Education for Domesticity:  
Women in the Indiana University Halls of Residence, 1945-1960  

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This article gives a historic view on the experience of women at Indiana University (IU) post World War II through examination of residence hall policies. It uses IU archival documents as primary sources in order to provide a snapshot into the lives of these women. These documents show how IU met the national norms of the era by prescribing to women a set of extra-curricular expectations of the domestic ideal to which they should conform.

In the years following World War II, "millions of women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing their station wagons full of children at school and smiling as they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floor" (Friedan, 1963, p. 12). The image of this seemingly flawless housewife became prominent postwar. Women were driven back to the home, despite advances in both the work force and education prior to and during the war, as jobs were needed for men (Solomon, 1985). Men returned from the war in droves and took advantage of the GI Bill, and the place for women in the work force and on college campuses was called in to question (Solomon, 1985). The same was true at Indiana University (IU), as veterans enrolled in high numbers after the war (Clark, 1977). As the role of women was shifted back to the home, college preparation focused once again on domesticity.

The postwar domestic ideal was defined as the “traditional sexual division of labor, and the formal and informal barriers that prevented women from fully participating in the public realm” (Meyerowitz, 1994, p. 3). Education for domesticity was prominent in universities, which was promoted through a curriculum that was deemed a “feminine education” (Friedan, 1963, p. 134). Educators such as Lynn White, president of Mills College, suggested that this education needed to counteract the notion that women should be educated “as if they were men” (Solomon, 1985, p. 192). White suggested that women be educated for the primary role of “enriching home and community” (Solomon, 1985, p. 192). Radcliffe president, W.K. Jordan, informed entering freshmen women that their education “would prepare them to be splendid wives and mothers and their reward might be to marry Harvard men” (Solomon, 1985, p. 192). Even the more liberal educators regularly acknowledged the value of preparing for domesticity. Barnard president Millicent McIntosh stated that women needed a “philosophy which does not belittle the home as a place unworthy of her best, and does not glorify the job as important beyond everything else” (Solomon, 1985, p. 193). The value of women’s place in the home was prominent in the idea of a feminine education and this ideal was built into the curriculum.

In her 1963 book, The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan states, “education was the prime target of the new mystique…” (p. 33). Friedan describes the feminine mystique of the 1950s as the notion that women were solely defined by their role as housewives and mothers. Friedan describes sex-directed educators that dictated separate education for men and women, with the result that “very few girls get the same education as boys” (Friedan, 1963, p. 139).
In interviews with many women, Friedan found that they felt discouraged from intellectual conversation while at college and that discussion mostly revolved around social engagements and finding suitable men to date. The national media portrayed college as a “marriage mart” and, when asked what they wanted to get out of college, women answered “the man for me” (Friedan, 1963, pp. 138-139). Many women attended colleges that acknowledged their potential for earning, emphasizing roles such as teachers, nurses, and social workers (Solomon, 1985). However, it was advised that women’s priorities were to learn from her coursework how to prepare to be wives and mothers (Friedan, 1963).

College was not necessarily seen as a path to a degree for women. Women focused on preparation for domesticity and finding a husband; hence, many dropped out before receiving a degree (Solomon, 1985, p. 195). IU encouraged women to take advantage of their time on campus, even though it acknowledged that many did not stay the full four years necessary to complete the degree (Indiana University Bulletin, 1951). Into the 1950s, IU published a special version of their course bulletin, What Makes an Educated Woman, which provided women with tips as to how their coursework might prepare them for future roles. It emphasized four areas: homemaking, citizenship, personal development and earning. This publication acknowledged that many women continued to work after marriage or returned to the working world after their children were grown. However, it still advised woman to “be prepared first of all to create a satisfying home, and second to make her own contribution to the world’s work” (Indiana University Bulletin, 1951). The curriculum acknowledged that women were capable of working but largely endorsed the idea that preparation for domesticity was the priority for women. Life for women at IU appeared to be no different than the national norm (Solomon, 1985).

It is important to note that some students were not represented by the notion of the domestic ideal. These ideals only applied to middle and upper class white women, as women from low-income families were focused on earning as a priority. A large percentage of black women came from low-income families, which placed them in their own social category at IU due to separate housing and activities on campus (Wells, 1980).

