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*Reproductive “Choices” at Lafayette College*

WGS 340

In March 2018, the Gender and Sexuality department at Lafayette College sponsored a talk by Dána-Ain Davis. As director of the Center for the Study of Women and Society at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, Davis is well-versed in the nuances of reproductive justice. Her talk centered around raising the visibility of black women in the fight for reproductive justice, and emphasized how simply having the right to an abortion does not give all women proper agency to their bodies. For examples, Davis talked about the use of synthetic estrogen on many women of color that ultimately led to infertility and various forms of cancer, the Population Control Program designed by the Eugenics Board that sterilized many Puerto Rican women without their consent, and the continual struggle women face in having safe access to reproductive health clinics across the nation. Her talk juxtaposed the current model of “reproductive rights” that popular strains of Women’s Movements tend to highlight, and articulated quite clearly that the “choices” women have aren’t really choices at all<sup>1</sup>.

The history of Lafayette College women and their reproductive “choices” echoes a similar sentiment. Before the development of the Gender and Sexuality department on campus and the sponsorship of talks like Dána-Ain Davis’, much of the conversation around reproductive justice was limited in its focus and aim. Pregnancy at any age is complicated. There are, however, added stressors in the pregnancy of college women on a national basis, due to the lack of resources traditionally available at college institutions for assistance in the full term pregnancy of a woman. This deficit in assets created and continues to perpetuate a narrative around women’s health that is very prevention-based, and consequently, it illustrates a dichotomy of the “right” and “wrong” way to handle sexual health at Lafayette College. Through utilizing the

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<sup>1</sup> Dana-Ain Davis, “Citing the Sisters: Raising the Visibility of Black Women in the Fight for Reproductive Justice” (presentation, Lafayette College, Easton, PA, March 8, 2018).

Lafayette College Archives and Lafayette Newspaper Collection in the digital scholarship services, a story begins to unfold about the opportunities afforded to and withheld from women at the College since their integration in 1970. With these patterns in mind, I hope to reassess the direction the College continues to take towards sexual health and reproductive services for women, and redefine the embedded assumptions about bodily autonomy and agency on this campus.

Throughout this paper, I discuss the category of “choice”. I in no way intend to make assumptions about what the right choices are for college-aged women, but rather, to argue that the choices themselves are limited. Through discourse in *The Lafayette*, the available health services documented through time, and the limitations experienced by women who defied the “norm” on campus, I hope to highlight the opportunity deficit for pregnant students at Lafayette College that ultimately restricts their choices and reproductive freedom. I use these examples not only to theorize the problematic nature of the current climate surrounding pregnancy on college campuses, but to construct a framework that may help promote a change to the flawed system.

The discourse surrounding abortion has been plentiful since women’s integration to Lafayette. In 1971, abortion ads began to appear at the end of *The Lafayette* with little subtlety. Four ads are listed in the April 6, 1971 edition, “Safe Legal Abortion in New York Schedule Immediately” and “ABORTION pregnancies up to 12 weeks terminated from \$175.00” can be seen alongside military draft and College Hill Tavern advertisements<sup>2</sup>. While abortion has been and continues to be a contentious subject in the United States, the availability of abortions near Lafayette College’s campus were not inaccessible by any means. The advertisements

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<sup>2</sup> *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Apr. 6, 1971. Accessed May 1, 2018.

surrounding abortion in *The Lafayette* continued with high frequency throughout the 1970s, across the Roe v. Wade decision, until the turn of the decade.

As the 1980s began, abortion ads seemed to disappear and discussion surrounding women's rights began to accelerate in *The Lafayette*. In 1985, a male fraternity member shared his views on the new rise of feminists on Lafayette's campus, stating that his issue with the movement was, "the attitude that has succeeded in totally abolishing the conception that becoming a mother and raising a family is as worthwhile a goal as having a business career... [he found] it disturbing that young women [of 1985 were] almost ashamed to admit any desire to start a family,"<sup>3</sup>. It is interesting to note the emphasis placed here on women and their role in the family. This is one of the only articles since the integration of women to Lafayette College that the concepts of pregnancy and having children are even alluded to. Quackenboss, the author behind this opinion piece, discusses his fear of losing a traditional nuclear model- one that would require women to bear children and find value in pregnancy- but Lafayette as an institution did little to institute these same values.

