

YALE NEEDS WOMEN

READING GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After screening for academic strength, Sam Chauncey and Elga Wasserman looked for toughness when selecting Yale's first women undergraduates. "There was no point in taking a timid woman and putting her in this environment," said Chauncey, "because it could crush you." Do you think they were right to consider a student's toughness? As a high school senior, would you have met this standard?
2. Before 1969, many top U.S. colleges banned women students. Some women also found their choices limited by their family's values and beliefs. How were your own college decisions impacted by your gender? Do you think gender plays any role in college choice today?
3. The goal of racial justice was central to many Yale students in the 1960s and 1970s. If we compare the trajectory of change for women's equality vs. racial equality since then, what do you see as similar, different, and why?
4. *Yale Needs Women* focuses in particular on the experiences of five women students—Shirley Daniels, Kit McClure, Lawrie Mifflin, Connie Royster, and Betty Spahn. With which of these five did you identify most closely? Why?
5. Yale's first women undergraduates sometimes found themselves the only woman in a classroom full of men. Were you ever the only person of your gender in the room? How did it affect how you behaved? How others behaved towards you? Compare this to a situation in which your gender was in the majority.
6. Would you describe the women at Yale in these early years of coeducation as powerful? Why or why not?
7. *Yale Needs Women* chronicles some of the sexual assault and harassment suffered by Yale's women students. Were you surprised that this was part of the early years of coeducation? How did it compare to your own college or work experience?
8. Elga Wasserman was the most visible woman leader at Yale in this period, but she was never given the support she needed to do her job. What do you think was the most effective strategy she used to bring about change? Would you have done anything differently?
9. Students arrived at Yale in 1969 with many identities—race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality among them. What identity was most salient to you when you were in your twenties, and why? Has this changed since then?
10. "Changes in social structures require a social movement," says feminist Naomi Weisstein at the Free Women Conference at Yale in 1970. [p. 129] Do you agree with her? What examples of social movements do you see today? Do you consider yourself part of any of them?