The ideal of a distinctly feminine education was endorsed outside of the classroom at IU through the regulations and activities in the Halls of Residence, which supported the development of attributes suitable for a housewife. IU required that all women reside in university housing after 1940 and was able to exert a high level of control over the lives of women in the environment where students spent the majority of their time (Indiana University Approved Rooms for Women Official Rental Contract, n.d.). IU prescribed the domestic ideal to which women should conform through an extra-curricular set of expectations and regulations provided by the Halls of Residence.

Origins of University Housing Serving In Loco Parentis for Women

Postwar at IU, the role of a parent was replaced by university administration, instituting in loco parentis on campus. This term translates from Latin for “in place of the parent” and is commonly used to describe the role that universities took in relation to their students up until the 1960s (Lee, 2011, p.1). Nationally, families demanded protection for women through a campus-administered moral code “even stricter than they themselves have enforced”
It was more “becoming” for women to continue dependence on her family, while men cultivated independence while away at college (Mueller, 1954, p. 109). Women were perceived as having more naïveté, temptation, and consequences for breaking the rules, hence “there must be more protection” (Mueller, 1954, p. 109).

This protection began in 1906 when IU provided housing to women in Alpha Hall more than 30 years before it was provided for men. The university also provided a yearly publication, Approved Rooms for Women, that listed approved rooms in private residences in town prior to the extensive housing built at IU in the 1950s and 60s (Approved Rooms for Women, 1953). IU lacked facilities to house all women; hence, this policy ensured that adequate quality of housing was provided and more importantly, that rules were followed. Men did not have such strict regulations for living in university housing and could choose whatever housing they wished (Approved Rooms for Students, 1953).

Between 1924 and 1940, the buildings of the Women’s Quadrangle provided housing for women in Memorial, Sycamore, Morrison, and Forest halls. With more housing options available, beginning in the first semester of the 1940-41 academic year, all freshmen women were required to live in the Halls of Residence (Indiana University Approved Rooms for Women Official Rental Contract, n.d.). President Wells stated this new rule was “intended to help girls adjust to college life, improve their scholarship, and encourage good social relationships” (Clark, 1977, p. 60). It also provided greater ease for the university in enforcing rules for women, as many were starting to “give rules a twist” and engage in behavior off campus that was frowned upon by the administration (Clark, 1977, p. 60).

The priority of protecting women in university housing before World War II quickly shifted during and after the war to housing military men and male veterans. Colleges were being asked to provide housing to not only high numbers of returning veteran students, but also for the families they brought with them (Blimling, 2003). IU built extensive housing for married students over the next two decades. However, the “married students” were almost always the husbands (Friedan, 1963, p. 10), as there is little evidence that women remained at IU once they were married (Women’s Residence Halls, 1949). President Wells reflected that temporary housing at IU enabled the university to “admit every returning Hoosier veteran who was qualified” (Wells, 1980, p. 161).

The boom of veterans on IU’s campus necessitated housing for men to provide opportunities for the nation’s heroes to pursue education; yet, housing for women existed largely to ensure their behavior conformed to the expectations of the administration and to serve in loco parentis (Clark, 1977). This distinction relates to the difference of opinion of the era with regard to the purpose of education for men and women. Education for men involved identity exploration and free pursuit of goals and achievements (Mueller, 1954). However, women’s education perpetuated the status quo of the domestic ideal and prepared them for their identity to be defined through their husbands (Friedan, 1963). The university established a new priority of constructing men’s residences, yet regulation of life for women still remained at the forefront of the Halls of Residence. This made clear that the university seemed to have different purposes for the housing of each gender.
Postwar Life for Women

All female students at IU were required to live in the Halls of Residence their freshman year. By this standard, all women were prescribed the same expectations to which they should conform. The Women's Residence Hall Handbook provided expectations that women would be involved in student government, eat meals and study at the designated times, and follow the many rules provided regarding dress, dating, and etiquette. These guidelines ensured women had the proper degree of protection and guidance that was appropriate in the absence of their parents (Mueller, 1954). Halls of Residence staff emphasized refining “niceties and social graces” (Nelson, 1959, p. 1), which “reinforced traditional concepts of femininity” that were prominent in the postwar era (Meyerowitz, 1994, p. 3).