In 1985, the year this opinion piece was written, very little gynecological assistance was available at the college. According to a letter written by a female student in the early 1970s to Dean Kissah, the, "inadequacy of the [then] current health services offered by Lafayette College" was detrimental to the women attending, and that even though, "extensive health care [was] provided for male athletes in addition to the provisions at the infirmary," there was still, "no gynecologist directly affiliated with the college"<sup>4</sup>. These lack of accommodations sent a clear

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<sup>3</sup> Bob Quackenboss, "Quack's Quill," *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Feb. 15, 1985. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous to Dean Kissah, Special Collections and College Archives, David Bishop Skillman Library, Lafayette College. Accessed May 1, 2018.

message about the way Lafayette College perceived women's sexual health, and also made it near-impossible for women to maintain healthy pregnancies or care for young children while simultaneously attending Lafayette. Dean Kissah acknowledged this deficit in a document titled *Health Services at Lafayette 1972*, where he writes about the vague need for, "minor gynecological services", but does not elaborate on any plans to search for specialists, purchase the necessary equipment, or any protocol to move towards this goal<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, a pamphlet for health services at Lafayette published after 1975 discusses that, "reproductive health services are available, in addition, through Planned Parenthood, the outpatient clinic associated with Easton Hospital, and private clinics,"<sup>6</sup> and speaks a lot about birth control and contraceptives, but nothing about prenatal care or post-birth assistance.

The clear shortcomings of the women's health services during this time period are not only indicative of the lack of consideration Lafayette had for its female students, but it also emphasizes the direction health services wanted to urge their students towards. When health services finally did begin to provide gynecological services, they were all aimed at preventative pregnancy measures. In order to obtain any prenatal or young child care, one would need to outsource to Planned Parenthood or another organization. And unfortunately, not much has advanced in the last thirty years. According to a 2014 women's health services pamphlet, gynecological services were only available for a total of five hours a week, notably during peak class hours<sup>7</sup>. Physical examinations and condoms were free, pregnancy tests were five dollars, prescription birth control was available, and absolutely nothing about prenatal care or assistance

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<sup>5</sup> Dean Kissah, "Health Services at Lafayette 1972", 1972. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Bailey's Health Services pamphlet, Lafayette College, After 1975. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Bailey's Health Services pamphlet, Lafayette College, 2014. Accessed May 1, 2018.

was mentioned in the pamphlet at all<sup>8</sup>. Gynecological services are important, and measures to prevent pregnancy are vital in women's reproductive agency. However, the absence of prenatal care and blatant lack of services for women continuing a pregnancy on campus implied a particular goal for Lafayette women stated by the institution itself: do not get pregnant.

In her letter to Dean Kissah, the student acknowledges that, "[she] realizes that a controversy exists concerning the position maintained by the college in matters of contraception, pregnancy, etc., and that Planned Parenthood has provided adequate and helpful information for many coeds,"<sup>9</sup>. Her language in this passage should not go unnoticed; the normalcy of the "controversy" she speaks of implies assumed presumptions about the relationship of Lafayette College and the reproductive lives of women. This relationship is not unique to Lafayette, it can be seen in most college campuses across the nation, but the essentialism of this passage is unwarranted. There is no real reason colleges should not and cannot provide women with reproductive health care beyond "minor gynecological services"<sup>10</sup>. Even more, there is no reason the only available health care should be centrally focused on preventing and discouraging women from carrying their pregnancies to term.

