that women attending college often had their own expectations of what their education offered; correspondence revealed that their goals for after college turned toward professional aspirations the longer they attended (Faehmel & Project Muse, 2011, p. 150-160). Still, the societal expectations expressed to them through gendered opportunities on campus often led to the outcome that their families and educators had originally encouraged (Eisenmann, 2016; Faehmel & Project Muse, 2011; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990). Even in coeducational normal schools, where women attended with the expectation they would join the work force upon completion, they still did so under the general expectation that they remain unmarried and work only for a few years until they became a wife and mother (Ogren, 2005, 2013).

Scholarship in the latter part of the 20th century shifted the focus away from the ways that higher education was used to oppress women within social hierarchies and looked at how women negotiated existing gender norms to create opportunity, building on Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's (1975, 1985) earlier works about expectations and realities for women in the "private spheres" of Victorian America. Women's academies and seminaries, created to provide a place for women to pursue practical education while protecting them from the studies – and poor manners – of men, became increasingly popular after 1800 (Thelin, 2004). Early goals included some exposure to the classics while maintaining an appropriately moral and domestic agenda, but these spaces rapidly evolved into protected environments where women could pursue and receive an education on par with male students at other institutions (Kelley, 2006; Turpin, 2016; Welch & Ruelas, 2015). The influence of these experiences went beyond the borders of an "Adamless Eden," (Thelin, 2004) where the absence of men would simply represent a temporary break from tradition. Mary Kelley's (2006) work on seminaries in the Early Republic (1790-1820) identified

not only the pride women felt about the social opportunities offered through education at these institutions but also the "cultural capital" gained through learning to articulate and organize efforts toward equality in other arenas, like voting, which did not go away once women finished their education.

A consistent theme in the literature of societal expectations for women, past and present, and their place in higher education centers on concepts of motherhood. Earlier concerns surrounding female participation in higher education vocalized a fear of vulnerability to over exertion and, even worse, resultant infertility. Critics and administrators pushed this theory even as the alleged science behind it was disproved; the declining birth rate in America at the end of the 19th century provided evidence rather than an accounting of evolving goals of women (Cogan, 1989; Matthews, 2003). President Theodore Roosevelt once railed against the risks of "race suicide" (Miller-Bernal, 2000) presented by the number of women attending college. These perspectives didn't change over time. Women with college degrees have historically had to find ways to use them that didn't threaten their responsibilities as mothers. Even after the 1964 publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique,* celebrated as a great moment toward equal opportunity, women who chose to work continued to fill lower-level positions or part-time academic spots at institutions where their husbands worked full time, some perhaps out of choice but many as a result of persistent traditional hiring practices (Eisenmann, 2016).

Women as Higher Education Professionals

Geraldine Joncich Clifford's 1989 book *Lone Voyagers: Academic Women in Coeducational Institutions, 1870-1937* analyzed personal accounts of women faculty and how discrimination and separate spaces on campus limited women's opportunities, even with their own students. Studies also highlighted that while the number of women employed by universities

has increased since the 1980s, women faculty and administrators remain the minority, and the pay gap between male and female colleagues increased over time (Frances, 2017). The presence of women faculty has grown over the last twenty years, but those numbers become smaller the higher in rank a person looks, and pay discrepancies remain (Frances, 2017).

Women in academia serve an important role in how women students perceive their opportunities and place within higher education, as well, and in some cases promote socialization toward patriarchal expectations in academia themselves (Fox, 2020). In her study of twelve female-identified doctoral students, Anna Fox (2020) determined that even in woman-majority departments, women advisors instilled in their advisees the idea that women academics could only be successful in their professional life or their family life, not both. Her participants recounted multiple occasions when their advisors told them the worst thing possible for their academic future was to get pregnant (p. 220). Whether as students or faculty, socialization and expectations of motherhood can lead women to embrace what Fox termed the "academic patriarchy" (p. 1), and in turn pass those ideals on to their students. While one could argue that this represents an effort by advisors to highlight the truth for their students, the fact that women students are told this but marriage and parenthood for men is not typically referenced as an end to their careers, illustrates the role that even women professionals can play in perpetuating gendered expectations.

Intersectionality and Women's Experiences

Understanding the experiences of women in higher education settings and society is incomplete without consideration of issues of class and race. A rapidly growing area of scholarship within this broader topic is the experience of women with intersecting identities. Kimberlé Crenshaw (2013) presented the concept of intersectionality in an effort to push back

against the tendency to treat gender and race as two separate, unconnected identities. Crenshaw wanted to center the voices of Black women and legitimize their intersecting identities in the eyes of the law. The idea of intersectional identity spread into multiple fields soon after, informing many critical theories, including Critical Race Theory. Still, many scholars – even those who use the theory of intersectionality in their own work – do not incorporate the perspectives of Women of Color. An interesting trend I noticed in the scholarship focused on women in higher education is that many works that investigate the history of female access to education in the United States, participation in STEM programs, and representation in faculty focus on white women and rely heavily on available historical resources and statistics, while studies that center on women of additional marginalized identities often emphasize their experiences and are written by scholars who hold those identities. This is another theme that suggests higher education's culpability in further marginalizing voices by focusing only on one portion of a population (white women).

Many early feminist movements struggled with this historically, something contemporary feminist scholars work to address (Ahmed, 2017; hooks, 2015). Contemporary studies centering the voices of Women of Color draw attention to myriad ways that their opportunities are hindered by factors that extend beyond only their gender, including forced instances of othering, like having to identify ethnicity as well as gender, and the experience of being not only the first in their family to obtain a degree but also the only one in their academic departments that holds their identity (Moffitt et al., 2012; Shields, 2012). It is vital that the voices of these women be central to the understanding of their experiences, and it is problematic that a significant portion of academic work about women in higher education is silent on this perspective.

“Feminization” of Education

Another significant theme consistently presented in scholarship concentrating on gender disparities in higher education is a focus on the “boy problem” – a term used to refer to the declining enrollment of male students and what that may mean for the future of American education and society (Diprete & Buchmann, 2013; Stoet & Geary, 2020). Stoet and Geary (2020) at the University of Essex conducted a study investigating the gender gap among students in higher education institutions in multiple countries. In 2017, there were 2.4 million fewer men than women pursuing postsecondary education in the United States (Stoet & Geary, 2020), a significant shift since the 1990s. Stoet and Geary present three theories to explain this shift: a change in social attitudes toward the education of women, stable reading achievements among women, and poor reading achievements among men. Though male reading scores have consistently been lower than those of their female peers, it is the interplay of these reading scores and social attitudes that define attendance in higher education.

The study ultimately concluded that nations that had “less discriminatory attitudes” (Stoet & Geary, p. 14074) toward women’s education and where female students performed well in reading had a female majority among higher education students. Sociological research presented in an earlier study by Diprete and Buchmann (2013) supported this assertion, tying academic success in early education to eventual interest in pursuing higher education. On deeper analysis, a connection also emerged between boys’ attitudes toward academics and higher education and the education level of their fathers, in turn carrying an influence on ideas of masculinity and the perpetuation of class status across generations (Diprete & Buchmann, 2013).

Some elements of the studies that focus on the declining male enrollment in higher education approach the topic as almost a crisis, despite the fact that statistics also demonstrated

that while women do make up the majority of enrolled students at the undergraduate and postbaccalaureate level, there is still growth in the numbers for male students enrolled, particularly in STEM fields (D. G. D. G. Smith, 2017). The study by Stoet and Geary (2020) relied primarily on statistical models as evidence, but the researchers also reflected on other causes they believed to be factors behind the decline in male enrollment that couldn't be quantified. Their most substantial assertion was that "schools are less accommodating for boys than girls, in part because the school environment is a better match to the behaviors and attitudes of girls than boys" (Stoet & Geary, p. 14075). To support this claim, they cited a twenty-year-old study by the National Center for Educational Statistics but did not enunciate the reasoning behind it. They further explained that boys are inherently more inclined to "visuospatial and mechanical reasoning" (Stoet & Geary, p. 14075), making boys more adept at physical sciences and engineering than girls, who are more inclined toward reading competencies. There was no supporting evidence – contemporary or out of date – included that spoke to this claim.

This stance is illustrative of two key, problematic issues: a social and cultural stereotype that males are naturally "better" at the sciences and engineering fields than females, and the ways in which academia perpetuates such stereotypes which clearly align with patriarchal values. Depicting declining male enrollment as a "crisis" even as enrollment numbers as a whole are holding steady or on the rise, suggests that those who are attending college – women – are not the ideal student. These stereotypes are also a risk to equitable career paths. Studies show that these ways of thinking are in place in children's minds as early as age six, perpetuated through gendered activities based on assumptions that girls will be more inclined to storytelling exercises and boys to robotics and programming (Master et al., 2017). To see similar expectations

expressed in scholarly work is problematic, and demonstrative of the ways that higher education professionals can do damage through lack of social and self-awareness.

Concern about this "risk" to male students is not a new phenomenon, and it has often been connected to a larger worry about the "feminization" of higher education due to increased female enrollment (Solomon, 1985). As women joined more higher education institutions in the United States after the Civil War, concerns arose in the late 19th century that increasing female presence in higher education was driving men out (Matthews, 2003). Some institutions aimed to address this by offering professional options like law, engineering, and medicine to men only, while continuing to push women toward studies in "new" areas like home economics – sometimes called "sanitary" or "domestic" sciences (Matthews, 2003). Women who did find space in science and medicine programs were in the minority, and they faced continued gender-segregation in the professional field after graduation (Eisenmann, 2016; Matthews, 2003).

Many of these gendered lines remain. 2002 marked the first year that women surpassed men in number of doctoral degrees awarded in the United States (May, 2008). Documented social thought, like that discussed in Chapter I, shows the perpetuation of early theories, including ideas that women are not "prone" to scientific or mathematical thinking, or that they will default to "opting out" of positions of power or leadership due to conflicting demands with their roles in the home (May, 2008). According to this logic, those influences make women more inclined to care-taking fields like nursing and early education (Eisenmann, 2016; Ogren, 2005, 2013; Peril, 2006; Thelin, 2004).

The prominent social expectation of women as caretakers and educators in the home made their place in working with children largely acceptable at a time when the demand for teachers was on the rise; however, restrictions of female participation remained, including the

expectations that they be unmarried and work as teachers for younger students, not as high school teachers or school administrators (Ogren, 2005, 2013). The legacies of these gendered expectations remain in many of the themes outlined so far in this study. Despite earning more master's and doctoral degrees, women account for less than half of senior leadership positions in college administrations, and the number of women college presidents –always the minority – has been on the decline (American Council on Education, 2017; D. G. Smith, 2017). Even with statistical evidence to support that men maintain the majority in the math, sciences, and engineering programs – fields known to be particularly lucrative career paths – the socialized concern about higher education becoming too feminine persists (Eisenmann, 2016; Frances, 2017; Miller-Bernal, 2000; D. G. Smith, 2017).

This study aims to understand how on-campus experiences and educational opportunities for women influence the quality of education received, as well as resultant professional opportunities, as a means for addressing issues of educational equity. I approach the issue by looking at the experiences of women students and faculty at a state normal school in the American West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My work builds on the existing literature of women in American higher education and addresses two significant gaps: the influence of place and community needs on educational practice, and how equitable experiences in school and work opportunities can defy, rather than perpetuate, traditional patriarchal social hierarchies. In Chapter III, I explain in greater detail how I designed this case study in answer to these concepts.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I detail the structure of my narrative historical case study. The purpose of this study was to understand the influence of educational experience on perceptions of social influence and opportunity by identifying the historical precedents for persistent issues of equity within higher education and potential solutions. As discussed in Chapter I, this work defined woman as anyone identified as such in institutional records and personal writings. It used the term within the context of a specific social group rather than related to sex assigned at birth and acknowledged that gender is an evolving construct that means different things to different people (American Psychological Association, 2021; Butler, 1990; Colebrook, 2004; Donaghy & Sellberg, 2018; Dzuback, 2003).

Defining Womanhood

Gender is an evolving social construct shaped by culture and time, not always by sex assigned at birth (Butler, 1990; Colebrook, 2004; Donaghy & Sellberg, 2018; Dzuback, 2003). My work uses the term woman to include any individuals identified as women in institutional records and independent writings. Because I am referring to the students and faculty within this study as a social group, I use woman and gender within the same context, apart from possible connections to sex assigned at birth (American Psychological Association, 2021). What womanhood meant to each individual within this study undoubtedly varied. Historical research can present methodological challenges as it is bound to the records available and the social expectations of the period; past American societies almost always intertwined concepts of being

a woman with sex assigned at birth. As a result, when combined with social pressures, many felt limited in their self-expression of gender identity, even within personal records. For scholars, this can lead to reliance on generalized binaries when studying groups in the past. It is my goal to present an analysis of experiences of the women studied that is as inclusive and individually specific as possible, pushing against binaries, when possible, with acknowledgement toward the cultural and social values of the time period of interest and the correlating limitations of the historical record.

Research Questions

Q1 How did institutional curriculum, policies, and procedures explicitly demonstrate expectations for women and gender, particularly in relation to power and opportunity?

Q2 How did social climate and experiences on campus and within the broader community implicitly shape understandings of opportunity for women students?

Q3 How can modern practitioners learn from and implement strategies for educational equity based on models that did, or perhaps did not, work in the past?

Research Paradigm

This study utilized a qualitative research paradigm, which centered on lived experiences and individual identities to "illuminate and understand, in-depth, the richness in the lives of human beings and the world in which we live" (Jones et al., 2014). While statistical data is useful in supporting this research, a quantitative study emphasizes trends over understanding, which would not allow for the deeper connections between experiences and outcomes that informed my work. How the women within the study setting perceived their opportunities due to their experiences was a vital element to being able to answer the outlined research questions, and thus justified a qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Epistemological Stance

My study used an interpretivist epistemology, with an interest in understanding and interpreting societies in the past and their continued legacies on educational practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interpretivism holds that social understanding is produced through "meaningful interpretations" (Pascale, 2011) shaped by how people perceive the world around them, rather than strict fact (Jones et al., 2014). Ultimately, knowledge comes from "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 2003), meaning that both researchers and their subjects are shaped by the world around them rather than a singular, objective reality.

