



2-25-2019

The Impact of Feminist Action at the University of Pennsylvania Between 1970 and 1975: A Story of Consciousness Raising, Public Action, and Lasting Change

Kristen Ierardi
University of Pennsylvania

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On July 30, 1975, William G. Owen of the Office of the Secretary wrote to Professor Phyllis Rackin informing her that she had been granted full tenure as an associate professor of the General Honors program in the English department at the University of Pennsylvania. This decision came after six years of debate, costly litigation, and tactful planning by a group of Penn women to challenge a sexist system in place at the university. Phyllis Rackin's battle with the university for tenure is not unique to the struggles many women have faced in academia, but the story behind her case reveals a complex and astonishing network of women who were fed up with the status quo and willing to put their professional careers on the line for it. The case, which would span the course of seven years, exemplifies a time at Penn when women used the power of personal reflection in conjunction with more public acts of consciousness raising and protest to achieve change. As feminist groups of the early 1970s pushed women to recognize their place as equal members of the community, roots of a collective identity among university women began to develop. At Penn, women began to turn inward and reflect on their lives as students, faculty, and staff, and as a result, their personal consciousness came together to form a powerful body equipped to take action against a major university. This change in personal consciousness involved women evaluating what they thought about themselves and their identity, and had a tangible effect on their politics and actions. Feminist scholar Ruth Rosen

describes it as “looking at your life through your own eyes, reflecting on the choices you had made, realizing who had encouraged and discouraged your decisions, and recognizing the many obstacles and constraints that had little to do with individual temperament or talent.”¹

As the discussion among and about women at Penn began to take hold of the University in the early 1970s, an interesting dynamic between a growing collective consciousness and public action unfolded as a means to initiate and achieve change. Public displays of action among Penn women catalyzed other women to look critically at their own personal situations, thoughts, and feelings, and from it groups like Women for Equal Opportunity at the University of Pennsylvania began to see exponential interest and growth in their organization. This only furthered the group’s power to take more public action. The actions of Penn women during the 1970s reflect an element of duality between public action and private consciousness. Through this duality, these women were able to transform the University.

The story of feminist activism at Penn during the early 1970s is best told through a focus on three key events: a 1971 study on the place of women at Penn, the Phyllis Rackin discrimination case, and the four-day long 1973 anti-rape sit-in. Each of these episodes would showcase this element of duality differently. In the case of the 1971 study, elements of consciousness raising would serve as a catalyst for the study to be pursued by a group of Penn women in the first place. The effect of this public effort to demonstrate inequality and discrimination at the University ultimately resulted in a shift in consciousness among a larger group of Penn women and was essential in creating groups like Women for Equal Opportunity at the University of Pennsylvania. With regards to the Rackin case, there is a clear shift in consciousness for Rackin herself that made public action possible. In the results of this public action, a rise in consciousness among other Penn women also becomes evident. The anti-rape sit-in of 1973 is similar to the Rackin case in that it happened as a result of raised

consciousness among Penn women, and as a result led to public action that initiated and achieved major change. Together, these three events showcase how personal reflection and public action, though often held separate, work together in a way that allows for significant change.

In scholar William H. Chafe's *Civilities and Civil Rights*, he spends the introduction of his book explaining why he chose to focus on the Civil Rights Movement in one single city (Greensboro, NC) over the course of thirty years rather than taking a more national perspective. He claims, "The decision to choose one place grew out of a desire to become familiar with all the aspects of the community... that shaped the social context out of which the civil rights struggle emerged."² The decision to focus on Penn, aside from my personal connection to the university as a student, is in many ways similar to Chafe's. By focusing on Penn, rather than a more general analysis of the impact of feminist action on college campuses, a greater depth of knowledge about the University's people, culture, and history allows for a more telling narrative. Throughout this research into Penn specifically, a story emerges that reflects underlying themes of the national women's movement of the early 1970s and the social and political culture surrounding it.

The story of feminist activism is not unique to Penn, nor was Penn necessarily a vanguard in university activism when compared to universities widely known for their more radical student bodies, like Cornell and the University of California, Berkeley. The fact that Penn was more similar to an average university with regards to radical activism is what makes it a worthwhile school to examine in a time of national change. As Beth Bailey points out in her book *Sex in the Heartland*, "if the challenges to America's sexual codes had taken place only in the streets of Greenwich Village and the Haight-Ashbury, there would have been no revolution."³ Bailey's claim is true of the women's movement; looking at Penn allows a perspective that "goes beyond the usual suspects" to demonstrate how widespread and impactful

the women's movement was.⁴ Sara Evans argues in her book *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation In the Civil Rights Movement & The New Left* that as the women's movement grew it found itself decentralized and separated from the more radical feminists. As a new feminist consciousness spread far beyond the New Left, thousands of groups and organizations formed across the country where "the process repeated and renewed itself as questions and possibilities deepened and spread."⁵ This was true at Penn, where a feminist consciousness spread across campus, igniting a wave of change for University women and demonstrating the power of collective action. The question of how change is initiated and accomplished is one that has long been debated by feminist scholars. At Penn, we see that this change was a result of consciousness raising and public gestures that demanded results.