Rules and Regulations for Women

Residence hall life was designed to help women “develop good taste, self-discipline and good personality traits” (Jordan & Nelson, 1947, p. 13). Extensive rules and regulations were in place to ensure that women conformed to this notion. This reflected the idea that had long been present in the national culture and was re-emphasized postwar, that women bore an unequal burden for the maintenance of standards in morals and manners (Mueller, 1954). Men had an entirely different set of expectations regarding their behavior. “Be Reasonable” was the slogan stated in the Official Handbook of Procedures, Rules and Regulation for Men and this was “all that’s expected” (Official Handbook of Procedures, Rules and Regulations for Men, 1947, p. 13).

Dating. In the postwar era, finding a husband was often times a higher priority than finishing one’s degree. Women were pressured to take advantage of the chance to find a suitable husband, as college presented an opportunity to be around many single men (Mueller, 1954). In her book, Educating Women for a Changing World, Kate Hevner Mueller advised women that when considering a university, they would “do well to note what steps are taken…to meet suitable men of their own age” (1954, p. 98). As dating was a high priority for women, in turn, it was also highly regulated.

In order to date, men and women first had to overcome the many rules in place to keep them separate. At IU, women’s residence halls were not a place that male students or even male family members could visit freely. Male students were never permitted to go beyond the living and recreation rooms and could only visit during limited hours, which on some days were only for 30 minutes (Jordan & Nelson, 1947, p. 22). Male visitors were referred to as “men callers” (Jordan & Nelson, 1947, p. 22), which suggests that the sole purpose of men and women interacting was to find a suitable date. Women were not permitted to go into men’s houses, clubs, fraternities or residence halls without a chaperone approved by the Student Activities Office (Official Handbook of Procedures, Rules and Regulations, 1947).

Dating was one of the few occasions that men and women could interact alone and required “proper emphasis” in order to balance it with other areas of college life (Women’s Residence Hall Handbook, 1954, p. 6). The Women’s Residence Hall Handbook (1954) went as far as to provide some tips for dating, as it was recognized “as an important part of life on a campus” (p. 6). One such example cautioned women against “necking” without getting acquainted with their date first and that “prolonged necking in public…is rather childish and inconsiderate” (Women’s Residence Hall Handbook, 1954, p. 7). Dating was of such importance that it was
also emphasized in the men’s Handbook. Discussion “regarding the co-eds” highlighted the rules and regulations for interacting with women in order to “save both you and your date embarrassment” (Halls of Residence for Men, 1947, p. 17).

While it is not said outright in the Handbook, dating and sex had much greater social implications for women (Mueller, 1954, p. 95). Women felt pressure to impress their dates in order to secure a future husband. From the regulations and tips in the Handbook, the Halls of Residence staff appeared to recognize the high importance that dating played in a woman’s social standing, both at IU and in shaping her future.

**Dress.** Postwar, a woman’s dress was of utmost importance. Women’s magazines of the era revolved around fashion and romance (Mueller, 1954). Even a few subtle mistakes in dress may have jeopardized a woman’s social or employment status. Serving in an *in loco parentis* function, Halls of Residence staff provided students with detailed information about what to wear and when to wear it.

“Clothes don’t make the woman…but the way she wears them helps” (Key to WRH, 1957, p. 27). This first line of a paragraph in the Key to WRH from the 1957-58 year introduces a detailed chart for women on what to wear for different occasions, listing the types of shoes, dress, coat, gloves, and that they should wear for every occasion, even athletic events and sun-bathing. The most formal occasions included church, plays or operas, the Auditorium series, and sorority rush parties, where women should wear pantyhose, heels, dresses, dress coat, gloves, and a hat. The least formal attire was dorm wear, where women could wear pajamas, jeans, robes, slacks, bermudas, skirts or shorts. Women were provided with the proper guidelines for dress so that they could conform to societal standards and not make social miscues while at IU or on other important occasions. These guidelines did not serve to directly improve the environment in the residence hall. However, they existed as part of the residence hall administration’s commitment to assisting women in developing proper habits that would allow them to find a husband and prepare them for domesticity.

**Dining.** In the Halls of Residence, mealtime was deemed the “most relaxing and sociable hours of the day” (Key to WRH, 1959, p. 14). For this reason, the dining hall was an ideal place to emphasize manners and proper etiquette for social situations. The residence hall took the place of a student’s parents in providing education regarding proper etiquette. Women were educated in preparation for success as wives and mothers, and the life of a middle or upper class housewives tended to involve a lot of leisure time, including social engagements and hosting parties (Mueller, 1954). Women served as caretakers of the norms that society maintained for social functions (Mueller, 1954). It was important for women to perfect these social graces and manners before marriage, and these were emphasized in various editions of the Handbook.