In 1989, over 100 Lafayette students attended a Women's March for Abortion rights<sup>11</sup>. Their return to campus sparked a heightened discourse around abortion within *The Lafayette* that continued for several weeks. One student reflected on her experience at the March for Women's Lives in the week following, writing, "coming from the stale, conservative air of the Lafayette

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<sup>8</sup> Bailey's Health Services pamphlet, Lafayette College, 2014. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous to Dean Kissah, Special Collections and College Archives, David Bishop Skillman Library, Lafayette College. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Dean Kissah, "Health Services at Lafayette 1972", 1972. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Weiss, "Women's March for Abortion." *Lafayette*, Apr. 7, 1989. Accessed May 1, 2018.

campus, we were thrilled to discover that a refreshing wave of political activism is vibrant in America,”<sup>12</sup>. This recount was posted adjacent to another op-ed, that asked, “how can we, as a people, continue to exist when we place such an insignificant value on the lives of human beings?”<sup>13</sup>. In the following years, abortion debates continued: a 1992 edition contains an article on a Philosophy professor discussing the issues around non-accessible abortions<sup>14</sup>, a 1993 edition displays an “opposing viewpoints: abortion” column<sup>15</sup>, and a 2001 edition covers a Jones Faculty Lecture focused on abortion, pregnant teens, and constitutional rights<sup>16</sup>. In 1990, another article from *The Lafayette* recounts how 130 people showed up to write letters to state senators, representatives, and Supreme Court Justices expressing their desire for choice, published only a few pages behind the first pregnancy-related ad in *The Lafayette* since the 1970s (This time, the advertisement was for a “pregnancy center” and advertised pregnancy tests and counseling, but did not say anything about abortion or prenatal services)<sup>17</sup>. It is difficult to assess from these resources what the general attitude of Lafayette students and faculty surrounding abortion really was- only anecdotal letters to the editors provide clues for this climate. However, it is clear that abortion was being talked about. But the alternative is continually missing from these conversations: resources, services, and options for women who choose to continue their pregnancy.

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<sup>12</sup> Pam Gerran, et al, “We Witnessed History in the Making.” *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Apr. 14, 1989. Accessed May 1, 2018

<sup>13</sup> Gerran et al., *Lafayette*, Apr 14, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> “Faculty Focus: Legal Rights to Abortion.” *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), May 1, 1992. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Laine Faxt and Douglas Kiker, “Opposing Viewpoints: Abortion.” *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Nov. 19, 1993. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Becky Wanman, “Pennsylvania Abortion Laws: A Threat to Constitutional Rights of Minors” *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Feb. 2, 2018. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Mar. 30, 1990. Accessed May 1, 2018.

In 1996, an article was published on Plan B, an emergency contraceptive that was not approved by the FDA as an over-the-counter prescription drug until 1999<sup>18</sup>. The article is titled, “The morning-after pill: contraception’s best-kept secret” and includes interviews with the Bailey’s Health Center staff concerning the availability of the medication on campus. The staff interviewed speaks highly about the pill, stating that, “at some schools, people wait at health centers every morning to receive the pill,” and urges students to access this option as an “alternative to a potential abortion,”<sup>19</sup>. Within this article, it is noted that, “an average of 8 pregnancies each year” occur on Lafayette’s campus. In 2000, a follow-up to this discussion was published in *The Lafayette*, this time focused on the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. Dr. Johnson and McDermott of the health center are quoted in this piece stating that, “The health center distributes the pill about five times per week,” and that a “mandatory pregnancy test [is] issued before the pill is prescribed to make sure there is not an established pregnancy,”<sup>20</sup>. They also note that the college performs an average of seventy pregnancy tests a year<sup>21</sup>. It’s clear from this data that Lafayette has a sexually active campus, and that the minimal gynecological services available are being heavily utilized, sometimes in the case of already established pregnancies. One student even claimed that, “the Health Center really pushes the morning after pill,” even though it is a relatively new drug<sup>22</sup>. With a seemingly state-of-the-art

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<sup>18</sup> “Emergency Contraception: Plan B.” Princeton University. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<http://ec.princeton.edu/pills/planbhistory.html> .

