

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Gender and Generation Y

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Few undergraduates realize that Yale College became coed only thirty-four years ago. Three years ago the Women Faculty Forum screened a film about the early days of coeducation at Yale, *Boola Boola . . . Yale Goes Coed*. I had not attended Yale, and had gathered from speaking with faculty members that the story of coeducation was part of Yale College lore. As it turned out, most students I spoke to had either never heard of coeducation or assumed it had taken place in some far distant past—you know, like the 1950s. I got the sense that women faculty members didn't quite know what to make of the students' lack of knowledge.

The story of coeducation struck a nerve when I realized my own mother could not have attended Yale. But having recently graduated from Stanford, I understood the blasé reaction of Yale undergraduate women. For people my age, it's inconceivable that institutions could place such blatant limitations on women's ambitions. The stories about demonstrations in front of Mory's or the Title IX strip-protest to get locker rooms for the women's

crew team seem almost anachronistic. Of course men and women receive equal access and treatment. Many young women feel that equality has arrived and we are living it.

I decided that students' ignorance of the coeducation struggle was not emblematic of a problem, but rather a perverse sign of progress. Young women have built on that past and made Yale a different kind of institution. My tidy conclusion hit a roadblock when, during *Gender Matters*, Nan Keohane began to speak of her experiences at Stanford. After a few years in New Haven I felt I understood women's undergraduate experiences at Yale. But I had lived through it at Stanford. In truth, I had become increasingly grateful for my college experience as I learned more about the difficult history of women at Yale. After all, Stanford had always been coeducational—my own grandmother graduated in 1931. As an undergraduate I came into contact with amazing female role models in the history and feminist studies programs. In my mind Stanford didn't have a difficult history regarding gender issues.

Imagine my surprise to hear of Stanford's strict quota on women that persisted through World War II. I squirmed in my seat; while I had vague recollections of my grandmother's stories about college life, I had to admit to myself that I knew nothing about this part of the university's history. I also had no idea about the struggles to start up the feminist studies program. Like many young women I assumed that such programs just sort of materialized on college campuses in about 1975.

While I had been able to justify the ignorance of coeducation at Yale, now that it hit closer to home I began to wonder again what it meant. I *knew* that the history of women's experiences was critical in helping change the future, but I had remained totally ignorant. Even I, on some level, had come to believe it didn't matter to my life.

Having just completed my first semester at Yale Law School, I realize that many of my peers have had similar experiences. Our futures look very different from those of our mothers. We rightly believe that we can accomplish just about anything.

While this freedom is exhilarating, it makes it difficult to identify the barriers we keep coming up against. A few weeks into the term a friend confessed that, though she had always been an active class participant, she had recently stopped raising her hand in class, after realizing she wasn't going to get called on. Another friend who had majored in math in college (and never had an interest in gender issues) confessed that, to her surprise, she was really looking forward to taking classes with female professors in the spring semester.

My friends and I are loathe to admit that inequities exist *in our lives*, but these experiences illustrate that gender does matter. Unlike before, our generation doesn't have to worry about gaining access—we just expect to constitute half of the law school class. Instead, we experience subtle setbacks, such as not being called on in class and a lack of mentors.

My friend recognized that not raising her hand anymore signaled a problem, but she didn't know what to do about it, since, in her eyes, it didn't constitute blatant sexism. My other friend had never expected law school to so closely mirror life as a math major. She, like myself and many others, had no female professors the first term of law school. Never taking gender into account can have detrimental effects, especially for women in my generation who have always assumed nothing would stand in the way to success.

Today my peers and I truly can live out the ideal of feminism—the freedom to choose one's own path. The stories told at *Gender Matters* help to bridge the gap between the lessons of the past and the less obvious forms of gender inequity that persist today.