The Handbook included *Rules for Your Dining Hall*, and instructed women on details such as to wash their faces and hands and to comb their hair prior to dinner. Table manners were important, and the Handbook suggested consulting “Emily” at the library if one needed to be refreshed on social graces. This referred to Emily Post’s popular books on social graces published in the 1920s. The manners that women learned in the dining hall were preparation for occasions when they might go out to special places to eat, presumably on dates or at important social functions. Dinner etiquette was of such importance that it was discussed in a meeting of the Halls of Residence
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Committee. While meals were generally served cafeteria style, the committee proposed an idea where students would rotate being the host or hostess for a formal meal to educate on proper table manners (Key to WRH, 1959; Nelson, 1953). The emphasis on proper etiquette at meal times set women up for success in securing a husband and for her future role as a housewife.

Quiet Hours. The 1954-55 Women’s Residence Hall Handbook proclaimed, “…watch that roof! When you feel like raising it, make sure it isn’t during quiet hours” (1954, p. 3). One of the many areas that were regulated in the halls was the extensive guidance given on quiet and study hours. This was one of the more practical areas of regulation in the residence halls, which directly impacted community life, unlike dating and dress. Quiet hours were in place to facilitate proper time for studying and socializing, as the Handbook emphasized that planning was needed when a large group of people were housed together.

In the 1954-55 Handbook, each hour of the day was divided into study, sleep or social time, and women were advised to schedule their activities during the appropriate hours. The Handbook indicates that these stricter rules were developed from feedback given by students in the previous year, and there were lengthy suggestions provided regarding proper interpretation of quiet hours. Women were advised to “never yell or shout” and were told to keep “visiting and partying in other rooms” to a minimum (Women’s Residence Hall Handbook, 1954, p. 39). Activities such as tap-dancing, gymnastics, and the playing of musical instruments were restricted to open hours. Quiet hours, while a more practical regulation, provided the kind of strict rules that one might experience from parents, as opposed to expectations for educated adults.

Women were provided with additional regulations including those regarding alcohol, roommate relations and classroom behavior, in order to ensure that they made proper choices and were prepared for success in their future role as housewives. Strict rules ensured that innocence was protected and reputations remained intact so that women remained suitable prospects for marriage. The Handbook also guided what activities women should participate in on campus. Women were encouraged to participate in student government within the halls, promising a democratic way of residence hall living and “equal responsibility for the regulations which govern the group” (Jordan & Nelson, 1947, p. 13).

Activities for Women

While men focused on preparation for employment or involvement in campus politics, they unconsciously left it up to women student leaders to maintain morale, plan activities, and maintain campus standards (Mueller, 1954). Women were not being pushed towards careers as men were; hence, they had many different opportunities for social engagement on campus. The role of a housewife also left time for leisure activities, which the female student could become well versed in through her involvement on campus (Mueller, 1954). Student life at IU was vibrant and presented women with many options for activities and engagement, including many traditional events, such as serenades, Homecoming, Little 500, and University Sing (Women’s Residence Halls 1951-1952, 1951). In the residence halls, student government was touted as an opportunity to get involved in these campus events and make a difference within the hall.

Student Government. Involvement in student government was promoted heavily to women through the handbooks they
received each fall regarding residence hall living. Women were encouraged to develop a “vital and effective campus community,” and through the roles and social activities of student government, were in essence, being prepared for roles as civic-minded housewives (Women’s Residence Halls 1951-52, 1951, p. 12). There existed a variety of leadership positions in Hall Councils, which assisted in reinforcing traditional roles for women. Although the President of Hall Council had many duties, one of the most important was “filing the capacity of official hostess within her hall” (Jordan & Nelson, 1947, p. 17). Hall Council positions were also responsible for making their hall more attractive through bulletin boards, providing flowers for the living rooms, and caring for the kitchens. These were all skills that would benefit women in their future role as housewives. As a representative body, the Hall Council was empowered to assist in making decisions about rules and regulations and their enforcement in the halls. The handbooks indicate that student feedback was the reason for the modification of certain rules and regulations. However, the issues that the Council did take on were those of quiet hours (in which they actually made more strict) and minor aspects of the dress code. They did not appear to provide much push back against the rules, continuing to conform to the regulations provided.