My world view is informed by the integration of postmodernism, a belief that there are no absolutes in research, and pragmatism, the idea that multiple methods of analysis can be used to identify core trends and to identify what research can – and cannot – ultimately accomplish. This stance is referred to by some historians as "Practical Realism" (Appleby et al., 1994; Zammito, 2008). While there are basic historical facts that can be verified to help construct a broad narrative, there is no capital 'T' truth – the past is not empirical fact, and its influence is not separated from the present (Appleby et al., 1994; Donaghy & Sellberg, 2018). Our understanding of the world around us and what came before is the product of linguistic, discursive constructions that dictate social power which are shaped by the perspectives and interpretations of those who lived it, as well as of those who study it in the present. These systems of power determine not only whose success is prioritized but also how knowledge is generated (Foucault, 1980; Partner & Foot, 2013; Southgate, 2003).

Theoretical Perspective

My work is supported by multiple theories, specifically those which inform critical hermeneutics and feminist historiography, which together ensure rigor and trustworthiness through the use of different perspectives and ways of thinking (Denzin, 2009). Hermeneutics is the theory of interpreting the meaning of an object, specifically text, to gain social understanding (Crotty, 2003; Schwandt, 2015). Critical hermeneutics, sometimes referred to as depth hermeneutics, builds on that foundation by also critiquing the meanings of what is written through an understanding of contextual influences on the writer(s) and promoting transformative change (Crotty, 2003; Schwandt, 2015).

Feminist historiography uses feminist theories, gender paradigms, and historiographical methodologies to interpret social constructions like gender, race, and class (Donaghy & Sellberg, 2018). The systematic othering of women in America was never due only to perceived biology; gender as a category is a socialized reality influenced by patriarchal systems, labor and economic disparity, and expectations of production (Ahmed, 2017; Brooks, 2007; Denker, 2021; Lerner, 1990; hooks, 2015). Even so, women's history is not automatically one shaped only by oppression, as there is not a singular definition of woman across all cultures and moments in time (Dzuback, 2003). The works of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (1975, 1985) assert that women created their own spaces and fulfilling lives within established gendered hierarchies.

Perceived differences and the ways they were negotiated must also be viewed from a relational standpoint to understand the inequalities they carried within society (Brown, 1991; Gordon, 1991), and gender and education theories intertwine to inform the potential power – both emancipatory and oppressive – education can carry (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). I incorporate corporeal feminism to further connect concepts of who was historically considered a

woman and their place in society to the cultural and societal expectations for their perceived physical ability, namely reproduction (Butler, 1990; Donaghy & Sellberg, 2018; Grosz, 1994; Riley, 1988; Scott, 1986). Concepts of gender consistently structured power hierarchies, even as specific definitions of 'woman' evolved and varied across cultures and temporalities, often with the more emotional 'woman' subjected to the rational 'man' (Foucault, 1978; Higginbotham, 1992; Lloyd, 1993; Scott, 1986; B. Smith, 1998; Zinsser, 2013). Even in realms that viewed women and men as generally equal, such as coeducational institutions like normal schools, the expectation for women at the end of the 19th century was that they were ultimately capable of one thing their male counterparts were not: motherhood.

Understanding of the past is also influenced by the social and cultural realities of the scholar, as seen in the evolution within the historical field from a predominantly white, protestant, male perspective which often omitted the presence of women in the historical record toward a more inclusive model following the Second Wave of the women's rights movements (B. Smith, 1995; Thurner, 1997). To avoid the tendency of over-generalization, or an "add women and stir" approach (Harding, 1995), I incorporated considerations of intersectionality of identity, ethnicity, class, and race (Brown, 1989; Crenshaw, 2013; Higginbotham, 1992; Riley, 1988). Ultimately there is no universal, static experience of women, past or present; however, in my work I aimed to better understand the realities faced by individuals identified by the social and cultural values of the times in which they lived and how education shaped those experiences.

Methodology

Storytelling is one of the oldest tools used by human societies for passing on knowledge and making sense of complex ideas; narrative inquiry seeks to understand through the analysis of these stories as data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Historical narrative relies on the interpretation of

primary texts to make meaning, using literary analysis techniques combined with secondary research and understanding of the social and cultural influences that shaped what was written to tell a story (Bloch, 1992; Brundage, 2018; Wood, 2008). As with other approaches to qualitative research, historical research is driven by the questions asked, theories used, and the interpretation of the researcher utilizing existing literature and contextual data (Brundage, 2018; Hoefferle, 2011; Rousmaniere, 2004; Wood, 2008). Narrative research produces more than a chronological accounting of a story, and history is more than just a recollection of facts; the two methods combined provide an analytical interpretation of the meaning within the details being presented about a social group. By understanding power structures of the past, we can better conceptualize solutions to inequities faced in the present – just as the personal and the political are one and the same, the past and the present continue to each inform the other (Kerber, 2015; Wood, 2008).

The discourse-historical approach outlined by Reisigl and Wodak (2009) combines social justice and historical research by connecting contemporary issues with their historical context and analyzing relevant themes through a critical lens, which focuses specifically on power relations with the goal of bringing light to issues that can motivate the search for solutions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Palmadessa, 2017). Because the past is a compilation of multiple perspectives, influences, and interpretations, we cannot ultimately know exactly what transpired, only the societal expectations and cultural norms that shaped those who lived through those events and evaluate lasting legacies of those experiences. These ideas directly influenced my work.

Setting

This study was bound by a single case, the Colorado State Normal School (CSNS), which I selected with the following criteria in order to shape purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015):

- Located in the Mountain West and designated by territorial or state legislatures as an official normal school in a state or territory that also had a Land Grant institution before 1890; and,
- Served students consistently and remains open; and,
- Evolved into a larger state university with significant education programs as one of many major options.

I selected these criteria as a means for narrowing sample size, as many short-lived normal schools developed in the West but did not ultimately serve the community for a significant length of time, and for ensuring the rigor of source availability and content. CSNS, now the University of Northern Colorado, not only met my initial criteria, but it also has an extensive digital archive, rich in institutional documents and student and faculty writings which allowed for thorough research. Furthermore, the circumstances that led to and impacted the creation and evolution of the CSNS were typical of similar institutions in the West, allowing it to be representative of a larger phenomenon and my findings to be more broadly applicable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because this institution's history is widely and publicly known, none of the included subjects are still living, and the scope of my study ended before the school transitioned to its modern form, I determined confidentiality through pseudonyms was not necessary. I focused on the time range of 1870-1929 because this is the period in which territories and states in the West were pushing for the creation of schools and before most normal schools fully transitioned to larger state colleges, which influenced concepts of gender and opportunities in different ways.

Data Collection Methods

Document analysis was the primary method for this study. The analysis of historical documents is highly valuable and informative when combined with secondary research into historical context (Wood, 2008). The key to document analysis as part of historical narrative

inquiry is to read between the lines and allow the underlying message to speak for itself rather than looking for a predetermined outcome (Brundage, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The language used in the documents is equally important, offering insight into what might not be immediately observable (Love, 2003). It is often the things that the writer does not include that reveal social and cultural influences, as performativity presents itself even in the written word. This required a knowledge and use of cultural and social context to identify meaning (Crotty, 2003), which I established through reading many secondary sources on related topics.

Data for this study came from collected documents and artifacts from the school's extensive digital and physical archival collection. These included documents released by the institution regarding programs and policies such as annual catalogs and other administrative records and board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, letters, testimonies, photographs, student publications, and yearbooks. I verified that all documents used were legitimately connected to CSNS in order to ensure their authenticity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Looking at both institutional records and individual works by students and faculty served as an effective way to identify the goals and experiences of each and how they may have differed (Thelin, 2004).

Archival documents and artifacts are ideal for a historical case study for several reasons. Documentary material is not influenced by the presence of the researcher in the ways that in-person interviews or observations can be (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are no objective sources or researchers, as both are informed by the values of the writer and the reader, but as a dataset, material data are "unobtrusive," meaning that its form is not altered simply by the act of studying it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This allowed for my research of people and perspectives well into the past. Certain limitations existed, such as the fragmentary nature of what was preserved and thus available for research. Additionally, revisions to the Family Educational

Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in 2021 barred access to any institutional records with identifying information of students for 125 years, which made two-thirds of some student data within my scope inaccessible. I ensured rigor and balance in my research through the analysis of many different sources pertaining to the same time, place, and events to establish a fuller picture (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Trustworthiness

Being mindful of ethical considerations is key to conducting a narrative historical case study. The researcher must remain mindful of the social and cultural impacts not only of the topic being researched but of the questions being asked, as the outcomes of the study could carry implications for all people involved. Transparency of process was especially important to this study, because those included in my findings were not able to speak to the veracity of my conclusions (Jones et al., 2014). The subjects mentioned in this study are not alive, but they represent experiences and perspectives that still inform practice. To ensure that my research was conducted as accurately and fairly as possible, I consistently pursued secondary research and context and sought out peer reviews of my work. I created a physical and digital paper trail of my visits to the archives, the documents I studied, and my work with a committee of advisors to allow for an audit or replication of the study if requested (Jones et al., 2014).

Researcher reflexivity is also a vital component of ethical and trustworthy research (Lahman, 2022). As a white researcher, I am aware of the inherent status and power that can come from my identity, as well as my own responsibility in consistent, honest personal reflection of my own values and biases. (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I incorporated strategies like regular journaling throughout the research process, questioned my own assumptions, and asked for feedback through all steps of the dissertation process. I also strongly

believe in the importance of centering the voices of the authors of the documents studied – I utilized direct quotes as much as possible, ensured that any paraphrasing did not change the original meaning, and I did not infer identity of any subjects that could not be verified in records. I also triangulated my data through the use of multiple forms of data to ensure the utilization of diverse perspectives (Denzin, 2009).

Analysis

Narrative inquiry prioritizes human experience through the stories told (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Historical research itself is a product of its time, and it builds on works that have come before with contemporary perspectives and textual analysis (Brundage, 2018; Wood, 2008; Zammito, 2008). Through the combination of critical narrative and historical research methods, I centered my analysis on several aspects of the stories as they were told in the texts evaluated. My study combined knowledge of social and historical context with document analysis for interpretation in order to construct a story that conveyed meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 2003; Hoefferle, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I analyzed documents holistically, first as a whole to identify overall purpose, then broken into parts, similar to the "thick descriptions" and analysis conducted in ethnographic works (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Wood, 2008). Data were coded into identified themes, focused on common language, references, and ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Sources were sought out and analyzed until a sense of saturation in terms of perspectives and data were reached; I then combined my analysis of the individual materials in order to compile a larger narrative and identify implications for practice (Jones et al., 2014).

Researcher Positionality

The identities I hold directly influence my research and interpretation. I identify as a white, cis woman, who serves as a faculty member of a midlevel public university. As a student, I was a single mother, and I have encountered personal and professional discrimination. As a culturally responsive researcher, it is vital that I remain actively aware of the privileges and assumptions carried by my identities and experiences when studying people past and present with identities different from my own (Lahman, 2022; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I emphasized the incorporation of perspectives of scholars with varying views and identities to help me to maintain appropriate cultural awareness in my work. I also incorporated critical reflexivity (Lahman, 2022) regarding what motivated my interests and the questions I asked, as outlined in my discussion of trustworthiness. My experiences as a woman in higher education – both as a student and as a professional –shaped my perspectives on power structures, while my privileged identities have also protected me from certain experiences.

Likely due to the identities I hold, I felt a strong personal connection to the stories and subjects within my study. In many ways, this served to continue to motivate a truthful accounting of their experiences, as well as the prioritization of incorporating their voices. At other times, it seemed to increase my bias, in the sense that I struggled to analyze and interpret the data critically as a researcher rather than protectively as a friend. To counter this challenge, I sometimes stepped away from the work, took breaks, and actively rewrote many drafts to maintain a scholarly analysis. I feel strongly that I was effective in my process, as I will gladly admit that I was surprised by my findings. I entered research with the expectation that I would uncover institutional foundations that promoted a patriarchal experience, thus explaining the contemporary issues that prompted my research from the beginning. This expectation

undoubtedly resulted from my own experiences; however, by centering the experiences of the women in my study, I discovered something quite different. Chapter IV discusses these results, and Chapter V outlines the implications they have for modern higher education practice.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present my historical research and analysis of the equitable educational experiences, as well as how those changed, for women students and faculty at the Colorado State Normal School between 1890 and 1929. Through my research, I determined the Colorado State Normal School provided an equitable educational experience for women in three significant ways: the collegiate level of education received, their equitable treatment on campus, and the professional opportunities made available to them as alumnae of the school. My analysis further discusses how the combination of a belief in the expanded opportunities for innovation within the American West and a necessity to prioritize local community needs allowed for the creation of an educational experience for women that transcended that of traditional institutions in the East.

A Local Need: The Creation of the Colorado State Normal School

The Colorado State Normal School (CSNS) in Greeley, Colorado, hosted a grand ceremony in June of 1890, just over one year after it was established by State Senate Bill 104, to commemorate the laying of its cornerstone atop a relatively barren plateau known in town as "Rattlesnake Hill." People came from as far as Denver and Boulder to hear political and educational leaders from across the state speak about Colorado's future. Governor Job Cooper praised the community for prioritizing the democratic nature of universal education and the power of the classroom, which he called "the nursery and citadel of intelligence, liberty,

Americanism." State Senator McCreery, who sponsored Bill 104, connected the institution to the "cherished prophecy" of the pioneers who moved West, motivated by Manifest Destiny to build a utopia where the "inalienable right of knowledge may be enjoyed as well in homes of self-reliant toil as in the palaces of wealth." Superintendent of Denver Schools Gove drew attention to another significant value the new school carried: opportunities for women. "A Colorado girl by birth and training is especially fitted for association with Colorado boys and girls in a Colorado community," he said, and her "charitable, free" nature would be sure to "make the generation immediately to follow the present one superior." The western community's needs superseded traditional gender ideas; those who would realize the pioneering visions of the frontier colonists and see the rise of the next great Colorado generation would be its women (Carter & Kendel, 1930).

