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Cover Page Footnote

Janelle Green requested changes to in text citations. Despite searching, I could find no reliable guide so I simply added page numbers or deleted the title of the primary source in the two citations in question. The sources I used were individual documents, drawn from archival sources. They did not have traditional page numbers, and sometimes did not have titles. Despite this, I have attempted to alter the citations to the satisfaction of the editors.

Students, Parents, Faculty, and Chickens; Parental Discipline at Indiana University in the 1850s

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Abstract

Indiana University (IU) was rocked by controversy, scandal, financial struggles, and political agitation throughout the 1850s. Opportunities for student unrest were rife in Bloomington. The campus, however, was remarkably quiet and well behaved during the tumultuous decade. The disciplinary scheme implemented by the faculty was instrumental in maintaining order. It was coined "parental discipline" and it was based on the cooperation between students, parents, and professors. The intended purpose was the application of patriarchal principles to the relationship between student and professor. For parental discipline to operate, it required a special connection between dorm, household, and edifice. Students needed to admit their status as dependents and allow themselves to be subjected to a non-traditional source of patriarchal authority. Fathers had to allow their natural paternal authority to be assumed by the surrogate source of the faculty. Professors needed to cultivate caring relationships with a student body they actively feared. The dimensions of parental discipline allow insight into the intersections of manhood, education, and fatherhood in the 19th century. Parental discipline at IU highlights the pliability of gender in the 19th century, and how it was molded to serve the various purposes of the actors involved.

Keywords: Parental Discipline; Patriarchal Principles; Manhood; Masculinity; 19th Century; Academia; Indiana University

Indiana University (IU) struggled through the 1850s. At the dawn of the decade, Indiana University employed around twenty faculty, enrolled about a hundred students, and educated them in a standard variety of classical subjects like Latin, Greek, Arithmetic and Philosophy (“Annual Report” 30). Thomas D. Clark, in his history of Indiana University, wrote that education was conducted in Bloomington in 1850 much the same way it had been when the institution was founded in 1820 (88). But the 1850s would be the most challenging decade the University had yet experienced. In 1853, the first president of the institution died while in office, inaugurating a period of turmoil. In 1856, the College Chapel, the main campus building, burnt to the ground. In 1859, the campus was rocked by the resignation of President Daily, who left Bloomington amid controversy and disgrace (Briskey and Capshew 6-7). During these seismic shifts on campus, the University nearly went bankrupt, endured the sudden comings and goings of multiple presidents and professors, all during a period of heightened political tension in the Midwest on the eve of Civil War.

Opportunities for disorder among the student body were present. But faculty meeting minutes, and private writings of Indiana University students throughout the 1850s depict a community of quiet scholars. Compared to notoriously riotous schools like the University of Virginia, Indiana University looked like a quietly humming machine (Carmichael). Every year a small cadre of Hoosiers entered the school, and four years later emerged as educated men, seemingly ignorant of the monstrous struggle underway to keep the University afloat. The student body was very well behaved, with misbehavior usually containing itself to a few fractious individuals, and their indiscretions generally very minor. IU students had no reputation for disorder.

What disciplinary scheme enabled the faculty to cultivate such a calm environment despite the chaos that seemed to engulf them? IU Faculty implemented a special breed of discipline that relied on student, parent, and faculty cooperation. In 1858, the faculty of Indiana University wrote in their annual report for the year, “The discipline of the Indiana University is intended to be strictly *parental*.” The faculty believed that parental discipline appealed “to the better principles of the heart, avoiding if possible, severe and disgraceful punishment. It is designed to be *preventive*, rather than *penal*” (“Annual Report” 30). But what was parental discipline, and what did it look like in practice at IU? What did students have to say about parental discipline; and what role did actual parents play in the administration of parental discipline? Further, were the faculty genuine in their pursuit of a kinder, gentler discipline? How did they really feel about the students that they claimed authority over?

There are many reasons why Indiana University maintained a calm demeanor during the 1850s, but this inquiry is only interested in the role parental discipline played at IU, and what students, faculty, and parents thought about parental discipline. Parental discipline was an effective system of governance for Indiana University, because of its appeal to students, parents, and faculty. Students were influenced by parental discipline and applied it to their own lives on campus. Parents embraced it because it preserved their ultimate authority over their sons. The faculty applied the system because it co-opted students and parents into maintaining their disciplinary scheme. For parental discipline to work, students, parents, and faculty all needed to perform the roles prescribed to them.