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Harding, “The Morning-After Pill: Contraception’s Best-Kept Secret.” *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Apr. 12, 1996. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Bethany Boucher and Heather Trautner, “STDs a Common Campus Concern.” *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Nov. 3, 2000. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Boucher and Trautner, *Lafayette*, Nov. 3, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> *We Were Pioneers*, 2004. Oral History Collection. Special Collections and College Archives, David Bishop Skillman Library, Lafayette College.

and modern health center with a women's health center department, why, then, are pregnant women so few and far between in Lafayette's student history?

A 2001 article in the student newspaper asked just this, stating, "A handful of student pregnancies occur on campus every year, most of which end in abortion, according to Bailey Health Center Resident Obstetrician/Gynecologist Ann Marie McDermott. Many think that the campus climate is to blame,"<sup>23</sup>. The article continues, with staff members admitting that, "many [pregnant women] don't come to [the health center]," so the actual number of pregnancies occurring on campus is difficult to pinpoint<sup>24</sup>. One of the nurses notes that, "in her eight years of employment she has only seen one or two students carry their baby to term," and that many Lafayette students, "might feel pressured not to continue with the pregnancy,"<sup>25</sup>. The officials at the center credit this pressure to the "affluence" of the student body, stating that the pressure for perfection makes it difficult for a Lafayette student to carry a baby to term.

A sophomore female interviewed for this article stated, "I think the girl [woman] would definitely feel more pressure here than somewhere else to get an abortion, if not drop out," while a senior male claimed, "a pregnant girl [woman] really has no place on campus,"<sup>26</sup>. A Registered Nurse at the college, Nancy Davenia, acknowledged these sentiments, and attempted to explain this phenomenon by noting the lack of options available for students:

"Davenia did say that pregnant females might be forced to leave the school if they chose to continue with the pregnancy because Lafayette does not offer prenatal care. 'We don't

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<sup>23</sup> Pamela Roth, "Campus Climate May Account for Abortions." *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Nov. 9, 2001. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Roth, *Lafayette*, Nov. 9, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Roth, *Lafayette*, Nov. 9, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Roth, *Lafayette*, Nov. 9, 2001.

have the facilities, and college students need assistance at that time,' she said. Davenia said that if a female inquires about pregnancy alternatives, the Health Center offers them three basic options. 'We ask them if they want to continue with prenatal care, adoption, or termination of the pregnancy,' she said. McDermott said most Lafayette females choose to proceed with abortion and that in the past three years she has never had a patient decide to keep the baby. According to Bio, the Health Center does not usually follow up on pregnant women that come in for assistance, because, 'Most [women] don't have the baby.'<sup>27</sup>

The acknowledgement by health officials at the College on the lack of prenatal care should not be dismissed so readily. By condoning an environment that separates motherhood and education, clear messages are sent about the way motherhood, intelligence, ability, and economic autonomy interact. Officials at Bailey's that were interviewed in 2001 claimed that the Health Center was actively trying to prevent pregnancies, and that it was "[saddening] that [women] still get pregnant, especially after all their options for birth control on campus,"<sup>28</sup>. The implication in this discourse is that it would be impossible to imagine a situation where a Lafayette College student would want to get pregnant. Perhaps this is true. But the reasons behind fearing pregnancy seem to stem back to what the author of this article conveniently articulated as the "campus climate".

In response to this article, a female student wrote to *The Lafayette* in the subsequent edition with disgust for the piece. She said, "the 'campus climate' seems to be less a function of political or moralistic conviction, but more the fear of being associated with the wealth of stigmas that our society attaches to single, pregnant women," and indicated that Lafayette should

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<sup>27</sup> Roth, *Lafayette*, Nov. 9, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Roth, *Lafayette*, Nov. 9, 2001.

not find solace in accepting the campus climate the health center workers were so quick to essentialize or blame on affluent students<sup>29</sup>. Perhaps it is not the students themselves who create this negative discourse around college women and pregnancy, but rather the institution they merely participate with that provides no resources or encouragement for women seeking prenatal assistance.