Societal beliefs that connected femininity to inherent teaching skills, much like schools for training teachers, did not originate in Colorado; many in the audience would likely not have found such a claim to be an overly progressive statement. The intertwining perceptions of women, motherhood, and the education of children dated back as far as ideas of American education itself (for detailed examples, see Chapter II). What made CSNS unique, like many of its western counterparts, was not the admission of women, nor its implied offer of social mobility; many normal schools throughout the United States could, and did, claim the same (Ogren, 2005; Thelin, 2004). What made these western schools different developed largely due to their rural and isolated realities, born from the imagination – and perhaps desperation – of those who braved the frontier in hopes of starting something new. The history of higher education, the American West, and gender, class, and racial hierarchies it challenged – and perpetuated – during the late 19th and early 20th centuries are more intertwined that one might

think, each driven by sometimes contradictory dreams of progress and the societal expectations they aimed to uphold (Limerick, 2014).

My work speaks to the existing scholarship of the American West and gendered experiences in higher education in two ways. First, I argue that while some cultural norms in the West came from values shaped in the East, the power of a belief in being free from more traditional hierarchies often allowed for the creation of something new. Second, as discussed in Chapter II, most work on normal schools focuses on the movement in the East and Midwest and the connection to concepts of class and access to higher education more broadly (Ogren, 2005, 2013). Works that do focus on gender specifically often depict the experience as one in which women could participate so long as they fit within accepted gendered boundaries, thus making their training and the knowledge they took out into public schools a pipeline for the perpetuation of traditional gender ideology (Havira, 1995; Rothermel, 2005). While I agree that normal schools were an accessible option for women due to the traditional gendered idea that women made better teachers, I argue that the educational experience itself and the legacies of who was trained fostered a reality that pushed against those norms rather than perpetuated them, particularly in the West.

Acknowledging Language and Implicit Whiteness

A discussion of findings related to the history and legacies of equitable education cannot be understood without consideration of issues of class and race, an area of the history of the West that is woefully underdeveloped. This is in part due to logistics, and in part through intentional exclusion of perspectives deemed as less-than in society at the time. Most western institutions did not explicitly prohibit the admittance or attendance of Students of Color or fall under the providence of *de jure* – meaning in the law – segregation like those in the Jim Crow South and

supported by the "separate but equal" findings of the United States Supreme Court in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. They were, however, complicit in *de facto* – in action – segregation through social practices which undeniably perpetuated whiteness (Hutcheson, 2020; Thelin, 2004). Even if not directly stated in legislation itself, legislative support still made what amounted to total exclusion possible. For example, the 1890 Morill Land Grant Act, which revised the 1862 act of the same name to accommodate diverse populations following the end of the Civil War, specified that states could create *separate* institutions based on race, so long as neither institution overtly discriminated by race in their admissions process (Hutcheson, 2020). While western institutions claimed superiority over their racially biased southern counterparts, separation was always part of American higher education.

On the plains of Colorado in the late 1800s, racial diversity was not at the forefront of many white settlers' minds to the same degree as those in other parts of the nation. In many rural, northern Colorado communities, there wasn't much to pay attention to in the first place. Indigenous populations declined sharply after the discovery of gold in the 1860s, initially due to disease and violence, and the subsequent mass-migration of white Americans to the area led to organized military action to remove Native American tribes completely from the region (Abbott et al., 2013). Those who remained typically settled in remote, segregated communities. African Americans were similarly underrepresented in the region. The 1870 census identified 456 of the 39,864 people living in Colorado territory as African American, with the vast majority living in the Denver area, as did the larger population of Chinese immigrants (Bugros McLean, 2018). Spanish-speaking populations who stayed after what the lands of Colorado transitioned from Mexico ownership to that of the United States in 1848 lived in settlements to the south, in the San Luis Valley (Abbott et al., 2013).

Another logistical challenge in the study of the history of race in the region comes from the fact that institutional records did not begin recording racial and ethnic identities until well into the 20th century (Bugros McLean, 2018).[2] This is reflective of a consistent challenge to historical research more broadly. Census data and institutional record keeping can also be incomplete or inconsistent, making inferences about racial issues problematic, to say the least. For example, Lucille Buchanan, a 1905 CSNS graduate, earned attention in some Denver newspapers for being the first African American to graduate from the school. There is no mention of her or any other student identities in relation to diversity in any institutional records accessed for this study. Additionally, if one looked at the media data only, it could lead to the inaccurate conclusion that Buchanan was the first African American to attend at all. In her personal reflections released later in life, she revealed that her older sister also attended CSNS, three years before Lucille, though she died before she completed her studies. Even those minimal details are known due to the works of Bugros McLean (2018), which took more than a decade of research to bring Buchanan's experiences to light. The racial history of CSNS – that remains hidden, and as a result, limits what this study can understand about the influence of racial identities on women's experiences.

Even in the absence of clear racialized language in institutional records, it is possible to identify the perpetuation of whiteness. Just as it is important to understand the logistical factors influencing perceptions, it is vital to acknowledge the evidence that an awareness of social hierarchies based on race remained an influential part of the cultural fabric in frontier communities, like that in Greeley. University of Colorado president H.M. Hale declared in his speech at the cornerstone ceremony that he came to Colorado 25 years earlier and visited the area

[2] In Chapter III, I outline the ways that FERPA regulation also presented challenges on this issue.

around Greeley "with a number of others to fight the Indians, or more correctly speaking, to hunt them" (*Greeley Tribune,* 1890, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930, p. 26). Such a casual reference to a period of extreme violence speaks clearly to accepted preference, even if not explicitly stated as such. Additional clues exist in specific language used within institutional publications. The First Annual Catalogue (State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899) described one purpose of science courses as a means to understand factors behind "the development of the race," (p. 72), while history courses allowed students to better understand "relations of the different races" of the world (p. 82). Though it goes on to mention an "*inner connection*" among human civilization (italics in original), the implication of difference remained. The term "Christian" (p. 107) carried similar implications of race and class well into the 20th century, largely in response to anti-immigrant sentiments that grew in tandem with increased immigration of non-Protestant Europeans.

An awareness and acknowledgment of these systematic truths and their roots in colonialism are essential in a critical study aimed to understanding the role higher education played, and still plays, in perpetuating inequitable educational outcomes, even if, as seen here, concepts like race are not clearly referenced in the data itself. When the community diversified after the turn of the century, discussed later in this chapter, these foundational ideals still shaped institutional mission. Whether explicit or implicit, *de jure* or *de facto*, the generation of future students of the "greater Colorado yet to be" (*Greeley Tribune*, 1890, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930) referenced in the speech on "Rattlesnake Hill" were white, a fact that undoubtedly influenced future policy. When diversity is mentioned, it is likely in reference to class, not race.

Though the findings of this specific study did not allow for a deeper understanding of the experiences of more diverse student bodies, I include it in Chapter V as a vital area for future research.

Higher Education in the American West

In terms of class and opportunity, social diversity was a motivating factor in the dreams of the West. Two years after the inception of the Colorado State Normal School (CSNS), Superintendent of Public Instruction Nathan Coy attributed the success of the educational mission to the "hopeful expectation of what is probable in the Colorado experiment," and, most importantly, the state's "freedom from traditional prejudice" (Coy, 1892, p. 60). CSNS did meet with great success, though it took longer than two years. Was Coy correct in his assertions that the secret to the perfect teacher training school lay in its location and its lack of traditional prejudice? Not entirely. The more dominant truth lies in an amalgamation of the two statements. Colorado, like any place in the United States, was never free of prejudice, not even in its educational systems; however, power existed in the "hopeful expectation" that states and territories in the West were not ruled by the prejudices of tradition. An enduring belief in the existence of that freedom and the strength of the pioneering spirit met with pragmatic, local innovations, allowed for the creation of educational spaces that defied gendered expectations seen elsewhere in America. As frontier realities turned to legends, new generations remained committed to upholding what they perceived to be the original ideals. The legacies of those spaces and what could be learned from them represent meaningful lessons for higher education.

Westward Expansion and Educational Needs

The American West in the late 19th and early 20th centuries represented for many, at least in theory, an opportunity to start a life that went beyond the bounds of established societal

expectations in the East. At the same time, concepts of education for women were expanding and as new ideas flowed westward, so did some coeducational opportunities (Goodchild & Wrobel, 2014; Limerick, 2014; Radke-Moss, 2008; Thelin, 2004). Seen as a herald of "civilized" culture, some territories in the West founded universities even before statehood in hopes of bringing more people to the area (Cohen, 2014). Traditional university structures originated from a belief that a successful democratic society required an educated citizenry, but they defined the parameters of the ideal student along the same lines as the ideal voter: white, male, and elite (Robertson & Zimmerman, 2017; Thelin, 2004). The further a person journeyed away from established educational systems, though, pragmatism and population demographics determined that such rigid definitions were untenable. This opened the doors for less-traditional students, out of necessity for keeping those doors open, if not a total embrace of a democratic spirit.

Federal legislation often supported these interests, such as the Morrill Act of 1862, which established higher education institutions – twenty-one of them west of the Mississippi –on the condition that they emphasize agriculture and mechanics, skills seen as essential to the continued growth and support of the nation, and that they open their doors to more "classes" of people (Cohen, 2014; Goodchild & Wrobel, 2014; Radke-Moss, 2008; Thelin, 2004). As a result, several land grant institutions were coeducational, though the programs and courses of study for women were usually kept separate from those of the men. It was the normal schools, institutions focused on training primary and secondary school teachers, that truly found an ideal arena in the West. The normal school movement began in the early 19th century but was slow to take hold in the eastern United States, and slower still to garner much popularity. The debate over how essential standardized educational systems and formally trained educators really were had drawn out its implementation for decades. Yet the overwhelming public opinion remained that college

education was a true sign of a successful citizenry, and college leaders were frustrated with the general lack of college-ready students applying to attend their institutions. This translated into campaigns to expedite the creation of programs that could train teachers quickly who could in turn produce students prepared for entrance exams and the rigors of college curriculum (Ogren, 2005; Thelin, 2004).

Despite the larger purpose intended for graduates of these institutions, a contradictory stigma arose that held that teacher training schools, and the students they admitted, lacked the prestige of the more traditional colleges that needed them. Thus, larger cities in the East, particularly those with established higher education systems already in place, remained less interested in diverting resources to these "lesser" institutions (Ogren, 2005, 2013). In the West, societal need tended to supersede most social stigma. Communities were anxious for a trained local teaching force for the schools they created, and normal school tuition was minimal or eliminated in exchange for promises to teach in the State schools afterward (Ogren, 2005; Thelin, 2004). Supporters doubled down on the message of the powerful dreams of true democracy: in the West, society was defined by more than mineral or agricultural wealth for those brave enough to try – they insisted that its greatest innovation was education for all, the realization of its pioneering mission.

Educational Aspirations in the Union Colony

The Union Colony that established Greeley, Colorado, began as a collaborative effort of white Americans from the East interested in establishing something new in the West, and became an ongoing example of the power of collective belief in what is possible (Cohen, 2014; Larson, 1989). Nathan Meeker, a farmer and journalist whose previous experience with unsuccessful utopian experiments and fascination with the West merged into a conviction that

the Colorado foothills and the right kind of people, “educated, thrifty, intelligent,” with “moral and religious sentiments,” (Carter & Kendel, 1930) could finally make the community of his dreams a reality. Meeker found support in his editor at the New York Tribune, Horace Greeley, the man known for encouraging young men to go west in the days of the Colorado Gold Rush. Greeley agreed to put a call for investors in his paper. Advertisements for the venture proclaimed that individuals who demonstrated “industry, moral rectitude, and temperance” and had $155 to invest could join the experiment. In exchange for their hard work and commitment to the success of the whole, Meeker promised a settlement of culture and prosperity centered on its educated populace (Larson, 1989).

Rather than the 30 or 40 people Meeker hoped might answer the call, 442 colonists of middle-class backgrounds and various skill responded. They left the East in early 1870 for this new agricultural haven on ten square miles along the Cache la Poudre River. It was largely their diverse skill set that allowed the settlement to survive the harsh reality awaiting them on the arid Colorado plains (Larson, 1989). As was true of most western ventures, the reality of the place did not align with the description of fertile farmland in the shadows of grand mountains and pure air. It was windy with few trees, and the thin-aired open spaces played tricks on the eyes; what looked near and accessible was in fact days away. Yet the colonists persisted, driven by what they viewed as a powerful and important dream for the future, even as its realization seemed to elude them.

One critic warned people against the venture in Illinois newspaper *The Republic* in June of 1870: “Greeley, Colorado Territory, is a delusion, a snare, a cheat, a swindle…. a graveyard in which are buried heaps of bright hopes and joyous anticipations.” If lured by the promise of an

agricultural heaven, disappointment would follow when they arrived and found:

> a baker's dozen of slab shanties, as many tool chests, a great ditch, and twenty acres of prickly pears – on a barren, sandy plain, part and Parcel of the Great American Desert, mid-way between a poverty stricken [sic] ranch and a prairie-dog village on two sides.

The greatest problem outlined by the author was that survival required farming, which in turn required water, and there was no water to be found. Settlers would not work because there was nothing to produce. Mothers and children would be occupied only by the removing of prickly pears from "their babies' corporeal frame." In a final appeal to readers, the Illinois editor wrote, "if they can't stay where they are, but must go somewhere else, don't ever dream of such a wild and foolish think as striking out for the great colony of Greeley, Colorado Territory" (*The Republic*, 1870, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930).

