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Is Feminism Still Relevant?

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In the United States, 50% of the workforce is female, and more than 50% of undergraduate degree earners are female. There are now more female Supreme Court Justices than there ever have been, and the summer 2012 Olympics were the first to feature women from every attending country. Team USA was actually composed of more women than men, and women won the majority of US medals. Many people say we have achieved gender equity, and that the need for feminism is a thing of the past. Through my CURF summer research position I explored the issue in various dimensions by delving into the Penn Women’s Center archives, attending the National Council For Research on Women’s annual conference, and gathering information for a PowerPoint entitled “Does Penn Need a Women’s Center?”

By looking into the history of the Women’s Center and immersing myself in the environment of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, I was able to see how far women’s rights have come since my mother was the same age that I am now. However, it is clear that gender equity is something that we have not yet attained, despite the progress that has been made. Women may make up 50% of degree earners but they’re only 28% of full professors nationwide, 3.8% of Fortune 500 CEOs, and 16.8% of Congress. However, they are 92% of plastic surgery recipients, 90% of rape victims, and 85% of domestic violence victims. As these statistics and the surrounding graphics suggest, feminism is just as relevant as it has ever been.

Penn has only 7 female commencement speakers in the past 40 years... and just 1 in the past 15. Additionally, in the past 12 years Penn has composed a mere 26% of SPN Commencement speakers. Penn has the lowest percentage of women in its leadership of any major university in the nation. 1 out of every 6 women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. There is a 72% chance that she will know her attacker.

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