These lack of resources may seem trivial to most people who genuinely do not intend to give birth during college. However, for the few individuals who do choose this alternate path, it is clear that Lafayette College does not have the adequate resources to assist young women during this time. In 2004, a woman on the Track and Field team at Lafayette College proved this to be true. Larissa Bellamy was an incredibly driven and dedicated student, who balanced her varsity athletics and academics with goals of entering health care. When Larissa learned about her pregnancy, she wanted to discuss what would happen with her athletics with her coach. Head Track Coach Julio Piazza instead, “tried to convince her to have an abortion,”<sup>30</sup>. According to Bellamy, “he locked the door and shut the blinds, and started to [talk about] how [having a baby] would be a mistake, and how I wouldn’t be able to handle it,”<sup>31</sup>. Piazza denied this exchange as being one of intimidation and coercion, but the NCAA did use the situation as a “worst case scenario” when rewriting their policies regarding pregnant athletes<sup>32</sup>.

Similarly, College housing officials told Bellamy, “she could not live in an on-campus residence with a baby due to College insurance limitations,” and instead, advised her to take a

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<sup>29</sup> Jessica Jamhoury, “ALW Co-President Responds to Abortion Article.” *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Nov. 16, 2001. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Marianna Macri, “The Future in Her Arms: Athlete Cradles Motherhood and College Education.” *Lafayette* (Easton, PA), Nov. 5, 2004. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Macri, *Lafayette*, Nov. 5, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> *Introducing the NCAA Model Pregnancy and Parenting Policy*  
<https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/Ch%2B1%2BIntro.pdf>

year off<sup>33</sup>. Bellamy was consequently forced to seek off-campus residence for the upcoming year. Because private off-campus housing has no legal obligations to Lafayette College, the school could do virtually nothing to assist Bellamy in this housing acquisition, and Bellamy was left vulnerable to discrimination and prejudice by the landlords in the surrounding area. When she attempted to find off-campus residence, “multiple College Hill landlords hung up on her after hearing her story,” and the quest to find housing with her newborn proved to be quite difficult<sup>34</sup>.

According to the 2017-2018 Student Handbook, the College, “will not discriminate in room assignment on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, creed, national origin, ancestry, age, physical ability, gender identity, or sexual orientation,”<sup>35</sup> but there is no explicit procedure regarding women with children. “Overnight guests must be 16 years old,”<sup>36</sup> is the only acknowledgement that could potentially be applied to children trying to live with their young mothers, and it is clear that through this policy, women with children younger than 16 years old would be unable to live in quarters with them. The lack of explicit policy regarding women with children implies that women at Lafayette College do not, and should not, have any; the ambiguity of the statements themselves allows the College officials on duty to have total control over the fate of mothers’ housing on campus. As experienced in Bellamy’s case, it is unlikely that this ambiguity would work in the favor of women with children. It should be noted that after Bellamy found an apartment and fought for her position to remain on the track team, she was able to graduate with a B.S. in Biology, achieve new records for all of her Track and Field events the following year, and raise her child while working in her (very little) spare time. She

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<sup>33</sup> Macri, *Lafayette*, Nov. 5, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Macri, *Lafayette*, Nov. 5, 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Lafayette College Student Handbook 2017-2018, Appendix IX, Page 76. Accessed May 1, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Lafayette College Student Handbook 2017-2018, Appendix IX, Page 76. Accessed May 1, 2018.

continued her education with a Master's Degree in Management and is now a Senior Specialist in Global Quality Assurance at Merck Pharmaceuticals, despite the lack of support she received at Lafayette College<sup>37</sup>.