Despite the challenges and strongly worded – and perhaps not entirely inaccurate – views of opponents, the colonists continued with their mission. Water did fill the ditches, and education remained the next top priority. The existence of such criticisms only fueled their commitment, even decades later. A special edition of the Weld County News Magazine released in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Union Colony (1920, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930) praised the many successes of the area, as "nowhere on earth is there a more enlightened, intelligent and prosperous people than those now living on the lands at which the world scoffed a half-century ago." Ten years later, Albert Carter (1930) wrote "it took men of vision, the dreamers of dreams, to see in these broad, rolling acres of open range with nothing but buffalo grass, sage-brush, and prairie dog holes" not only what would become "one of the richest agricultural counties in the United States," but also "a good place to make a home and educate a family." (p. 6). Carter's inclusion of such statements in his works demonstrated the

continued belief in the mission of the early colonists, as well as the power of that belief in the face of contradicting realities. By 1930, it was a well-known fact that the lived experiences of the first generation of settlers did not match all that was promised. What mattered to those who came after was their persistent efforts in bringing their dreams to fruition.

This is also seen in efforts to help readers "understand" just how hard it must have been, in order to illustrate the power of their persistence. The best way to visualize how hard that life must have been, Carter argued, was to drive far out into the prairie or read "the reaction of some less hardy spirit of those old days" (Carter & Kendel, 1930, pp. 5-6). Did the imaginative pioneers of legend really look out on the prickly-peared, prairie-dogged plains and think first of the educational prospects of their future families? Probably not. But the generations that followed viewed the origins of their great educational institution and its visionary practices as intrinsically connected to those early days and early dreams of the ones who came first and the world they created in that distinct space.

As promised in the original call for participants, a portion of the land chosen for the settlement was reserved for a college. Despite setbacks including a failed effort to lure the as-yet unbuilt State university from Boulder, and a lost bid for a land grant institution to neighboring rival Fort Collins, members of the Union Colony continued to hope their college would come (Larson, 1989). Perhaps due to Meeker's initial promise of culture and education, the westward venture attracted settlers who were more educated and financially stable than many others in early frontier communities. They saw education as a sign of culture, and to have not only public schools but an institution for higher education would help the town reach a loftier status than many of the places they left behind. Their first Board of Education formed in the summer of 1871, and public-school sessions started not long after. Meeker reported in *The Greeley Tribune*

(1871, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930) that Greeley was well on its way to having "schools, refined society, and all the advantages of an old country" (p. 6). When Meeker left Greeley in 1879 on an ill-fated mission to bring reform to the White River Indian Agency, the area contained several public schools to accommodate the education of boys and girls alike; however, higher education remained elusive.

Community Needs Influenced Educational Outcomes

The solution to Greeley's collective collegiate goal appeared in answer to a local problem: they did not have enough teachers for the growing population, and no reliable local programs to train them. The Colorado School of Mines opened in Golden in 1874 in response to economic reliance on mineral wealth that was increasingly difficult to access. Colorado Agricultural College, the State land grant institution, offered its first classes in 1879 focused on agricultural and mechanical skills. Boulder, which finally opened its doors in 1877, technically had a teaching certification program, but prioritized the more elite traditional Liberal Arts education and administrators there voiced their belief that the training of teachers was beneath them (Carter & Kendel, 1930). Educational leaders in Greeley and other rural Colorado towns wanted better for their children than "the school ma'am of their boyhood" (Carter & Kendel, 1930). who had to be recruited from the East sight unseen, so they set to work to meet this communal need.

Thus, Senate Bill 104 was born, and within seventeen months the town had raised $26,000: the $15,000 mandated by the bill, as well as the $10,000 promised by the State that it ultimately did not have, and they secured the land. At the ceremony on "Rattlesnake Hill" the following summer, President Hale of the State university (and self-proclaimed fighter of "Indians" mentioned above) lauded not only the progress within Colorado since his arrival in

Denver in the 1860s, when the entire "system was taught by one woman in an abandoned saloon," but also the great progress of Greeley itself toward realizing its original purpose. He recalled his time spent there in 1871, and how downtrodden the first settlers were in the face of early hardship. "Look at it today," Hale said, "they planted better than they knew" (quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930, p. 26). Hale's reflection, like Carter's own words, demonstrates the significance of the dreams of Greeley's founding residents despite initial challenges which could have stifled them.

The long-term bounty of the seeded efforts to bring trained teachers to the region blossomed into the Training School, later called the Model School, which opened to local primary-aged students in 1892 (Carter & Kendel, 1930). CSNS's first-year placements of student teachers in local schools resulted in catastrophic failure, partly to do with the lack of prior standardized education of the students, and partly because of the same in the classroom teachers. CSNS administrators collaborated again with community leaders and opened a school on campus to serve two community interests: the education of the children of Greeley, and the supervised training of the student teachers by professors who knew how to teach. For $.25 per week, a hired horse and buggy picked up enrolled children and brought them to campus, where student teachers and educational professionals, called Critic Teachers, emphasized leading pedagogical practices and theories of childhood learning (Carter & Kendel, 1930). By 1900, the Model School included all classes, kindergarten through high school, and its graduates could attend CSNS for free, without condition of application, if they opted to become teachers themselves. This fostered continued economic and educational success CSNS and community alike. The Model School remained a staple of the educational landscape in Greeley through the end of the 20th century (Larson, 1989).

Community Investment Fostered Success

The path toward creation of CSNS quickly reached legendary status, completed in less than two years when it took the better-funded institutions in Boulder and Fort Collins more than a decade to open. Board of Trustee minutes from September 1889 credited an English investor, motivated by "stateman-like and eloquent views on higher education and the prophecies of the future work and influence" of the school, for the donation of the first $15,000 (Carter & Kendel, 1930; *Greeley Tribune,* October 1930, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930). The community raised the remaining $10,000 within two weeks of being told the State could not provide it as promised, despite the limited financial ability of many of the citizens of Greeley.

Several of the organizers of these campaigns and private donors were women in the community, a standard reality in many aspects of social activism in the United States but especially the West, where women were largely responsible for bringing education to rural communities. School elections were the only ones they could take part in until 1893, so education represented a central investment in their futures for multiple reasons. The connection to the community remained an integral part of CSNS's success, both professionally, with at least one community member on the Board of Trustees beyond 1929, and personally, with most students housed in private homes within the community, and shared events and holiday traditions on and off campus (Carter & Kendel, 1930).

Innovative Educational Equity

Building on the legend of its origins, CSNS organizers embraced innovative educational practices to accomplish their goals. Efforts to attract students, in the style of great Victorian Era booster literature, claimed conveniences largely mythical in nature at the time it was written.

Even the description of the setting and school in its first announcement (State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899) leaned a bit heavily on what *could* be:

> The city is in the valley of the Poudre River and is in one of the richest agricultural portions of the State. The streets are lined with trees, forming beautiful avenues. The elevation and distance from the mountains render the climate mild and healthful. The city is a city of Christian homes and contains churches of all leading denominations.

Released within months of the scathing description detailed in the Illinois newspaper that year, it is likely that only the last sentence of the advertisement was strictly true: "it is a thoroughly prohibition town" (p. 2).

The First Annual Catalogue [sic] (State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899) defined the school's ultimate purpose: to "lead the educational van [and] project the future" (p. 17). This would be accomplished through the support of "such scholarship, such power, such culture, such influence as will grow strong men and women, equipped for the work of teaching" (p. 18). Less direct, yet as impactful as the linguistic choice to mention both men and women in its purpose statement is that the remainder of the catalog did not differentiate between men and women at all– they were simply students. While possibly motivated by progressive ideas of gender equality more prevalent in the West – Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming all granted women the right to vote before 1900, for example – the greater impetus was likely local realities. Many men in the West focused on agriculture and business; those who had the means attended higher education at one of the larger State institutions, but most lacked either the finances or the time to allow such a commitment. If the community wanted well-trained, local teachers, they had to open that opportunity to the part of the population with sufficient numbers and ability: women.

Democratic Goals in Practice

Embracing its western innovative spirit, CSNS emulated democratic practices often claimed by and yet missing in traditional institutions in the East (Robertson & Zimmerman, 2017; Thelin, 2004). Courses of study at CSNS were not restricted by gender as was the case at many coeducational schools elsewhere in the United States, including normal schools. Instead, students were put into classes based on their readiness for college-level work. Many students who enrolled, some of whom had not even finished elementary school, were placed in either Preparatory, First Year, or Second Year classes, which focused on remedial courses designed by the faculty to meet them as they were and get them ready for college-level academics (Colorado State Normal School, 1910-1919, 1920-1929; State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899, 1900-1909, 1910-1911). The Junior and Senior classes were the most prepared students, some of whom were high school graduates. This inconsistency in previous educational experience was not unusual; remember, the lack of national standardization led to the creation of normal schools in the first place (Larson, 1989). The first faculty saw the policy of acceptance of all who wished to apply as a continuation of the democratic mission of education, one tied to opportunity for those wanting to do the work, with the goal of increasing the academic expectations over time (State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899). That these opinions appeared in the catalog at all is also significant – by pointing out that they embraced this mission from the beginning, they demonstrated not only a commitment to its continuation, but also an awareness that they were doing something significant from the start.

The makeup of the faculty was also celebrated as democratic and another way CSNS looked different from its eastern counterparts: it maintained an almost equal male-female split, beginning with the first faculty of four. This trend would continue to be true, especially after the

addition of the model school. What each faculty member taught was also veered away from more common practices related to gender, with women teaching history, math, and science courses, and men teaching education and music (Colorado State Normal School, 1910-1919, 1920-1929; State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899, 1900-1909, 1910-1911). Not all policies were equitable; payroll records from the era show women consistently earned 15 percent less or more than men in similar positions, even before academic rank became implemented practice (Snyder, 1900). That discrepancy was consistent with other fields, but the equal representation of women and men in positions of authority seen at CSNS was not. Students, faculty, and the larger community further expressed pride in the democratic spirit they saw illustrated in the hodge-podge collection of "school rooms" utilized prior to the completion of the first Normal Building. These included such illustrious lodgings as the Sunday school rooms of the Baptist Church, storage areas within the Courthouse, and even a room above a local paint shop (Larson, 1989). Local newspapers and student writings recalled the commitment to the pursuit of education in any setting as harkening back to the survivor mentality of Greeley's founders (Carter & Kendel, 1930), another example of the enduring significance of the belief in its power, even if realities challenged it.

Greeley commemorated the first official day of school on October 6, 1890, with a "simple ceremony and much speechmaking by citizens of the town," many of whom spoke at the cornerstone ceremony as well *(Greeley Tribune*, 1890, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930). Recently appointed president Thomas Gray honored the day as the one when the state of Colorado stepped "into the front rank" (p. 33) of educational science and professionalized teaching. Senator McCreery emphasized the economic opportunities teacher education offered to the new students. He believed American society sometimes overestimated "the importance of

money. The great forces are the earnest-minded and large-hearted" individuals who chose to teach *(Greeley Tribune*, 1890, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930). This claim undoubtedly carried significant weight for the educational professionals in the room, aware that the most prestigious schools in the nation came about through the generous donations of Robber Baron benefactors, rather than a community-level investment in the potential of its future (Thelin, 2004). Board President J.M. Wallace asserted that, despite its connections to the government as a state school, education had nothing to do with politics. "The ladies of the faculty may belong to the extreme wing of the women suffragist, for aught I know," he announced, in illustration of how little he allowed political ideology to inform him in his role with the institution – even liberal suffragists were none of his concern. Gray, not known for his easy or congenial relationship with the board, or his long tenure at CSNS, congratulated Wallace for his magnanimity before moving the ceremony along *(Greeley Tribune*, 1890, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930; Larson, 1989).

The opening events provided a synopsis of the values and ideologies that shaped the culture and purpose of CSNS moving forward. One speaker after another connected back to the "pioneering spirit" that formed the town and brought the school – and all its "civilizing" potential – to Colorado. Gray made multiple references to the innovative nature of the planned curriculum, which would emphasize the "science and art of teaching" and focus on the needs of each individual student, as "scholars are not all alike" *(Greeley Tribune*, 1890, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930), a groundbreaking educational philosophy at the time. Setting the tone for religious presence in school events, Gray read a psalm; the ministers from each of the Protestant congregations in town led prayers, and the audience sang a collection of hymns. A young local schoolgirl named Elizabeth – "Lizzie" – Kendel accompanied them on the piano, likely unaware at the time of the long future associated with the school that lay before her. Certain aspects of the

ceremony also directly contradicted claims made by the speakers; the exclusion of any Catholic participation, despite its existence in Greeley, for example, likely carried implications of class and race common during the Gilded Age but that belied the egalitarianism of McCreery's assertions, and the non-political gathering outlined by Wallace concluded with a group rendition of "America" *(Greeley Tribune,* 1890, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930). Even in cases of claimed intentions to the contrary, concepts of "democracy" and who that applied to were never far from educational practice.

Collegiate-Level Education for All Students

Whether the result of demographic realities, social beliefs that held women as harbingers of "civilizing" influences, or a combination of both, CSNS delivered a collegiate education for women students on par with those offered by prestigious universities typically reserved for men. Most normal school curriculum followed the formula created by Horace Mann, considered the father of the normal school movement in the United States, in 1851 (Ogren, 2005). Students focused on the "three Rs" of Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, with supporting courses in English, Grammar, and Geography. The goal of these academic pursuits was the ability to teach the same to elementary students through rote memorization. While it did not necessarily require intensive academic performance, what set normal schools apart from other preparatory programs was the professional training students received in their senior year regardless of their educational background, delivered in brief stints of supervised "Practice Teaching" in local schools (Larson, 1989; Ogren, 2005). Normal school graduates joined the workforce with applicable professional skills.

In 1897, CSNS, now under new president Z.X. Snyder, set itself apart and established a national precedent by becoming the first institution to require a high school diploma for

admission to the junior or senior class (Carter & Kendel, 1930; Larson, 1989). Through the removal of some variations of background, the program ensured that the professional teachers that left the school had a very similar caliber of ability. Curricular requirements further exceeded national trends by requiring more intensive courses in the physical science and mathematics, History, Civics, considered the foundation of four-year liberal arts institutions, and diverse pedagogy, including Psychology (State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899), a practice only beginning to appear in scholarship at the time. Instruction style followed that of prestigious universities like Harvard and Yale and combined lecture with recitation. Students attended daily and weekly chapel and 25 recitations per week, a total of 900 per school year, more if they opted in for summer school attendance (Bugros McLean, 2018; State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899, 1900-1909, 1910-1911).