Activities for women were touted as social outings, opportunities for skill development in event planning and etiquette, participation in campus tradition, and celebration of academic achievement. Even with the broad variety of activities on campus, women were still encouraged to direct their efforts to activities that would prepare them for domesticity. According to the Halls of Residence Committee, the administration attempted to limit the

Looking Forward

Student Governments in the men’s and women’s halls were merged in the fall of 1960, establishing the Inter-Residence Halls Association (Sensational Smithwood, 1960). This was the first of many small changes within the Halls of Residence towards the end of the 1950s as the halls and their programs began to become co-educational. This provided opportunities for men and women to have shared experiences, lessening, but not removing, differences in education associated with each gender.

Wells Quadrangle became co-educational in 1959, and in the same year Towers Quadrangle opened with wings for men and women. This environment allowed men and women to interact more frequently. However, the rules were slow to change and women continued to be advised on items such as their dress and manners in the handbooks of the 1960s (Halls of Residence, 1964). It was not until the late 1960s that the university made greater concessions regarding the rules that governed residence hall life. Keeping with national trends, IU students at this time began to push back against university administration. Residence hall rules were one issue at the forefront. Open residence halls, where men and women could interact freely, were demanded, and students requested freedom from in loco parentis restrictions (Clark,
1977). Over the years, IU had collected a large set of rules relating to student behavior that seemed unjustified in a more modern era (Clark, 1977).

During a meeting between student government and a committee of trustees in 1968, it was pointed out by students, with support of interim President Wells, that the rules of the residence hall system were “absurd” and that “differentiation between rules for men’s rooms and those for women’s rooms could not be sustained” (Wells, 1980, p. 223). With continual pushing from the students, the Board of Trustees approved new regulations that allowed for open guest hours and freed students from the university housing requirement if they preferred (Wells, 1980). IU was the first school in the state to give such freedom to its students.

Along with a change in residence hall rules, IU developed its first uniform code of conduct in 1969, the Indiana University Student Code. The Code provided a uniform set of expectations for all students and stated “it is written to ensure fairness and equality by explicitly defining the rules governing student life and disciplinary procedures” (Shaw, 2012, p. 23). This new set of rules defined life for all IU students and did not classify rules for different groups, as had been done in the previous decades. In loco parentis had ended, and this freedom finally allowed women the opportunity to deviate from the conformity that had been prescribed in the residence halls and on campus for so many years. Female students now had the responsibility to make greater choices regarding many aspects of university life and begin to deviate from the domestic ideal after college.

Summary and Discussion

Colleges and universities were confronted with many decisions regarding their influence over students’ lives during the in loco parentis era, which lasted until the 1960s. It was clear at IU that the administration bought in to the notion of the domestic ideal that was prominent in the nation at the time through the curriculum and regulations in the Halls of Residence. All women were required to live in university approved housing and first-year women in the Halls of Residence; thus, conforming to this ideal was not an option. While every aspect of residence hall life served to prepare women for their future role as housewives, men did not have such expectations for conformity placed on them. They were subject to university regulations but were not as highly regulated as women. Men were not required to reside in university housing until 1952, 12 years after the requirement was made for women (Nelson, 1951).

The effect of the domestic ideal still lingers, as society continues to provide messages to women about how they should act, just as IU and the nation did postwar. Women are now expected to live up to the ideal of the 1950s while also pursuing a career (Holt, 2006). Although women have now become the majority on college campuses, they still make 78 cents for every dollar that men make in full-time employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). They are underrepresented in science and technology fields, government and leadership in corporate America (Catalyst, 2014). Understanding the origins of the domestic ideal and how it was reinforced can provide greater insight in to the challenges that women continue to face today.

Although in loco parentis ended in the 1960s, institutions still provide many rules and regulations that students must follow in order to remain in good standing. Today, these rules often reflect the values and mission of institutions, just as they did
postwar. Knowledge of how universities have previously promoted their values through policies and procedures could inform the decision making of contemporary administrators as they approach the task of setting these norms on their own campuses. The postwar era serves as a reminder of the power that institutions have in shaping the lives of students during and after their time on campus.

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