Faculty disciplinary schemes have rarely been discussed by historians interested in antebellum colleges and universities. Historical scholarship about Northern colleges before the Civil War is generally framed around student’s later Civil War service. Kanisorn

Wongsrichanalai's *Northern Character* and Peter Carmichael's *Last Generation* are studies of Civil War soldiers based in their pre-war education. Both are interested in the on-campus development of young men, but neither devotes serious attention to the disciplinary relationship between dorm, household, and edifice. Julia Mujic's analysis of Midwestern faculty responses to the American Civil War does delve into the relationship between student and faculty and the tensions therein, but does not dwell on faculty disciplinary schemes (Mujic). A narrow study of academic discipline in the antebellum era may seem of dubious worth, but studying parental discipline at Indiana University gives insight into intellectual and cultural life in the North and 19th century manhood in every day practice. Parental discipline illuminates how male students understood themselves as dependents situated between boyhood and manhood. It also highlights the flexibility of patriarchal authority, and the willingness of sons and fathers to allow the natural flow of authority to be interrupted by a surrogate source. The way the faculty managed Indiana University reveals what they thought their purpose as a university was, and how they aimed to accomplish it through their students.

Parental discipline was based on the belief that college students were dependents, naturally subject to patriarchal authority. Male students did not fight for their agency and independence because they did not view themselves as men. Independence was the key to manliness and agency in 19th century America. A boy became a man when he acquired dependents (a wife and children) and the ability to provide for them (Rotundo 48, 56). Students were widely understood to be dependents, and therefore, not possessed of manly agency. But just because they did not struggle for their status as men, does not mean they did not agonize over their dependent status. The desire for manhood, independence and the symbols that represented it

drove some students to consider dropping out and embarking on their careers. One IU student succumbed to an aggressive fit of melancholy over his status in his diary,

I cannot see that I am learning any scarcely and sometimes think of “finishing my education” this term. O why should man spend his best days, his youth at college, break down his constitution, ruin his eyes, literally kill himself, commit protracted suicide to have the name of knowing more than you really do. To go forth from College dispirited, sickly, dyspeptic, skeeny sour feeble [and] pale. I have written a discourse upon Agriculture I feel very much like putting into practice what I have written concerning it (IU Student Diary, Nov. 6, 1856).

Regardless of frustration, IU students still assumed the role of dependents and naturally embraced the parental authority of the faculty. Getting into trouble was a testament to the juvenile qualities of certain students and their indiscretions prompted IU students to articulate their beliefs on their own status and agency. David Beem, class of 1858, wrote that a group of students caught stealing a beehive and destroying a local man’s furnace “ought to have innocently spent [their time] at their, respective homes, with their fond parents.” (“Some Bitter” 1). The same student who mourned the time he wasted as a dependent in Bloomington, confidently noted in his diary, “Boys do best at home under the superintendence of vigilant parents” (IU Student Diary, Dec. 16, 1856). Frustration with dependency started and ended with the individual student, and was rarely translated into a critique of the faculty or the system of parental discipline.

In mid-19th century America, the ideal relationship between father and son was familiar and instructive. Discipline was to be judicial and firm, but mercifully applied. The faculty of IU assumed the same posture in the parental relationship they cultivated with their students. The faculty were looking to correct wrongs and set out model behavior, rather than enforce certain codes of conduct through draconian punishment. Student approval of faculty discipline was reinforced by lenient punishments. Students naturally admired the faculty’s graceful sense of justice that often allowed them to walk free (IU Faculty Minutes). John D. Alexander, class of

1861, remembered that when a couple of pranksters were treated with clemency, all agreed the faculty were “a lot of jolly good fellows” (“Recollections”). The faculty proved remarkably lenient throughout the 1850s, with the most common punishment being a stern talking to, cemented by the promise of the offender to maintain good behavior thereafter (IU Faculty Minutes).