Unlike many coeducational institutions at the time, men and women attended classes, chapel, and activities together, and women were not limited in how far in the program they could go. Students could receive a lifetime certificate for teaching in Colorado, as opposed to the traditional one or three-year options elsewhere, as well as a bachelor of pedagogy (Pd.B.) if they completed three years of coursework. Those who stayed the final year received a Masters of Pedagogy (Pd.M) (State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899, 1900-1909, 1910-1911). There were several tracks for students to choose from, based on their desired professional outcomes and availability. Women who completed these programs earned the equivalent of a graduate-level degree – not just a certificate – at a time when the national trend was limited to a high school diploma, if that (Thelin, 2004). Within the first ten years of opening, undergraduate and graduate studies alike diversified and continued to become more rigorous (Larson, 1989). All

along the way, largely as a result of local need and regardless of possible egalitarian intent, women benefitted from these practices in ways they did not in the schools of the East.

These advanced practices made the Colorado State Normal School a leader in its field; that it continued to pursue innovations in education and leadership with the woman majority made it a leader in women's education. The 1899-1900 Annual Report demonstrated the school's continual growth in its first decade, with a total enrollment of 312 students in the normal program, 260 of whom were women (Snyder, 1900, p. 2). The president reported that since requirements were raised in 1897, students were more mature and were "much better prepared to grasp the principles which underlie the science and art of teaching" (p. 11). He further shocked supporters and critics alike when he announced that CSNS intended to train students to become high school teachers, something previously reserved for men with advanced degrees. He also declared intentions to grow CSNS into a full teacher's college that offered graduate degrees, including the still-rare PhD. In the summer, an even larger program than the one offered during the traditional academic year brought some of the leading educational thinkers and practitioners to Greeley to directly mentor the students. Over the years, students learned from the likes of G. Stanley Hall, famous educational psychologist and mentor of John Dewey, as well as many of the top educational scholars from the Teaching School at Columbia (Carter & Kendel, 1930; Larson, 1989). As a result, CSNS delivered an education on par with any of the top educational programs in the United States and crafted experts in the field, regardless of gender.

Equitable Experiences on Campus

Successes for women students included more than academics and growth in enrollment– the innovative environment fostered on campus for experiences aligned with those reported of "college men" elsewhere in the United States. Eastern and Midwestern normal schools followed

straightforward, expedited paths of instruction that left no time for extracurricular activities, though they often lacked sufficient resources for such things, anyway (Ogren, 2005). CSNS students participated in on-campus clubs and off-campus festivities regularly from its inaugural year onward. Participation in at least one extracurricular wasn't only recommended, it was required, seen as an instrumental way to build a well-rounded campus community and foster holistic learning among students (Carter & Kendel, 1930; Larson, 1989). Literary societies maintained the largest memberships early on, tasked with organizing festivals, plays, and debates on campus in addition to the discussion of famous works. The Platonian offered a more regimented option for those of serious commitment. The required weekly meetings could be missed only with an accepted, documented excuse – any violators paid a steep fine.

The Chrestomathean Society, led by club president Mary Jacobs, was the more liberal option, with required meetings but no related penalty for absence (Carter & Kendel, 1930, pp. 335-336). Clubs diversified and grew in number after 1895 in response to the rapid growth of enrollment – creativity abounded, as well, illustrated through organized fashion shows, monthly themed events, and plays, all put on by organizations with names like Modern Wills, the Clionian, and the Hackman Zemzabee, which was almost always followed by "what a name!" when referenced (Carter & Kendel, 1930). Women also joined discipline-specific groups focused on the study of biology, geology, mathematics, music, and many others. By 1900, one of the most popular options was the debate club, which not only allowed women and men students to debate each other, it traveled to other campuses and over time garnered media attention for its successful runs (Carter & Kendel, 1930; Larson, 1989; UNC Scrapbooks, 1916-1922). The idea of women and men debating each other undoubtedly raised many eyebrows among readers. Even

normal schools outside of the Mountain West did not develop similar social practices until the eve of World War I or after, and they remained strictly separated by gender (Ogren, 2005).

Opportunities to socialize on campus also challenged existing norms. Social fraternities and sororities, an uncommon feature on campuses of teacher's colleges and non-existent at normal schools, developed at CSNS between 1903 and 1905 (Carter & Kendel, 1930). Membership represented the height of Victorian, middle-class social status, appropriate manners and formal dress required. During the day, women wore long skirts and thick silk stockings, with "long kid boots that took at least fifteen minutes to lace," and high collars, because "who ever heard of a *nice* girl going out, in the daytime, with her neck exposed! Oh no!" (p. 337). Formality increased in the evening, when the sororities and fraternities held events that required dresses with long trains and white gloves "wrinkled in *just* the proper style" (p. 337). Grace Wilson recalled her own sorority adventures of old– girls slept in the house bathtub to make room for friends during homecoming, snuck out to attend five-cent movies in town like "riff-raff," and enjoyed "fussing" (the colloquial ancestor of "petting") with fraternity boys in horse-drawn buggies that didn't lock. The "dateless girls" (p. 339) found entertainment by stealing the "boys'" unlockable buggies when they went inside to meet someone; they found great amusement in the knowledge he had to walk home or wait for their return. These encounters and pranks, which undoubtedly would seem commonplace among modern college students, illustrates a social hierarchy in which women held most of the power. This held significance for the women who lived within it, because by becoming the norm it pushed against other socialized expectations about where they "belonged," and they knew it. Even with their locking automobiles and expanded social activities, Wilson believed the more regulated sorority sisters

of 1930 could not possibly "have a better time in her college days than we did" (p. 337). Those first few decades of life at CSNS offered something special.

CSNS, which became the Colorado State Teachers College[3] in 1911, was the first of its kind to implement national branches of prominent honors fraternities on campus, and most of the inductees were women (Carter & Kendel, 1930). These opportunities weren't only social in nature – honor clubs and fraternities focused on academic interests and excellence, some of which offered awards for achievement in scholarship and came with monetary prizes. The award offered by the Sigma Pi Lambda was a favorite among women graduate students, which honored "higher educational ideals among women students on campus" (Carter & Kendel, 1930, p. 342). The faculty selected the winning student based on "high scholastic average, a high degree personality, and leadership," and gifted her a $20 gold piece. Women students ran the alumni association, beginning with the first graduating class in 1891, and served in leadership roles in student government, something typically reserved for men for fear of giving the women too much power, or worse, the realization they could handle it.

Lula Heilman, who graduated from CSNS and went on to teach there, recalled an atmosphere of security and comfort that supported her and her peers in their academic interests and even in their fun, "merely mischievous" school pranks (Colorado State Teachers College, 1915). A sense of awareness of their unique opportunities is evident in students' creative art, as well, like a vocal solo described in the Editorial of the school publication *The Crucible* in 1892. The song was written and performed by student May Broad who, "in a doleful manner" compared "the woes of the Denver girl" to the "independent bliss of the Greeley girl in the closing line, 'I can go, and I will,'" (p. 15). Over the next 30 years, *The Crucible* featured

[3] For continuity, I continue to use CSNS to reference the school.

women-written pieces on political developments abroad, criticisms of local issues – even on campus – and current events like the mining strikes in the Colorado Mountains. These opportunities weren't only for women; the demographics of the school itself meant it was almost exclusively women, however, school policy in those early years was not altered because of that fact, an innovative practice in and of itself.

Institutional Support of Equitable Experiences

Awareness and acceptance of the women students as the majority was present in explicit and implicit ways at CSNS. An example of practical recognition not typically observed on other campuses included the building of a Women's Clubhouse on campus as compensation for the expanded use of the athletic field and travel by men students, who contributed a vast minority of actual fees (State of Colorado, 1913). In 1911, the administration built an indoor toilet and sitting room for women students, neither of which were provided for men. Student Council welcomed men and women equally and met at regular intervals with the president. Women students who ran for office chose their own message, and administrators honored it. The first elected student body president was a woman who ran on a radical suffragist platform, something that would have scandalized not only many Greeleyites, but also normal school attendees in the eastern United States, where women students found encouragement in their individualism so long as it stopped short of political opinion (Carter & Kendel, 1930; Larson, 1989; Ogren, 2005; State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899). This difference in acceptable participation liked developed through western ideals, as well, where state constitutions enfranchised women decades before eastern regions and the federal government. The result was a system of governance with women in the highest position of power, who then used that power to shape administrative ideas, something unheard of in traditional eastern coeducational institutions.

Innovation often attracts criticism, and CSNS experienced a substantial amount; however, administrators, including President Snyder, did not back down in the face of societal pressure. Their institutional support of students and commitment to their mission only increased, often in very public ways. Their loudest critic was the State university in Boulder. When created in 1877, the university begrudgingly offered education classes at the behest of the State Legislature, despite the leading national opinion that pedagogy was not real science (Larson, 1989). Its leaders initially resisted the addition of a State normal school in fear of a further divergence in state funds, until it became clear that they could let go of the education program. They shifted to the supporting side soon after.

Despite their earlier support, though, the regents of the State university started to push for a new teaching program in 1911, the same time that CSNS was elevated to the Colorado State Teachers College and started offering graduate degrees. The regents justified this development with the claim that the State should not be forced to rely on the "little girls" (*Crucible,* 1911, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930, p. 55) of the normal school for the education of their children, out of concern for the risk to the masculinity of little boys if all teachers were women. Their argument suggested that, as a "real" university, they didn't train local "girls," they trained Colorado men, who in turn taught the next generation of Colorado men – and maybe some women. Snyder responded in a public standoff at a meeting of the State Senate Committee on Education, where he declared the liberal arts degrees offered by Boulder notoriously meaningless. As evidence, he offered his own son, a Boulder alum whose education Snyder claimed prepared him for "nothing! Absolutely nothing" (Carter & Kendel, 1930). By stating

that his only son received a sub-par education by *not* becoming a teacher, Snyder made it clear that his programs and educational outcomes stood above even the most prestigious ones in the region.

Equitable Experiences for Women Faculty

This institutional support existed for women faculty, as well. In a State-sponsored investigation into the school, and President Snyder specifically, women faculty and some former students testified about their work. In all cases, when asked to discuss the oversight or requirements imposed on them by Snyder and the Board of Trustees, they stated that they had total freedom over their materials and pedagogical choices (State of Colorado, 1913). This meant that their positions carried equal authority to men faculty at the school, and that their authority continued to be valued and supported, even as degree levels and expertise in academia diverged (Thelin, 2004; Zimmerman, 2020).

Evidence of fair opportunity based on merit also appeared in the documents, as demonstrated by Elizabeth Kendel's testimony. Kendel, the former high school student who played the piano at the opening ceremony in October of 1890, attended CSNS and was hired at the Model School right after graduation (State of Colorado, 1913). A position at the Model School typically required years of classroom experience; being hired so soon indicated Kendel possessed a talent for teaching – what made this especially significant, though, was how it continued to be honored. Kendel advanced through the ranks of the Model School before she joined the Math Department as an associate professor; she retired as Associate Professor Emerita in 1943 (UNC Libraries, 2018). Also of note was the confidence implied in her testimony in the face of consistent challenges to her qualifications and training. When asked if she believed she was truly qualified for her professional position, she replied: "I suppose when I obtained a life

certificate to teach in Colorado in 1896, it might be said that I was prepared" (State of Colorado, 1913). Such comments not only indicate Kendel's own belief in the quality of her training; by going on the record in a state-sponsored investigation into the school and its practices, she presented it as fact, one that warranted sarcasm when questioned, even by a man in position of power.

Equitable Experiences and Social Empowerment

The impact of equitable treatment on campus and in coursework is best illustrated in the experiences women chose to write about and how they expressed themselves, often in a manner that pushed against societal norms. Their language and activities showed they understood their experiences to be exceptional, not just from other schools but from the societal expectations for women in America. Student Ida Hamilton displayed a sense equality with elite institutions when she wrote an editorial in *The Crucible* in 1895 that demanded more physical education classes for women at CSNS like those offered at prestigious women's colleges like Vassar and Smith. She argued they were not a detriment to their femininity, as depicted in some recent scholarship, but rather essential toward the "development of complete, noble womanhood" like that fostered at the school in other ways (p. 17). Gertrude Wheeler disagreed in her response the following month, demonstrating a trend of debate. The activities of women at eastern schools were not a model for western realities, she argued, not because of lack of status but because "those" (elite college) women came from "luxury and ease," whereas "normal girls" were "practical and broadminded," not "well developed animals with little minds" (*Crucible*, May 1895, p.7). These women did not aim to mimic those of elite eastern classes – they viewed themselves as already above them.

The daily lives of students on campus at CSNS further challenged social norms simply in the ways in which they looked much like those recounted of "college boys" on eastern campuses. Frances Tobey recalled a "spirit of play" that defined campus life before the outbreak of World War I, one that made no gendered distinctions in who could take part. Men and women colleagues would go out in groups for "romantic questing" in the surrounding countryside after classes ended at noon most days, not in search of romance as connected to love, but as a sense of camaraderie and a love of nature. Tobey recalled one such outing, a picnic to nearby Seeley Lake planned to welcome three new women faculty members. They hired a vehicle for the day but realized too late it did not come with someone to drive it. Rather than being put off, Bella Sibley, despite questionable experience, "drove valiantly" there and back, with such skill that she ran over the hitching post outside the faculty housing. "There it stood," Tobey wrote (Carter & Kendel, 1930), "tipsily aslant, for many a year, to tell the story of six women who were gracious in welcome of three" (p. 110). It became something of a monument – to their sense of freedom, not feminine shame. College presidents would often open their homes or host "real West barbeques" (p. 111) over bonfires. Each Christmas, the president would host a faculty dinner, and the men – dressed in serving aprons and with trays – would cook the meal and serve the women (p. 122), an indication that their male colleagues viewed them as equals on campus, as well.