Women's Liberation March from Farragut Square to Lafayette Park

This does not challenge the established narrative of what pushed change in the women's movement, but rather adds an interesting historical perspective to an ongoing discussion among feminists about how to achieve a better, more equal world for all women. Penn is not unique, but this is precisely why its story is worth telling.

When discussing feminist activism on Penn's campus in the 1970s, it is essential to discuss the larger changes happening at the university-wide level. By the early part of the decade, it became clear that the University's goals for a large capital campaign and endowment growth were a driving motivator behind its actions with students and faculty. When Martin Meyerson became president of the University in 1970, he had aspirations to bring Penn into a new era as a premier research institution. This would require massive structural, academic, and budgetary change across campus. Meyerson's new project was referred to as "One University" and served to remedy the "academic fragmentation and factionalism" that persisted on Penn's campus as the University entered a new decade of continuing social and political change.⁶ Faced with a financial crisis and a significant University budget deficit at the start of his presidency, Meyerson recognized that financial support and growth was essential if the University were to flourish. Calming gender tensions and working on the "status" of women at Penn was a key part of this plan.

By the fall 1970, the Board of Trustees was beginning to introduce the topic of the status of women at Penn more concretely. Specifically, they were beginning to look into the status of female faculty within the University. As stated by a member of the Board of Trustees in a meeting in October of 1970, "this matter is of some importance now not only because women are more actively interested in the subject but also because of the Federal Government's concern about discriminatory employment practices." The problem was surfacing as a result of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination on the basis of sex. The University, which received a large amount of federal funding

annually, understood that in order to remain stable or grow, their gender policies could not counter this legislation. The discussion that was emerging among trustee members about women at the University was also a result of an ongoing examination by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). In June of 1971, as a “direct result of the examination by HEW” and others that had been “initiated independently,” the University was beginning to consider a new affirmative action plan. Noted in the trustee minutes, this plan would potentially include “a proposal that each department and school establish its own goal for the next five years in terms of a ratio of women to men; revision of the nepotism rule; possible establishment of a day-care center and creation of a maternity leave policy; appointment of an ombudsman; and articulation of the fact that the academic freedom machinery will provide the best judicial assistance for clarifying questions of promotion involving race and sex.”⁷ Several of these suggestions would come from a massive study on the status of women at Penn released just a few months prior to this meeting, marking the first of three events that would force the University to confront issues it had previously ignored or did not consider to be problems.

In 1969, the Women’s Faculty Club, headed by Assistant Professor Elizabeth Kirk Rose, formed an ad hoc committee on the problems of women in the University. The committee, which was chaired by biochemistry professor Dr. Phoebe Leboy, sent out a survey to over six-hundred women employed by the University of Pennsylvania.⁸ The data, which was meticulously collected and analyzed, was telling, and would serve as the basis for years of battles with University administration over the place of women at Penn. Though made public for the first time on October 27, 1970 at an open meeting hosted by the Women’s Faculty Club, the results of the study would again be officially released in three separate issues of the *Almanac* in April of 1971.⁹ Referred to as the Cohn Report, the study details the status of female faculty through tables and graphs regarding the rank, salary, and promo-

tion of female faculty within different schools and departments.¹⁰ The report was accompanied by general recommendations by the committee on the steps the University should take given such information. The results of this study were published widely across Penn's campus and the city, as evidenced by the expansive *Philadelphia Inquirer* article, "Women in Academia Seldom Reach Top," published in January of 1971, which detailed the efforts of Penn and other Pennsylvania universities attempting to assess gender discrimination.¹¹

The information published in the study is dense, though the committee was sure to clearly highlight the most noteworthy facts and figures revealed by the study. They boldly and repeatedly point out, for example, that only two percent of all full professors at Penn were women, while they comprised thirteen percent of assistant professors. Where fully-affiliated female professors were found in departments of the University, they were almost always in lower ranks than male faculty. The survey results also made public how few tenured female professors there were across all disciplines and departments. History, English, and sociology had no tenured women at all.¹² One of the most important elements of this survey was the rebuttal of the common claim that this disparity in hiring practices and professorial rank was due to a lack of qualified female candidates. Using data about female doctoral candidates at American universities, the committee claims, "there are a number of fields where women do constitute a visible proportion of the pool of potential candidates, but have little or no presence here."¹³ The committee would continue to meet regularly through 1970 and 1971, discussing the results of the questionnaire and what steps they would take to remedy what they saw as massive discrimination in hiring practices throughout the University.