But Bellamy is not the only woman to have a baby while at Lafayette College. Alma Scott-Buczak, a member of the first class of women at the College and former-president of the Association of Black Collegians on campus, is the first women in Lafayette's history to have a child while attending the College. Even though there was an unspoken pressure for the women of Lafayette to practice sex with contraceptives because of an, "undercurrent that somebody was [going to] get pregnant and then coeducation was just [going to] be ruined because it was [going to] be such a scandal,"<sup>38</sup> Scott-Buczak reflects on the school being quite supportive. In interview, Scott-Buczak commented on the flexibility of Lafayette's scheduling making it easy for her to return home on weekends to take care of her child, who was primarily living with her mother<sup>39</sup>. It's important to note the unique nature of Alma Scott-Buczak's situation, in that her status as a pioneer for Lafayette women made her a special case that the College may have purposely catered to, for fear of disappointing donors that were already critical of the integration of women. It's also imperative to realize that the primary care of Scott-Buczak's child was taken place away from campus, and that, Alma "did not tell a lot of people or share with a lot of people [her status

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<sup>37</sup> Larissa Bellamy, "Larissa Bellamy," LinkedIn, Accessed May 1, 2018.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/larissa-bellamy-40773723/>

<sup>38</sup> *We Were Pioneers*, 2004. Oral History Collection. Special Collections and College Archives, David Bishop Skillman Library, Lafayette College.

<sup>39</sup> Alma Scott-Buczak (member of Lafayette's first class of women) in interview with a member of the Lafayette College Archives, David Bishop Skillman Library, Lafayette College, 2000, interview transcript.

as a mother],”<sup>40</sup>. Although Alma does note that Lafayette was, “incredible,” in her accommodations, it is vital to consider the context of her experience. The fact is that Alma did not have the opportunity to experience raising a child on Lafayette’s campus, and there is little evidence in Scott-Buczak’s interview that suggests she would have been able to take care of a baby while simultaneously attending Lafayette College. And while Alma does point out the respect that she felt from students who were aware of her motherhood status, this can be considered evidence that the “campus climate” towards college-aged mothers is a product of the institution and not the attitudes of the students themselves<sup>41</sup>.

As heavily documented in *The Lafayette*, reproductive choices have been an apparent concern for Lafayette students over time. The addition of a gynecological department in the health center and the increased availability of birth control, Plan B, and other contraceptives throughout the years is indicative of advancement in agency towards female sexual autonomy that can only be regarded as progress. However, the lack of prenatal care, the negative discourse around pregnancy through these alternate health care initiatives, and the deficit of explicit policies for women with children indicate that the College has a stance on college-aged mothers, even if it is not formally announced. Lafayette College simply does not have the resources or accommodations for young pregnant women, and historical documents suggest it never has. It is not enough to say that the lack of need is to blame for inadequate resources, for there have been and always will be women at this college facing pregnancy decisions. But as it stands, having

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<sup>40</sup> Alma Scott-Buczak (member of Lafayette’s first class of women) in interview with a member of the Lafayette College Archives, David Bishop Skillman Library, Lafayette College, 2000, interview transcript.

<sup>41</sup> Alma Scott-Buczak (member of Lafayette’s first class of women) in interview with a member of the Lafayette College Archives, David Bishop Skillman Library, Lafayette College, 2000, interview transcript.

“choices” at Lafayette translates to having access to resources that will help you hide, prevent, and terminate the pregnancies that Lafayette does not want you to have.

In order to truly have choices on this campus, there needs to be adequate resources for women who choose to continue their pregnancies and have children on campus. There needs to be a policy for reputable housing, health services that do more than just diagnose the “problem” and send women away to get them “fixed”, and more discourse on the sexual agency of women in more terms than just abortion. Reproductive justice is more than just the right to terminate a pregnancy, it is the, “human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children [women] have in safe and sustainable communities,”<sup>42</sup>. By this definition, Lafayette College does little to secure reproductive justice in its students, and continues to dictate the sexuality of their female students in a harmful and reductive way. There are no choices, but rather, the false presumption of choice, that allows and has allowed this institution to play a role in the reproductive lives of women that is unjust, unfair, and unacceptable.

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<sup>42</sup> “Reproductive Justice” SisterSong, Accessed May 1, 2018. <http://sistersong.net/reproductive-justice/>