Faculty Engagement with Students

Faculty and students also socialized regularly on campus. Departments and faculty would host "annual frolics" and "evenings of aesthetic play" to promote community among all on campus (pg. 110), a situation that defied longstanding norms of separation between faculty and students (Zimmerman, 2020). When the town ban on dancing was lifted in Greeley, students

became less interested in faculty events, much to the disappointment of many professors. Tobey recalled the slightly scandalous solution of bringing dances *to* campus, which first required that the faculty learn to dance themselves. “For, plainly, if we were to continue to share the social life of the students, we must learn the tango,” she recalled (p. 137). She fondly remembered “the solemn progress of the faculty around the room in a single file, in careful, not to say painful concentration, upon the one-two-three of the waltz step” within the empty third-floor room where men and women faculty – some married, some not – gathered to learn to dance (p. 137).

Such progressive ideas and activities were not limited to issues of student engagement. Many women on campus challenged prominent social ideals in multiple ways. Tobey acknowledged the lives of women faculty on campus would likely “foster a Victorian attitude” – meaning disapproval – in outsiders due to the “little sophistication” and homes where “husbands and wives share(d) interests happily,” on campus (p. 124). This observation hints at another unusual trend as CSNS: women faculty sometimes married men faculty (not itself unusual) but continued to work, not as their husband’s assistant but as a peer. Work after marriage did not become a common reality for American women for decades; when women did work in academia, they tended to fill the role of their husband’s typist (Thelin, 2004). Other women pushed back completely against conventional marital expectations of the day. Tobey recalled a colleague in the English Department, Ascha Parker, who claimed, “I don’t need a husband – I can provide for myself; what I need is a wife” (p. 118). The casual tone of these recollections demonstrate not only that they were commonplace, but that they were so common as to not warrant much specific mention beyond a comedic anecdote. Fear of judgement of the reader is not present, suggesting an anticipation of acceptance.

Elizabeth Kendel often mentioned regret for the classmates and colleagues "lost" to Cupid and his arrow, whom she referred to as "the god with the bow," and her friends and students his "victims" (p. 210). Kendel (1930) demonstrated her disapproval literally, as well. In her chapter about the history of the Training School, she listed women alumni and their accomplishments. "That the young women of this list were attractive as well as superior teachers is attested by the fact that forty-one of them have married, after teaching for a short time," (p. 221) she wrote. She followed the statement with a list of these forty-one women, all in significantly smaller font than their unmarried counterparts on the list. Helen Dresser, the first primary supervisor of the Model School, avoided the Kendel's judgement despite leaving after marriage, if only because she "always retained her interest in educational progress since her marriage," and in 1930, still sat on her hometown school board in California (p. 211). Throughout the long chapter, Kendel actually named many women who married but continued professional careers throughout the United States, an indication of the lasting impact of their experiences, well beyond the borders of Colorado.

Educational Experience Became Professional Opportunity

Upon graduation from the State Normal School, women students accounted for the majority of the best-trained professionals in their field. All eight women who graduated with the first class in 1891 became teachers in local schools (State Normal School of Colorado, 1890-1899), a trend that only increased over the years. Letters written in memoriam to President Snyder upon his death in 1915 came from women employed in school districts as principals, superintendents, within the Department of Education in Washington, D.C., and in national women's associations in California. When Albert Carter (1930) published the extensive institutional history commemorating CSNS's 40th anniversary, a list of publications by former

and current faculty and student scholars showed that women accounted for 24 percent of the scholarship published in leading educational and academic journals across the nation (Carter & Kendel, 1930). The expansion of women in education in Colorado undoubtedly influenced even its highest positions, and from 1896 until 1951, women served as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, an elected position ("Full List", 2007).

Many women students worked for the school in some capacity after graduation, and they and faculty found their experience led to career opportunities elsewhere in the United States and abroad. Mabel Wilkinson Etheredge attended the school from kindergarten through graduate school, something that became more common in the 20th century, and became a key member of the library staff. Florence Lowe, also a full-career student, left only when offered a prestigious offer to work on a graduate degree in art on the East Coast. Rae Blanchard, confident in her own expertise, demonstrated her sense of empowerment when she wrote to a scholar of Richard Steele and criticized him for some incorrect information in one of his articles. The author, so impressed by her observation and action, wrote back and offered her a job to edit a larger Cambridge work of biography with him, commissioned by the British Museum (Carter & Kendel, 1930, p. 140). She wrote a letter of thanks from London to commemorate the school's anniversary and credited her time in Greeley for her career. Alice Krackowizer traveled to conferences around the world that hired her to speak, despite being "at an age when another woman of her culture and experience would have held to the security of a university department" (p. 142). Not only did women faculty and alumnae of CSNS pursue high-level careers as part of their connection to the school, they did so well past the traditionally accepted age of public activity for women – they held these careers for life, just like most men at the time.

A thank you letter written by alumnae and former faculty member Anna Heilman Hugh, who taught dramatic arts in Los Angeles in 1930, further highlights the widespread impact of the innovations at CSNS. She recalled a phone call from a woman student at the University of Southern California whose master's thesis discussed the use of storytelling as educational practice with children. Hugh taught in the Model School primary department in 1901 and used storytelling often. She was still surprised to learn that the graduate student wanted to interview her about observed outcome – the student's research revealed that Hugh and her colleagues in Greeley were the first to ever use storytelling and play within official curriculum (p. 140). The innovative efforts for equity at CSNS reached a new generation, even if they hadn't set foot on the campus.

Changing Realities in the Name of Tradition

Dean of Women Helen Gilpin-Brown ended chapel early one morning in 1917 with an announcement that all men students and faculty needed to leave so that she could notify the women of new instructions on "what to do and what not to do." The new year would include implementation of several new rules, deemed necessary to avoid a repeat of the "spiked punch incident" of the previous year. Effective immediately, only two "dates" per week would be allowed, and a new 10:00 pm curfew (as opposed to 10:30 pm the year before) would be strictly enforced. "Joyrides" after dark were strictly prohibited, unless the Dean of Women received proof, and approved, of the identity of the "gentleman caller" ahead of time. Further, women could not leave town or violate these instructions without specific written approval from Gilpin-Brown directly. Students, particularly members of sororities, expressed anger at the changes, which did not extend to their male peers. Little recourse existed for pushing against these new

rules, which had been sanctioned by the college president, and students were reminded that violations would be counted as misdemeanors which in turn could lead to full dismissal (UNC Scrapbooks, 1916-1922).

Concerns Regarding the "Feminization" of Education

A significant shift in the experiences of women versus those of men at CSNS occurred after the conclusion of World War I. Similar to national trends, interest in increasing male enrollment became more prolific after 1915, as did concerns about the masculinity of the younger generation. Meetings and banquets for men took place on campus that prioritized discussion on how to appeal to more men students and bring them to Greeley (UNC Scrapbooks, 1916-1922). Arguments appeared in campus and town publications highlighting various concerns for the imbalance within the student body; some addressed a practical need of male teachers to mentor male primary and secondary school students, but most outlined the more common concern of the increased "feminization" of education. Women students on the college campus in Greeley outnumbered men as much as ten to one in the first two decades of the 20th century, which some feared created "delicate problems of sociology and sex psychology which even the wisest heads are unable to wholly solve" (UNC Scrapbooks, 1916-1922). It wasn't only that more women students existed – these women were dangerous because they intended to create a predominantly-woman public school teaching force. At the same time, women had to "scramble" for men to socialized with. The competition for male companionship made women more likely to accept inappropriate advances, while the lack of competition for men resulted in "severe cases of swelled-heads," which often spurred a development into "sissies or rakes" (UNC Scrapbooks, 1916-1922). While these debates weren't new to the field (see Chapter II), the extent to which they were considered by administrators presented a new obstacle to women's

education and demonstrated a significant shift in the future experiences possible for women, often in the name of so-called tradition.

New Programs and Regulations

Curricular and extracurricular activities became more restrictive for women toward the end of the war and into the 1920s, a trend which contradicted many societal ideas of opportunity for women at the time. What sometimes began as restrictions during the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918 did not lessen for women once the threat abated, even though it often did for men. Administrators added additional programs in hopes of becoming a state college devoted to more than just education and sought other strategies for increased enrollment of men (Carter & Kendel, 1930; Larson, 1989). President John G. Crabbe and the Board of Trustees saw the war in Europe as an opportunity to bring more male students – and their fee income – to Greeley and applied to the United States War Department to become a branch of the Student Army Training Corps (SATC). The plan was successful, and the number of male students enrolled grew to almost equal that of women in the next year.

This in turn brought greater separation of men and women students in the curriculum for the first time, as men experienced more physical education courses, as well as new classes offered in skills deemed relevant to the war: conversational French and German, Modern European History, and wartime technology. To judge academic ability, standardized tests became part of student experience, and stayed as a means for determining who qualified for admittance (Larson, 1989). Women students were encouraged to pursue more educational courses, and, if interested in the sciences, consider the new program of Domestic Arts (UNC Scrapbooks, 1917; *Crucible,* 1920; *Mirror,* 1923). Though not declared as official policy, this

pushed women at CSNS into programs and coursework seen as acceptable for women in traditional American culture and more in line with eastern educational institutions in ways not present earlier.

Campus publications throughout the 1920s also illustrated how extracurricular activities and common language shifted toward new perceptions of gender and racial realities, as well. Western communities became more diverse in the 1920s, as more African Americans migrated out of the Jim Crow South, and immigrants from eastern Europe and Mexico came to work in expanded agricultural markets (Abbott et al., 2013). The arrival of diverse student bodies, and a related segregation of racial identities, became more apparent in club descriptions, if not in policy or records. World War I fostered an interest in the international community, but the local community. For example, the Cosmopolitan Club, a local chapter of a national network "promoting good will and friendship among students of all races and creeds," ("Activities," 1928, p. 158) formed to foster "the formation of a basis for world friendship," among all students on campus. The Newman Club aimed to support a middle ground for "all religions, including Jewish and Catholic students" (p. 169). Casual language also demonstrated gender ideology. After 1918, the term "co-ed" was used for women, and the *Cache la Poudre* student yearbooks demonstrated a sharp division in extracurricular activities by gender, another sharp turn that put CSNS in league with the elite institutions of the East they stood apart from for so long.

Intercollegiate Sports

Athletics offered an effective vehicle for increased local and national attention for CSNS, as well as increased male enrollment in Greely. It also perpetuated the widening separation of men and women students and documented the manliness of enrolled men (Hutcheson, 2020). Some intramural sports developed for all students in the early 1900s, in line with increased

scientific interest in the connection between physical health and mental acuity (Larson, 1989; Thelin, 2004). Women students, as the majority of the student body, accounted for the largest force for the implementation of athletics, including an annual field day where women and men competed against each other. The interwar years – those between the end of World War I and the outbreak of World Wark II – saw a shift toward "official" collegiate sports focused on competition, an interest viewed as important in men, for manliness's sake, and inappropriate in women for the same reason. Teaching schools elsewhere in the United States did not prioritize sports activities on campus, at least not to the same degree as seen at Liberal Arts schools, but many in Greeley again preceded the norm and entered the regional and national realm of college sports. The SATC program also brought and built male students with significant physical strength, which some hoped would give Greeley the advantage over its local rivals in Boulder, Denver, and Fort Collins; they were right to hope. Successes on the field translated to increased status of the college on a social level, which added to the value of the athletics program.

It also created community tensions. The gender divides on campus widened further, and some prominent members of the Greeley community, long tied to the school and its success, pushed harder for administrators to pursue a designation as a state college, not one limited in aim to serving teachers. When the University of Southern California called off a scheduled baseball game after it discovered that CSTC was only a "lowly" teaching school, the administration started to consider it with greater interest (Larson, 1989). In 1935, Colorado State Teacher's College because the Colorado State College of Education, a name allegedly suggested by the USC athletic directors, who claimed USC would play against CSNS only if "teachers" was not part of their title (Larson, 1989). The field of education, and those who pursued it, carried

implications of feminization seen as beneath state institutions like USC, and CSNS had motivation to distance itself from it – regardless of the needs of the majority of its student body.

The 1929 yearbook demonstrated the significant shift toward a male dominant, sports-oriented campus climate, with a majority of its pages devoted to sports events of the previous year, images of the most-prized athletes – all men – and personal stories of success, also talked about only men ("Athletics," pp. 135-161). A smaller section devoted to "Women's Athletics" (pp. 162-168) – not to be confused with the larger section entitled simply "Athletics," which, in line with the trend, just meant men – highlighted the health benefits of fresh air and the democratic spirit fostered by women's intramural activities for basketball, baseball, swimming, and hockey, which they played only against each other or the local girls' high school teams. This must have seemed quite the break from tradition to the CSNS alumni who participated in coeducational debates only a generation before.

New Expectations, and Greater Limitations, for Women

Hardened guidelines for social behavior for women in ways not documented for men also developed during this period, like those outlined by the Dean of Women in chapel on that morning in 1917. In some ways, this contradicted national trends for women, when expanded individualism and ideas of the "New Woman" gained influence and expanded opportunities for women in the public sphere (Lepore, 2018). In others, it aligned with the rise of fundamentalism and conservative ideals, especially toward education and in smaller, rural communities like Greeley (Thelin, 2004). Community resistance to "liberated" women after the war also encouraged stricter requirements for students. One Greeley school board member wrote a warning to the school that there was "no place in our schools for bobbed-haired, bare-kneed teachers" *(Greeley Tribune,* 1930, quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930). While these trends also

impacted things like science curriculum and other liberal "threats," restrictions on behavior and freedoms did not exist for men to the same degree as compared to women at CSNS.

The student newspaper *The Mirror* reported in February 1926, that the Dean of Women and other administrators began cracking down on problematic behaviors among women students, such as "smoking, drinking, and petting," and declared these things were now grounds for immediate expulsion. Socialization between faculty also changed, and in 1930, Frances Tobey – in stark contrast to her earlier warm memories of times with colleagues— wrote they had become "a professional group grown impersonal through vision of a common goal" (quoted in Carter & Kendel, 1930, p. 144). As the administration pushed for recognition as a larger state institution rather than a teacher's college, the experiences for women aligned more with those of other coeducational schools, therefore greatly diminished in many cases.