The Cohn Report, which was collected as a means to have accurate data that had not previously been provided by the University on the status of women, also served a bigger purpose. As seen in the several drafts and edited copies of the report, it is clear

that the committee knew this was going to be powerful information when released to the public. Beyond Penn, this survey ushered in requests from other universities nationwide asking about the survey results and inquiring how they could conduct a similar study on their own campus. In January of 1971, for example, Dean Alice Emerson received a request from the director of the University of Minnesota's Planning and Counseling Center for Women asking for a copy of the study upon the report becoming public later that year.¹⁴ The report showed Penn's administration that if they were not going to supply this information willingly, there were women who were willing to devote immense amounts of time and energy to exposing unflattering truths and making them widely known.

Beyond the public awareness the Cohn Report brought, the study also raised personal consciousness among women involved in the study. At the end of each questionnaire was space for the study's participants to make open ended remarks regarding their status as women at Penn. Women responded with detailed, honest comments about their salaries, their treatment by the University and within specific departments, lack of childcare services, and curiosity about why women were in such a position in the first place and what could be done about it. For some women, this study was the first time they were made aware of a potential problem at Penn. As one response states, "Until this questionnaire crossed my desk, I was unaware of female discrimination at Penn."¹⁵ Many respondents were also interested in the results of the study because they lacked access to information regarding these issues. One respondent commented "[I would] be very interested in the published report. In my department, we have no idea how our male colleagues on campus or our female colleagues (in other departments) compare in salary, rank, rate of promotion, etc."¹⁶ While the comments among respondents range from advising women to leave the University to denial that there was a problem at all, there appears to be a general consensus that women at Penn were discriminated against or disadvantaged

to some degree. The impact of the Cohn Report on these women is clearly one of consciousness raising with regards to their own status as professional women and as females in general. This study served as a wake-up call to Penn's female faculty, staff, and students that there was something going on for women, and that their problems were not unique or unimportant. It would also serve as a catalyst behind the creation of one of the most powerful feminist groups at Penn.

In 1970, a group called "FOCUS on Equal Employment for Women" at the University of Michigan filed a complaint against Michigan through the Department of Labor, claiming that the University was violating parts of Title VII and Executive Order 11246. This decision required the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to enforce an Executive Order that could cut off funds to institutions that discriminated against women in employment or those who failed to develop affirmative action plans. In November of this same year, a dozen women, several of whom had worked on the ad hoc committee that produced the Cohn Report, approached President Meyerson for a meeting to discuss how soon the Michigan decision would be implemented at Penn.¹⁷ After meeting with these women, the president initiated a task force made up of the same women and tasked them with drafting an affirmative action plan. The women compiled their research and drafted a plan to present to the president, using the results of the Cohn Report as concrete evidence of the need for action. As detailed in an article published in *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, the plan included recommendations that the University initiate a "Women's Commission" as a mechanism to initiate reviews, investigate grievances and evaluate employee records.¹⁸ The report also suggested the active recruitment of women faculty members, with a temporary period of preferential hiring, and asked for equal pay and equal rates of promotion. In addition to its more specific requests for support for child care and female studies courses, the report at its core asked the President to publicly inform the deans, directors, department chairmen,

and other administrators of the University's commitment to end discrimination against women. President Meyerson rejected the proposal only ten days after receiving it. The women on this task force took this rejection and lack of initiative as an opportunity to start their own group, and Women for Equal Opportunity (WEOUP) at the University of Pennsylvania was created in February of 1971.

The creation of WEOUP shares a familiar narrative to perhaps the largest and most widely known organization in the early women's movement: the National Organization for Women, more commonly known as NOW. On December 14, 1961, President John F. Kennedy established the President's Commission on the Status of Women, thereby tacitly admitting there was in fact a problem. The existence of this commission and, in subsequent years, of state commissions on the status of women, provided a rallying point for professional women. This commission,



Eleanor Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy together for the establishment of the President's Commission on the Status of Women

in addition to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, provided women with a legal tool to combat discrimination in hiring and promotion. The women of NOW were quick to capitalize on this tool, though they formed their organization only after facing serious roadblocks in more traditional means of change. According to Evans, “When, at a national conference of state commissions on the status of women in 1965, activists were informed that they could pass no resolutions and take no action in their capacity as state commissioners, a group broke away to resolve to found the National Organization for Women (NOW).”¹⁹ This new organization was created to pressure the government to act, bearing a similarity to the decision among Penn women to form WEOUP to pressure the University administration into action. WEOUP and NOW, related in the stories of their respective origins, would continue to share commonalities in the way they approached change and emphasized the importance of equality.