Students naturally approved of discipline that allowed them to walk free. The real test of student approval is how they applied parental discipline to their own lives, and to their peers. Literary societies were student run organizations focused on moral improvement through debate, oration, prayer, and reciprocal critique. Indiana University had two main literary societies in the 1850s, the Philomathean Society and the Athenian Society, and every student had to join one. Each society had its own set of rules and strict code of conduct. One professor remembered that, “violations of good order were punished by juries often with more severity than the faculty itself would exercise” (Wylie, 2). John C. Wilson wrote that during a meeting of the Philomathean Society in 1857, “there was a great many fined for absence, spitting on floor, leaning with head against wall & c.” (Wilson, Nov. 20, 1857). Students could be more coercive than the faculty in their corrective efforts. John C. Wilson wrote in another entry that a “gentleman” threatened to thrash him and a friend for spitting out of a window (Nov. 17, 1857). But even this more zealous effort is indicative of a popular student held doctrine of watchful improvement of themselves and their peers. IU students were willing to apply the principles of the faculty to greater extents, enforcing harsher punishments, and even threatening physical violence.

Despite faculty and peer efforts to maintain manly conduct among the student body, IU students were not always perfect pupils. IU students got drunk, fought, skipped class, disobeyed the faculty, and staged pranks. John C. Wilson reported that on Thanksgiving Day 1858, “About

half the students are drunk” (Nov. 26, 1857). Practical jokes were a student favorite and most pranks seemed to center around chickens. John D. Alexander remembered that a gang of students put a chicken in the president’s office, but after it escaped into the chapel, hilarity ensued as the pranksters struggled to detain the bird before Dr. Daily arrived to conduct morning prayer (Alexander, “Recollections”). Another student recorded a night-time raid on a Bloomington citizen’s home, where he and a few friends surrounded the home and cackled like hens. When the enraged occupant emerged with a musket and shot at the hooligans, they retreated to their dorms, terrified, but unhurt (IU Student Diary, Dec. 1, 1856). Fights occasionally broke out on campus and property was sometimes destroyed by wayward students. But all of these petty crimes and minor infractions played into the hands of the faculty. Students needed to stray from the straight and narrow for the faculty to provide firm guidance. When those who had released the chicken were caught, they suffered no more punishment than a lecture on orderly conduct and their promise to behave in a more upright manner in the future. Two students who smashed a window of the chapel were also released after they promised to never get in trouble again. The faculty used petty crimes to educate students in manful conduct, and by doing so, earned student approval and a quiet campus.

Replicating a parental relationship was dependent on getting the student to play dutiful son to the caring father of the faculty. It was a role many eagerly played. One student overflowed with affection for his professor in a letter to him, in which he wrote that the professor was, “a venerable Professor, one, whom we poor students were compelled to respect and venerate with our impertinent spirits” (Greathouse, Jun. 25, 1859). Even those who possessed a dislike for the faculty still subscribed to paternal authority. Jesse Walker, dismissed from the University in 1859, wrote an acid letter addressed to the faculty, in which he wrote of Professor Theophilus

Wylie in particular, “my opinion of you has always been so low that it cannot fall. I have always hated + despised you but you are so little that a gentleman would scarce notice you.” Walker, however, prefaced his letter with, “By permission of my father I take this my earliest of opportunity of answering your most kind and interesting letter” (Walker, Feb. 18, 1859). With the permission of his real parent, Walker could lash out at the faculty, but he would dare not stray beyond the limiting influence of patriarchal authority, again demonstrating the strength of student belief in their own dependent status.

Jesse Walker’s bitter letter brings up the question of what student’s actual parents thought about parental discipline. Were fathers not forfeiting their status as patriarch by allowing their sons to be ruled by an artificial authority? Indiana University faculty circumscribed this problem by preserving the ultimate authority of natural parents. The faculty of Indiana University made referral to parents, one of the direst punishments a student could receive (IU Faculty Minutes). Fathers could rest assured that their sons were still accountable to them through the official channels of the university. John App, a student in the late 1850s, became delinquent in his studies and the faculty asked his father to withdraw him from the college. John App’s father, agreed, and wrote in reply, “I am sorry, to hear of the misconduct and non attendance of my son to his duties at school. But I am sir under many obligations to you for informing me of his conduct” (App, Mar. 9, 1859). Parent approval was so strong that in one case, a father continued to supervise his son after graduation using the model established by IU faculty. John D. Alexander graduated in 1861 and enlisted in the Union army the following year. His father, William Alexander, wrote to John’s commanding officer, asking him how his son was performing. The officer, replied, “I am well acquainted with your son John D. Alexander. I see him every day and it gives me great pleasure to bear testimony to his uniform gentlemanly

bearing and his fidelity to his duties.” (Gavin, Mar. 3, 1863). William Alexander’s conduct was extreme, but it proves the comfortable role an actual father played within parental discipline and the power it preserved in him.