An awareness of the change, and perhaps even a longing for what had been, is evident in the 1930 writings of the women faculty, who began as students, at CSNS. All accounts included reflections on the memories of a sense of freedom and happiness they experienced in the first three decades of the school's history. While they continued to praise the institution where they worked for its innovation and progress, an undertone of longing for something beyond simple nostalgia appeared. Grace Wilson recalled, "one often wishes one could take students of today back over the trail other students have trod," lamenting the loss of comradery she associated with the older days of the school (Carter & Kendel, 1930, p. 343).

In reference to recent changes requiring higher degrees for leadership positions in departments, Frances Tobey missed the days of "a faith in the unfolding life of the individual and in the freedom as the basic condition of such unfolding…a steady refusal to elevate one branch of knowledge above another" (p. 143). Elizabeth Kendel highlighted the disparity between the

praise of the men in top leadership positions at the Model School versus the lack thereof toward women who supervised the younger graders. The men at the top experienced an exponential rate of turn over, a period she referred to as “sturm and drang” (p. 195) – storm and stress – whereas the women all held long, devoted careers to the school. “The college should be congratulated upon being able to keep such able and progressive teachers for so long a period” (p. 203) Kendel wrote. By the mid-1920s, a significant woman student and faculty majority returned, but as the 1930s and national Depression approached, institutional focus remained almost entirely on its men. Professional opportunities for women-graduates of CSNS aligned more with national trends, limited to younger grades and with the expectation that it would last only a few years. Statistically, women accounted for the vast majority of degree earners at CSNS, but their educational access no longer guaranteed equitable experiences and opportunity.

Conclusion

Despite the transition to a more traditional and less equitable educational space after 1930, practices and experiences at the Colorado State Normal School demonstrated that higher education models promoting educational equity are possible. The influence of the initial motivations of people who first built frontier communities in the West, particularly the persistent belief in the power of those intentions, created important spaces with potential for gender equity in education. To build something entirely new despite the odds meant they could give themselves permission to do so in a way that satisfied need over tradition. Their visions didn’t have to be shaped by the boundaries of the places they left behind.

While previous studies of American normal schools and even CSNS itself demonstrated important connections between concepts of education and national trends, none identified the potential for educational equity demonstrated in environments like those discussed in Chapter

IV. The combination of the need to rely on the population available to serve the community, the connection between the institution and the local community at large, and the belief that they not only *could* but *should* press against the boundaries of traditional ideas allowed for the creation of an equitable educational experience. These experiences then fed into more equitable professional opportunities, as those best trained for the job were not limited by gender. Even when societal norms from the East took stronger hold, there remained an idea within many decision makers that being in the West freed them from some of those restraints. The pride of the collective memory of making something from nothing and defying societal expectation motivated a continuation of "breaking the rules," which in turn allowed for a continuation of the innovation and openness even once the earlier isolation no longer existed. It was only when new interests in looking more like traditional institutions became more prominent that the experiences of men and women began to diverge in more traditional ways. Chapter V explores the implications and possible strategies for practitioners, as well as areas for further research.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Building on the findings of the previous chapter, this chapter presents implications and possible strategies for practice and future research. My study first emerged from a personal curiosity inspired by what I perceived to be a paradox between the high number of women college graduates I encountered as a student and faculty member versus the lower number of women in positions of power. High-level positions in the workplace and within the government typically require a college degree, yet women fill only a minority of these, which offer greater socioeconomic advantages, despite earning the most degrees. Modern debates surrounding higher education often center on its overall efficacy, and educational equity plays a significant role in what it can offer and to whom. The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of educational experience on perceptions of social influence and opportunity by identifying the historical precedents for persistent issues of equity within higher education and potential solutions. Using gender as a lens for evaluating differing experiences, I analyzed if practices within higher education itself, both explicit – such as what students were allowed to participate in or encouraged to avoid – and implicit – what students perceived about education and opportunity through more causal observations or conversations with faculty, staff, and administrators. Early inquiry indicated a significant disparity in experiences of men and women and fostered an interest in understanding the origins of higher education opportunities in America as a means for better understanding broader contemporary challenges.

Looking at the history of education helps practitioners better understand the origins of the systems they work in and identify possible solutions to ongoing issues (Thelin, 2004; Zimmerman, 2020). Concepts of gender always informed American higher education, both in access and experience. I wondered if examples existed of models that promoted effective educational equity for both men and women. One career path consistently available to women in America is teaching, and teaching colleges offered some of the first coeducational opportunities; with that in mind, I chose to base my case study on a state normal school in the American West. The State Normal School of Colorado served as an ideal setting as a school known for educational innovation, a high woman-student ratio within a coeducational setting, and continued success with a well-provisioned archive. Using a postmodern feminist theoretical framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I utilized a discourse-historical approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009) informed by feminist historiography (Donaghy & Sellberg, 2018) with the following questions in mind:

Q1 How did institutional curriculum, policies, and procedures explicitly demonstrate expectations for women and gender, particularly in relation to power and opportunity?

Q2 How did social climate and experiences on campus and within the broader community implicitly shape understandings of opportunity for women students?

Q3 How can modern practitioners learn from and implement strategies for educational equity based on models that did, or perhaps did not, work in the past?

I analyzed institutional documents including catalogs and Board policies, as well as student publications and other writings to emphasize experience and deepen understanding of impacts on women students and faculty. The findings outlined in Chapter IV surprised me. Rather than a system that perpetuated societal expectations of gender, a consistent argument in existing scholarship of normal schools in the East and Midwest, this western normal school

created something new. Due to a combination of belief in a freedom for innovation away from the more established eastern United States and a necessity to serve their isolated community, it fostered educational experiences for women that not only equaled that of men on campus but also empowered them to push for equal professional opportunities. As a result, many continued to defy societal expectations, even if they left the West. It was only after World War I and a shift toward a desire to become a more traditional American university, like their more nationally prestigious counterparts in the East, that educational access and experiences became less equitable for women at the institution, both as students and faculty.

Three major themes emerged for better understanding what allowed for this early model to succeed: (a) connection and service to local community needs, (b) programs of study that varied in length based on desired outcome and practical experience, and (c) an institutional commitment to innovative, high-level liberal arts curriculum equal to that offered by elite, men-only institutions. These findings show that there are options; higher education does not have to be either a practical, trade-focused school or a traditional four-year university. The legacies of these schools indicate the potential power of outcome-based curriculum catered toward the needs of the local community in fostering educational equity and opportunity.

Implications for Practice

This study used gender as a lens for understanding the connections between educational practice and equitable outcomes for students. The implications of its findings, however, are not limited only to gendered realities – in truth, many of the issues highlighted in this work increase in severity as intersectional identities are considered. As a result, my suggestions for practice apply to a broader range of students, particularly as concepts of identity and what defines it continue to diversify. As a practitioner, I strongly believe that higher education can and, at its

most effective, does offer the social mobility and opportunities that many 21st century educators hope it can provide. Still, it is not at its most effective for all people, particularly for historically marginalized communities based on concepts of gender, race, and class. Many of the critiques of current higher education systems are valid. Though this may seem – and is often depicted as – bleak for the future of higher education, it doesn't have to be. An understanding of where these issues come from can present an opportunity to correct or strengthen them. In a globalized world based in a knowledge economy, options for the implementation of innovative efforts toward educational equity and realizing the equalizing force of higher education for Americans is limitless.

Community-Focused Strategies

Public opinion of American higher education and what it offers has significantly declined in recent years (Wooldridge, 2023). A 2023 Gallup poll indicated that only 36 percent of Americans feel confidence in the usefulness of higher education; another study found that 87 percent of employers believe most graduates do not learn transferrable skills needed for the contemporary work force while in college (Brenan, 2023). The findings in this study show that a model of using higher education as a means for answering local needs could assuage the tensions that exist between institutions and their surrounding communities. It brings students to the area who are invested in its future, it opens opportunities to local people already connected to the community but who may not be able to access it on their own, and it betters local interests which naturally feed into national ones. In order to restore faith in the benefit of obtaining post-secondary education, the disconnect between the American public and four-year institutions must be bridged (Xu & Jaggars, 2016).

Connecting with the Community

Levine and Van Pelt (2021) call for innovation to restore American's faith in higher education, stressing that it is only successful if it is "compatible with the university that hosts it" (p. 31). I argue that it goes both ways, and a university can only be successful – academically and financially – if compatible with the community that surrounds it. The interaction between the Colorado State Normal School (CSNS) and its surrounding community went deeper than only having a local representative on the Board of Trustees or offering some internships; the school served as more than a revenue base for town businesses. What fostered true compatibility was the cyclical nature of the relationship between all community members and all students. The women students worked and lived in the town, just as the men did. The social activities were not separated or restricted by gender.

Another key element to the success demonstrated in the study was that the community and the school played an equal role in supporting their invested interests. The community needed trained teachers; the school needed a community. Their visions relied equally on the other and required equal openness and commitment to necessity and practical solutions, namely that women – traditionally excluded from advanced, coeducational colleges and universities in America – would be the reliable population for supplying these students and teachers. As needs expanded, so did the subjects incorporated into the school. Administrators and faculty shaped and reshaped the curriculum to meet evolving needs and maintain the educational quality of Colorado schools. and administrators and faculty worked consistently to ensure that the students learned practical skills and relevant theories focused on the specific communities where they would work. The normal school thrived when the community felt involved and valued in its

decisions, and it struggled when relationships with community members weakened, including the on-campus community of women students and faculty.

Connecting to the Community

Many within academia today acknowledge that a disconnect exists between higher education as an institution and the diverse communities around them, part of a larger ongoing debate over the purpose and value of higher education to all people. Many higher education professionals tend to attribute the tensions between their structures and members of the general public to issues outside the purview of their realm, such as poverty, systematic inequity, or the politicization of public-school curriculum, for example (Gettinger, 2019). While these are all issues institutions at least claim to want to fix, and there are certainly practitioners who genuinely do, there exists very limited accountability – at least publicly – for the role higher education does in fact play in perpetuating these issues. The way it does so is by not meeting the public where *they* are, and instead waiting for the public to come to them. As a result, very little change occurs, even as enrollment declines, and financial crises increase. This case study provides myriad examples of how listening to what the community actually needs, rather than telling it what we think it needs, can address the divide and bring positive change to all involved.

One example is the creation of the Model School on the college's campus. CSNS first attempted to force unprepared student teachers into equally unprepared school classrooms, and no one benefited. Only when college administrators evaluated what would provide the best solutions based on honest, local, focused needs did a mutually beneficial solution emerge. This in turn fostered educational equity for women students and faculty by creating genuine systems of support for students in the form of highly trained supervising teachers, while exposing students to the practical application of the pedagogical theories being taught in their own

courses. Faculty members got to utilize their expertise through service to students within the actual demographic they trained others to handle, while receiving acknowledgement and support of their own abilities from those in power. Community members received something they considered to be foundational principles to their identity: affordable access to ground-breaking education for their children which opened opportunities unavailable to earlier generations. Significant progress was realized for all involved, a key element for educational equity for all identities.

Student teaching remains a generally successful example of a way to emphasize local need and provide students with practical skills. Students pursuing education degrees often do so with the community they wish to serve – rural, urban, abroad, etc. – in mind, and their practical and pedagogical training is intended to support those needs, combined with a traditional liberal arts curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking skills. The primary preventing current student teaching models from always being as effective as it could be, for students and schools alike, is also rooted in a general disconnect between institutional practice and community needs. Part of what helped faculty members provide the best support possible to their students was that they continued to use their skills. They kept their teaching muscles limber, and they implemented the new theories and practices they studied about in real time, rather than sending the student teachers off to do it and hoping for the best – a decidedly inequitable practice. A knowledge of theory to inform practice is important, but the field of higher education also needs to understand the world around it in a more practically applicable way. This isn't only true in educational programs. A significant number of employers feel college graduates are being taught, and thus entering the workforce with, skills no longer applicable to today's labor market (Wooldridge, 2023). Developing stronger connections to the local community can only bring better

understanding for higher education professionals of what knowledge students really need in order to succeed after graduation, a crucial element for ensuring that the experiences we offer to students come with equitable outcomes for all.

Reaching that degree of connection among contemporary communities will require a lot of honest reflection among practitioners and an openness to some humility in addition to confidence in the expertise they hold. This includes genuine involvement in local issues, as well as a willingness to incorporate community members into the institutional bubble in which many higher education organizations operate. Four-year institutions in particular tend to stay largely isolated; involvement in the community and training students to meet its needs is often assumed to the role of community colleges and trade schools, or of extracurricular clubs and charities (Deverts et al., 2017). Colleges and universities with established community engagement programs are a minority, despite demonstrating the myriad benefits of collaboration and reciprocity with local groups (American Council on Education, 2024), not least of which include lucrative connections for students after they graduate, made stronger, and perhaps more personal, through a history of connectedness.

Meeting Local Students' Needs

The benefits of a strong connection to the local community include access to potential future students. Colleges and universities do typically implement recruitment practices for regional high schools, but it is often uneven and focused on private and public schools with higher median family incomes (Gettinger, 2019; Mintz, 2023). This inherently promotes inequity in access. CSNS succeeded in its initial, community-focused mission because it took steps to ensure accessibility for as many people as possible. Normal schools generally appealed to "non-traditional" students in terms of class because it offered a direct line to gainful employment at a

lower cost (Ogren, 2005). In largely rural Colorado, the incentive needed to be even greater in order to motivate students to make the journey into town while still being able to provide assistance at home when needed. To meet these needs, students could attend for free if they agreed to teach in Colorado schools after graduation, the school scheduled classes and semesters intentionally to allow for commute times and family work needs, and a significant summer program for students unable to attend during the other three sessions during the year filled remaining gaps.

