LAURA BARRETT: Welcome back to Hindsight is 20/19, the podcast where we look at 250 years of Dartmouth’s history through 25 objects from the Library’s archives, one per decade. I’m Laura Barrett.

PETER CARINI: and I’m Peter Carini and we’ll be your host for this episode.

LB: Before we start, I want to let you know that the content of this episode might be difficult for some listeners as we discuss physical and verbal attacks on Dartmouth’s first female students.

PC: Imagine a grainy, black and white video from the 1970s. It’s washed out and hard to see, but you can tell you’re looking at a stage occupied by a lone woman. She stands facing the audience and begins to sing. Her voice is a little thin, a little lonely.

[Insert Melanie singing]

[the song plays in the background]

PC: She is soon joined by another woman and another until there are seven of them. Their voices swell to take up the space, steadily increasing in speed, intensity, and anger as they belt out the offensive words of the song whose creators won *first prize* in a fraternity singing competition known as Hums earlier that same year.

[the song plays in the background]

PC: To add insult to injury, the judge who awarded the fraternity first place was none other than Dean of the College, Carrol Brewster who joined in the singing of the song with the frat brothers.

PC: In the fall of 1975, Dartmouth had been coed for just four years. The 178 women who matriculated in 1972, 11% of the incoming class, were subjected to harassment and alienation by some of Dartmouth’s male students, most notably by those of certain fraternities and sports teams. The threats and misogyny the new female students faced are documented in the College archives; through articles, interviews, books by Dartmouth alumnae; and in stories passed down through generations of students. Our document for today’s episode is in response to that harassment. It’s a video recording of a 1975 performance by a group of female Dartmouth students. Their show was titled *You Laugh*, and you can check out a DVD copy of their performance from Jones Media Center. During the show, the women perform nine scenes in which they confront the sexism at Dartmouth with humor and anger through poetry, dance, songs, and skits.

PC: One of the most powerful aspects of the performance is the way the women use their harassers’ own words to make their point.

[audio from DVD]

“During the years women have been in Dartmouth, we have been repeatedly bombarded by comments, situations and public announcements all carrying the same message;

You petty emotional coeds go home you ruined the brotherhood, the real spirit of Dartmouth”

In a very recent edition of *the D*, a Dartmouth student stated;

“The ratio of men to women should be 3-0. I’d like to see a second Dartmouth campus started somewhere else for women.’”

Insulting songs have been sung at our doors in the early hours of the morning -

Men of Dartmouth, give rouse for the coed on the pill”

PC: The 30-minute video and the honesty of the performers gives us insight into how difficult it was for some women on the Dartmouth campus in the early years of coeducation. We could easily create a whole podcast episode, probably an entire series on this topic and we will explore it further, but first let’s take a look back at the roots of the issues of coeducation at Dartmouth.

LB: It turns out that coeducation was being openly discussed at the College as far back as 1867. At that time, an article was printed in the student newspaper, *The Dartmouth,* regarding the establishment of Vassar College in 1861, which was originally all women. The 1867 *Dartmouth* staff was in favor of coeducation as we can see from their closing paragraph of the article in which they stated; “We trust the day is not far distant when our own Alma Mater shall welcome to her halls the fair daughters of Eve, and ‘sweet girl graduates with their golden hair,’ will grace the bema on commencement day.” Of course, little did they know that it would be a bit over 100 years before this would come to pass.

LB: But, by 1894, the sentiments of the students had changed. That year, *The Dartmouth* ran an article regarding student opinions about coeducation (the students were largely against it, and their opinions seemed to hold for the remainder of their lives, as we’ll see in a moment). They stated, “that women are not made for the same physical effort; that owning to the constitution of the mind, the same course of study does not afford the information and discipline requisite and necessary for each, and that a higher moral and finer culture is not secured.” That line makes me wonder if they ever actually met a woman.

LB: While the issue did come up periodically over the following seventy years, the next important moment in the history of coeducation occurred in 1962. That year the College announced that the newly created summer term would include women. The summer term, not to be confused with today’s Sophomore Summer, grew out of the need for the College to utilize its vacant campus during the warmer months. The new summer program needed to admit women to make it solvent and to attract students from other schools as not enough Dartmouth men would attend to make it worth the College’s while. Other than veteran’s wives being on campus after WWII, this would be the largest influx of women to the campus in the College’s history for a non-social event. Co-education was now very much in the air.

In 1967, a group of Dartmouth men decided to push the College a step closer to true coeducation. An event called *Great Day* was conceived as an opportunity to bring women to campus during the regular term for a series of book discussions. The women were drawn from nearby women’s colleges including Mount Holyoke, Smith, and Colby. The intention was for Dartmouth students to have a chance to visit and interact with women in an intellectual environment. For decades, women had been brought to campus for big social weekends like Winter Carnival and Green Key. For Great Day, 385 women were brought to campus on chartered buses, but instead of participating in dances and parties, they spent the day discussing books. In May of that same year, a joint student-faculty Committee on Co-education was formed. The following year, 1968, this committee expanded Great Day into Coeducation Week.