Professors very naturally were often frustrated by the senseless antics of the students. Maintaining the smiling face of benevolent oversight, no doubt proved trying at times. An IU student diarist recorded how a ball kicked through a window in the chapel provoked the president of the college, Dr. Daily, to hold a special meeting. Draconian punishment was expected, “But the Dr only said ‘Some thoughtless students perhaps boys had been engaged in playing ball in the Chapel; that this would not be tolerated’” (IU Student Diary, Dec. 8, 1856). Lenient punishment was rooted in a healthy fear of the student body. A concerned state senator wrote to interim president Professor Theophilus Wylie during President Daly’s scandalous resignation, “Should difficulties occur with the students, the faculty must act firmly and submit to no insubordination.” the senator tempered this statement, “Conciliate if you can, for attachment to teachers is so commendable, that even when misplaced, it should be regarded leniently” (Bollman, Feb. 8, 1859). Student affection for the faculty, reminiscent of the relationship between father and son, helped preempt large scale student unrest and insubordination. Although there was surely real affection between student and professor, there was also real fear felt by the faculty. The overall calm demeanor of IU depended on a good relationship between student and faculty, a relationship the faculty actively fostered.

This is not to imply that the faculty manipulated the unwitting student body. Student cooperation enabled parental discipline to function at IU in the 1850s, and students voluntarily submitted to it. Their own understanding of themselves as dependent children, aspiring to be men informed their willingness to comply with the faculty. They submitted to parental authority

because they recognized it as a positive force in their lives. Parental discipline's influence is evident in the application of parental discipline to their own lives by governing the conduct of their peers within literary societies.

Fathers occupied perhaps the most important position in the scheme of parental discipline. It was their final authority that made faculty punishment meaningful to the student body. Fathers of students could have easily disrupted the system of discipline at Indiana University by interrupting the flow of power from faculty to student. Further, natural parental power moved in both directions. Rough handling of the students by faculty could provoke parents, discrediting the faculty's position as surrogate patriarchs. But by maintaining the natural father as the ultimate disciplinary influence over the student, and generally applying lenient punishments, the faculty created a system naturally agreeable to fathers.

The faculty worked within parental discipline by making themselves patriarchal figures of authority. The judicial application of lenient punishment turned professors and faculty into surrogate fathers, carefully shepherding young men into adulthood. Lenient punishment created an easy relationship between student and faculty. A student body that admired the faculty was easier to control. This meant that the faculty had to swallow certain indiscretions in exchange for a quiet campus and orderly student body. The sincerity of their motives might be doubted, but its effectiveness cannot.

The stereotype of the rowdy, fractious student cannot be applied to the IU student of the 1850s. Because IU students subscribed to Victorian conceptions of manhood and independence, they accepted the replicated parental authority of the faculty as the key to becoming men. The most important factor in their docile behavior was their own decision to submit to parental discipline because of their belief in their own status as dependents. Parental discipline also

dispels the myth of the traditional, heavy-handed faculty. Professors at IU took their role as firm but benevolent authority seriously, not only out of real investment in their students, but as the key to a calm campus. Parental discipline also highlights the flexibility of patriarchal authority in the 19th century. Often portrayed as an inflexible oppressive force, it was actually quite pliable. Both fathers and their sons were perfectly comfortable submitting to a surrogate source of parental authority. Of course, the faculty were not far out of the realm of the student's fathers – white adult males who possessed access to opportunity – but the self-announced replication of the father's role by the IU faculty in the 1850s highlights the fluidity of fatherhood in the 19th century.

Parental discipline at Indiana University in the 1850s illuminates the intersections of paternalism, manhood and education in the 19th century. The fact that students being educated in the principles of manhood did not yet regard themselves as men; that professors consciously feared their pupils while maintaining friendly relationships; and that natural fathers would surrender their paternal authority to a surrogate source, illustrates there is still much that we do not know about 19th century education that can inform broader historical discussions.

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