As the majority of students were women, this degree of flexibility was also undoubtedly necessary in order to gain familial approval of her attendance – theoretically, she could be called back home if needed. By creating an accessible environment for all students, one that acknowledged social or cultural expectations, students were able to attend and focus on what they wanted to get out of it. A contemporary example in gender-related higher education inequities involve students who are single parents. Studies show that single mothers encounter significantly greater challenges more consistently than single fathers in their pursuit of higher education (Guendouzi, 2006; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Zart, 2019). Single mothers often work full-time, which limits the times they can attend school. Many programs do not offer online options at all levels, and not all learners do well in online formats, and single mothers are statistically more likely to have less social support than single fathers or women students with no children. Yet while studies on this topic exist, most four-year institutions schedule class times and options in the same way they have for many years, with “traditional” students in mind. Additionally, I can speak from experience and add that, even if a single mother is able to make the typical class times work, the experience is unlikely to be truly equitable as she is less able to

utilize on campus resources or have sufficient homework time after using her lunch hour to attend class. Practices like these automatically exclude a substantial number of students – not only single mothers.

Incorporating Bold, Innovative Strategies

As mentioned above, the findings of my study surprised me in many ways. One trend that I found striking, not because I saw it in the research itself so much as its absence in contemporary practice, is boldness. Higher education needs to be brave. Refusing to implement new strategies can be a mechanism borne from fear as much as a sense of stability. Similarly, I have concluded that the bravery necessary for real, significant change, requires a fair amount of humility. Higher education needs to be humble. There are a lot of structures within college and university practices that hold on to ideas because it's how it has always been – the course offerings example from above or maintaining a social stigma that depicts two-year institutions as inferior in some way to four-year programs are examples of archaic perspectives that don't really serve today's students' needs. Innovative practice will require finding a way to meet the students where they are.

A local example that comes to mind is the Aims2UNC program initiated in Greeley, Colorado, in 2019. It is a collaboration between Aims, the two-year Community College, and the University of Northern Colorado. New and current Aims students can apply for the program, which eases and supports the transition to the four-year university after they complete their Associate Degree program. While completing their Aims courses, students have full access to all resources on UNC's campus, as well (Aims2UNC, 2020; University of Northern Colorado, 2024). Within its first year, the program accepted 117 applicants and maintained a 97 percent retention rate. One of the students preparing to transition to UNC that fall, credited the program

for inspiring her to do something she never thought she would be able to do: obtain a bachelor's degree. "You start thinking 'Wow, this is possible," she said, "I do have something to offer and there is something that I can do with what I'm learning and what brings me happiness and joy'" (Aims2UNC, 2020). As seen in Chapter IV, the power of a belief in what is possible is a vital component to creating an equitable reality.

Diversified Outcome Options

The debate surrounding the value of higher education often stalls over an either-or discussion of traditional, four-year institutions versus trade or technical schools offering shorter, skill-based programs. Those who support the traditional structures emphasize the social importance of a well-rounded liberal arts education, and often depict the other form as lesser quality education. Proponents of the opposing side claim that that most higher education institutions were too attached to old content and methods and lacked strong leaders, and stress that the focused should be on "microcredentials" and certificates as a means for expediting educational options (Levine & Van Pelt, 2021).

In truth, this is a useless debate, made more so by the ways in which each side clings to their argument for the preservation of their system without considering what should be most important: the students. Studies show that both formulas perpetuate inequitable experiences for students who hold historically marginalized identities. The continued one-size-fits-all options offered by most institutions tend to really only work for a minority of students; 41 percent of current college students have a worsening perception of their institution, feeling their needs are not being met in either scenario (Jaschik, 2020). As a result, higher education is plagued with high withdrawal rates, and a lot of students are not earning a degree, though they leave with the

same amount of debt. ASU President Michael Crow observed a disturbing trend toward a consistent reality where "rich kids get taught by professors and poor kids get taught by computer" (Delbanco, 2013).

The Colorado State Normal School model shows that the debate itself, which existed then as seen in the conflict with the State university in Boulder, may be part of the problem. The institutional stigmas are what end up disadvantaging students most often. The study also shows that it doesn't have to be outcome-based versus traditional liberal-arts-based for students to succeed; in fact, what made the school so impactful was that it embraced a combination of the two. The school offered various options to students, based on their previous education and ability, their schedule, and their professional goals. This proved significant in the development of educational equity for women in two ways. First, they didn't have to pick one side or the other in shaping their own lives. Some followed the degree tracts as far as they went, earning graduate degrees and becoming celebrated experts in their field. Others enrolled for shorter periods in order to earn a temporary certificate, taught for the few years required, and then married. There are also examples given of women who did both. Bringing the different options together, enabled students to structure their education in a way that works best for *them* and their ambitions, while also ensuring they have the institutional support that correlates directly to their overall success (Lee et al., 2004; Means & Pyne, 2017; Ruthig et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2017).

Higher Expectations for Quality Teaching

This study reveals the myriad benefits that come from an educational environment that prioritizes an awareness of student needs, pedagogical theory, and innovative practice. Since the end of the 1920s, that idea has become more accepted and embraced. Becoming a teacher in America today requires rigorous study and practical application through student teaching –

unless, that is, you're teaching in higher education. While some scholars work as Teaching Assistants in graduate school, that experience varies greatly and is not typically a requirement for hire after graduation. Many new faculty find themselves in the classroom teaching for the first time (Zimmerman, 2020). Even though American education as it exists today formed from a dawning awareness that there was more to effective teaching than lecture and recitation, unlike primary and secondary systems, higher education institutions typically have little-to-no infrastructure in place for addressing lack of teacher training among faculty (Zimmerman, 2020). Furthermore, while institutions and individual departments vary greatly in their level of faculty oversight, they are largely consistent in their inability to pursue recourse if lack of ability translates into ineptitude at a student's expense. This increases with rank, as assistant professorships and above typically require a scholarship component, and the "publish or perish" mentality, combined with the legitimate challenges that come with teaching even under the best circumstances, undoubtedly makes prioritizing quality teaching even harder.

At its best, college-level instruction is defined by inconsistent methods among people whose passion for their field merged with interest in educating; at its worst, the idea of academic freedom has led to academic indifference, sometimes even apathy, toward student success (Levine & Van Pelt, 2021; Thelin, 2004; Zimmerman, 2020). From my own experience, I can attest to the sometimes-surprising degree of resistance among faculty to adjusting their own methods or attending training that pertain to the in-class aspects of their position. I've also seen that there can be great advantages to the freedom that comes from limited regulation for the person who wants to teach well anyway; however, relying on natural talent alone is at least as much a gamble as trying to require new standardized methods. As a woman, I can also attest to the fact that I am often expected to be more maternal, soft, or committed to my students than my

men colleagues, sometimes to the detriment of my own personal well-being. This is an example of the explicit bias discussed in Chapter I, as well as another way in which equitable experiences are challenged or prevented by socialized ideas.

The findings discussed in Chapter IV of this study demonstrate how impactful learning from highly trained educators can be. Even when programs diversified beyond education, the expectation for faculty included that they have training in education; many were graduates of other normal schools. Other research supports this idea, demonstrating that students perceive greater learning in classrooms with faculty who received pedagogy training than those who do not, even among faculty who have been teaching at the college level for many years (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). This general lack of consistency also adds fuel to the fire of the debates around the overall value of a higher education experience. As education has grown more individual-centric, perceptions of teaching at the college level remain critical and accuse professors of being out of touch, disinterested in their students, and even focused only on making the students see the world exactly as they do (Zimmerman, 2020).

A potential solution to lack of pedagogical training in faculty is to incorporate it into the organized sessions aimed at Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) issues that many institutions are now implementing. The fundamentals of educational practice and interaction with students are an issue of equity (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994), and as such should be incorporated into that framework. This could include not only exposure to current pedagogical practices, but also how knowledge is conveyed, values socialized, and learning impacted culturally by diverse student bodies (Espino & Ranero, 2012). DEI programs increasingly face political and social pushback, but their value among academics is generally accepted. Similar programs to support more culturally responsive teaching should carry the same weight.

Academics know how to follow rules, whether they want to admit it or not. The research process itself is typically highly regulated, and scholars spend a great deal of time learning the best practices and processes for doing it well – teaching should be the same. Student-facing faculty members also have an obligation to the students who pay to sit in their classrooms. Scholarship is absolutely essential to academia and the continued development of knowledge, otherwise there would be nothing to teach. If students aren't prioritized or fall victim to a disinterest in "standardized" teaching practices, who will be left to teach the research to? Ultimately, there needs to be more structured training and support in place to ensure that the education being delivered on campuses is worthy of the distinction, and that includes training on *all* aspects of the educational experience, not only within the classroom. Most faculty not only teach multiple classes per week, but they are also academic advisors, and they are often most privy to student struggles. The lack of awareness of students' needs and effective teaching strategies carries greater risks in the form of socializing norms of dominance for some and inferiority for others.

Dismantling Institutionalized Whiteness and Social Hierarchies

The systems of higher education emulated by most contemporary institutions were established to maintain a social hierarchy that prioritized white, wealthy men. The 'democratic' nature of it all was not that it should be open and welcoming to all, but rather that it could establish an American nobility based in intelligence rather than birthright (Levine & Van Pelt, 2021; Robertson & Zimmerman, 2017; Thelin, 2004). This study details other ways that higher education is historically founded on concepts on exclusion and whiteness. Just as the histories people and institutions choose to tell, or to not tell, can reveal values, ignoring even uncomfortable truths about institutional origins can allow for the perpetuation of antiquated

social values. This is important for practitioners to consider because, even if not always able to articulate it, students can feel if something was not created to support them, which leads to demands for better connection, representation, and respect for their needs, another age-old concern. When students perceive that prejudice exists within their institution, their commitment and success is negatively impacted (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). However, positive messaging from support structures disrupts "not only societal messages of discrimination, but also students' own messages of internalized racism, sexism, and classism" (Means & Pyne, 2017, p. 921). Equitable experiences are only possible if higher education professionals recognize that American higher education practices developed as a means for perpetuating classism, whiteness, and a patriarchal social structure and work to dismantle them in their own actions.

Implications for Administrators

Effective change requires action from those with the most power: the policymakers. They must be first in efforts to understand the needs of the community and use their influence to meet them. They need to ensure through hiring practices and promotion procedures that the 'face' of the institution models that of the student body, and that candidates are chosen because they are the most likely to protect student interests and create equitable educational experiences, not necessarily the one with the most prestigious degree. This study shows that passion, commitment, creativity, and training together allow for proper support of students, not just a higher degree. Like Francis Tobey, I believe we all should embrace "a faith in the unfolding life of the individual and in the freedom as the basic condition of such unfolding…a steady refusal to elevate one branch of knowledge above another" (Carter & Kendel, p. 143).

To provide as much support as possible, they need to work to bridge the gap between local communities and their institutions and between academic and student affairs -it all started

as one whole, but diverged as student bodies grew and diversified. Student Affairs developed more standardized ideas of identity and professional philosophy, while Academic Affairs did not (Schuh et al., 2016; Zimmerman, 2020). I challenge administrators to provide additional support to faculty members and student affairs professionals in meaningful ways aimed at promoting total student support and success. This includes developing training and providing resources for engaging with students. It also requires an honest reflection by administrators in identifying their own role in perpetuating inequitable realities. For example, the continued increasing reliance on faculty members on annual contracts or serving as adjuncts – positions consistently filled by women and People of Color – perpetuates a gender and racial hierarchy through hiring practices. Administrators must evaluate the degree of their own investment in the surrounding community, if they are really providing options for students to pursue an education that truly works for and benefits them, and the level of support for faculty and staff that will allow them to do their job well and avoid academic burnout.

Considerations for Future Research

The State Normal School of Colorado offers only one possible model for effectively providing an equitable educational experience for all students. There are several areas for future research that could build on and expand understanding of how to implement these strategies. The general lack of diversity within the community surrounding the school in this case study prevents a deep understanding of the influence of race in implementing equitable practices. Broadening the work to include multiple normal schools throughout the West, particularly those within racially diverse areas, would be useful. in better understanding. A long-term comparative study of different types of contemporary higher education institutions and delivery methods to measure impacts on educational equity would be beneficial, as would a study of the presence of, or lack

thereof, these practices in secondary schools, to supplement understanding of student perspectives of equitable educational opportunities.

Conclusion

The history of access to American higher education is an uneven one, defined by evolving definitions of who should receive education and to what end. Women's experiences in general have been largely influenced by societal expectations of appropriate womanhood and civic participation. Normal schools offered an outlet for women to train for a career alongside men, particularly in the West. American society is still grappling with these legacies, even as women enrollment and representation in higher education is on the rise. On paper, federal regulations like Title IX have been a massive success toward representation in higher education, and in many ways, they have been impactful, but access alone is not the solution for equity. The issue is no longer as much one of gatekeepers outside of institutions as it is the systemic gatekeeping within. Ultimately, higher education holds *a* key to a more equitable society but must better understand its role in perpetuating systems that advantage some social groups over others, as well as its potential in restructuring in the future to a form more beneficial to students needs now.

This narrative historical case study of the Colorado State Normal School demonstrated the possibility of change and the power of educational equity through a local focus, commitment to provide what is really needed rather than what tradition suggests should be needed, and an embracing of multiple aspects of successful, innovative practice. How can we as modern educators and higher educational professionals give ourselves the same permission to not just challenge the status quo but to let it go entirely for the sake and betterment of the communities we serve? The narrative that an industry founded on ideals that may be antiquated or from a time

gone by can’t adjust - that it can’t both honor its legacy and meet the future - is a fallacy born of capitalistic competition. It’s true that to remain bound to practices of the past carries a responsibility of actively understanding it in its truest form and function, and to consistently evaluating if that function still provides a social benefit; however, letting the past go completely negates the good done and lessons learned, which in turn leads to repeated errors and limited progress in its own right. In a global world, there is no place for using physical boundaries to define who can or can’t be a pioneer, whether that be a tech start up, or a literal landscape, or the perimeters of a historic institution of learning. Just as the study showed that multiple models of education offered greater equity, the same is true for higher education’s next steps. There needs to be a facing of the past, as well as an embracing of bold, brave, innovation, to move it forward in a way that truly benefits all.

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