In 1969, Coeducation Week attracted approximately 1,000 women to campus for six days of classes, social activities, and discussions about coeducation. It was during this week that Foley House (formerly Delta Upsilon) admitted two female “brothers,” Virginia Feingold and Barbara Wood. Dartmouth’s fraternity rules stipulated that members had to be Dartmouth students. George Stauffer, then president of Foley House, argued that the two women had attended Dartmouth during coeducational week, which made them Dartmouth students. Let’s just say that the College administration did not see it in the same light.

But events like Great Day, Coeducation Week and Foley Houses’ action were putting pressure on the College to change and the institution found that it was being pushed inextricably toward coeducation. To add to the pressure, other all male colleges including other Ivy League schools were in the throes of similar changes. Notably, both Princeton and Yale went coed that year.

In September of 1970, newly inaugurated president John Kemeny commissioned a survey and report on the opinions of the College community, including alums, toward coeducation. The results are too detailed to lay out here, but a few numbers are particularly striking. Basically, the younger the alumnus the more favorable they were toward coeducation. Remember the 1894 article I mentioned a few minutes ago? Well, the members of the classes of 1893-1925 who responded to the survey were 54% *against* coeducation, so it appears that over the intervening seventy years the opinions of these men had changed very little! In contrast those respondents from the classes 1960-1969 were 81% in *approval*. The student breakdown was equally dramatic, 61% of the current students indicated that they were strongly in favor and another 22% stated they were in favor. In contrast, only 7% said they opposed coeducation and another 7% went on record as being strongly opposed. That means that 83% of students were in favor of coeducation and only 14% were against it. 14%. That’s a relatively small percentage of men who were opposed to having women on campus. In real numbers, that represents 448 of the 3,200 current Dartmouth students at the time.

If that 14% remained constant two years later when the college admitted women, then it is likely that the acts of aggression against women on campus were perpetrated by a minority of students, though they comprised a big enough minority to pose a real threat. While we can’t state that the 14% who were opposed were necessarily the same people who acted out against their new classmates, this number counters the prevailing narrative that the majority of men at Dartmouth were opposed to having women on campus. In reality, it appears to have been a vociferous minority.

PC: None of this minimizes the action of this group of men. The treatment described in *You Laugh* and by alumni who were on campus at the time include women being cat called as they crossed campus, and men holding up plaques with rating numbers when women entered the dining hall. Some women had their rooms invaded in the middle of the night, and some experienced physical violence. One woman reported her friend being hit in the head with a snowball with a stone in the center. Another woman recalls having a stone thrown through her window, and how the shattered glass cut her face. Even the members, male and female, of the socially and politically progressive Foley House were met with verbal abuse and violence. In 1969, following their attempt to admit women, the members recalled how they dodged golf balls, repaired broken windows, and cleaned uprooted saplings out of their front yard. In a misogynistic and homophobic letter shoved under the dorm room doors of women students, the women were told that they must appear topless in the dining hall and perform sexual favors for male students on demand. These demeaning and threatening messages combined with physical violence created an environment in which some women lived in fear of attack and even of sexual violence. As the seven women who created *You Laugh* make clear, “It is difficult for an individual woman to stand up against the Dartmouth traditions which insult and degrade her.” In this kind of environment women, or anyone threatened in this way, modify and limit their behavior and as a result they are held back and are made subservient to their aggressors.

What makes *You Laugh* particularly strong is that it is so much more than just a list of grievances. If it's not the first, it's one of earliest instances of Dartmouth women speaking out as a group and calling for change. The last two skits in *You Laugh* have a militant ring to them. In the first, a woman walking home is accosted by threatening voices coming out of the darkness on Frat Row. But instead of running away she blows a whistle and a hoard of variously armed women rush to her aid. The message is clear; you are not alone, together we can stand up for ourselves and win.

In the next skit, a woman sits on the stage and recites a poem about what a Dartmouth woman should be. The poem has a sarcastic edge to it as she examines what male students have said a Dartmouth coed should be and should do. She concludes by again calling on Dartmouth women to speak out and to be heard. She ends by telling Dartmouth men to let Dartmouth women decide what a Dartmouth woman should be.

“No longer need we sit in stew as remarks past, offensive and untrue. As women united, we can be strong; powerful enough to wipe out what’s wrong. What should a Dartmouth woman be? Why don’t you leave it up to me?

LB: Today, Dartmouth’s male to female student ratio regularly flirts with a 50/50 balance, though there tend to be slightly more men than women. Despite this more balanced make up, the feel of the College, particularly in terms of social life, still leans toward the masculine. While fewer women face the overt misogyny of the 1970s, Dartmouth is far from done when it comes to needing to find ways to support its daughters to the same extent that it supports its sons.

LB: Hindsight is 20/19 is a production of the Dartmouth College Library and is produced as part of the celebration of Dartmouth’s 250th anniversary, highlighting selected objects from Rauner Special Collections Library. This episode was written and directed by Laura Barrett and Peter Carini, and our sound engineer was Laura Barrett. Thank you for listening and we hope you will continue to enjoy Hindsight is 20/19.

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