The rhetoric of WEOUP expresses many of the same sentiments as the National Organization for Women, whose mission statement declares a core belief that “the power of American law, and the protection guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution of the civil rights of all individuals, must be effectively applied and enforced to isolate and remove patterns of sex discrimination, to ensure equality of opportunity in employment and education, and equality of civil and political rights and responsibilities on behalf of women.”²⁰ Both WEOUP and NOW were determined to systematically dismantle the limitations and restrictions women faced. This emphasis on equality in public life, however, set these groups apart from more radical feminist groups who were focused on the intricacies of the personal life of women. As Evans found, “in general, the professional women who created NOW accepted the division between the public and private spheres and chose to seek equality primarily in the public realm.”²¹ Both groups, however, had the task of pushing women to realize that there was, in fact, a systematic problem, and they would accomplish this task through public action and an emphasis on collec-

tive identity.

Though started by a small group of women in response to President Meyerson's lack of action, WEOUP was an influential presence on Penn's campus. The group grew rapidly in its first few years, attracting women from all areas of the University. Made up of students, faculty, and staff, the group allowed for dialogue and collaborative efforts across a diverse group of women. The core members of the group, including Carol Tracy and Phoebe Leboy, worked tirelessly through the early part of the decade compiling research, communicating with the administration, reaching out to state and federal government officials, and working with students. They combined elements of consciousness raising, sisterhood, and legal action to become the driving force of major change in all areas of campus life and a powerful network for University women. Their goal was clear: equality of opportunity for all women at Penn. This commitment to a singular goal allowed a diverse group of women to focus on their commonalities rather than their differences and, as a result, the group claimed, "we were not divided by the differences of opinion on abortion, sexual preference, unionization, or life-style."²² In this regard, WEOUP did not regard itself as a consciousness-raising group despite its work to raise consciousness across campus. In order to maintain cohesiveness among such a diverse group and commitment to their agenda, the members of WEOUP "avoided probing one another's souls any more than was necessary to resolve personal problems when they came up."²³ This powerful collective identity would allow the women of WEOUP to come together and act in one of the most public discrimination cases in Penn's history.

When Phyllis Rackin was originally denied tenure by the University, she did not immediately see it as a problem of discrimination. It was unfair, she thought, but a systematic problem? For Rackin, there was no precedent. She was the first female assistant professor in the English department to ever receive a favorable vote for tenure despite the large pool of female scholars in that

field nationally.²⁴ Her first review at College Personnel Committee level was at a time when there were no female full professors in the College at all, and only three female associate professors.²⁵ It was hard for her to see her case as a systematic problem when the system was so deeply patriarchal and male-dominated that no one had considered challenging it. In this regard, that was just the way things were. Rackin discusses this in her personal essay, “Not by Lawyers Alone: Ten Practical Lessons for Academic Litigants,” which was published in the 1983 collection of essays on feminist action, *Rocking the Boat*. “The person who first convinced me to take legal action... was a friend—a brilliant lawyer who wanted to help me because she was a feminist and because she believed that both of us had suffered because of our sex,” she notes.²⁶ For Rackin, the decision to bring forward and ultimate success of her case is largely attributed to the efforts of WEOUP. The group, and namely Carol Tracy, were critical to encouraging and supporting Rackin throughout her difficult battle against a powerful, male-dominated administration. Carol Tracy had previously filed a class-action complaint of sex discrimination against Penn with the Pennsylvania Human Relations commission and announced it through a televised press conference in October of 1971. During the 1971-72 academic year, the Commission investigated the complaint. This came before Rackin filed her lawsuit, though her battle with the University started long before then.

In order to understand its complexity, a basic timeline of the Rackin case must be presented to highlight the confusing, and at times contradictory, treatment Rackin received in the years leading up to the lawsuit. Detailed in the 1975 *Daily Pennsylvanian* article, “Rackin Case Spans Years of Controversy,” the timeline is as follows. On November 4, 1969, tenured members of the English department voted eighteen to three, with two abstentions, to approve Rackin’s promotion and tenure. She had been teaching at Penn since 1962. These results were forwarded to the Provost’s Staff Conference, which is responsible for all tenure decisions, along with a separate letter in which English Department

Chair Robert Lumiansky recommended against Rackin's tenure and promotion. On February 4, 1970, six students presented Lumiansky with a six-page brief praising Rackin as a teacher and counselor, which was signed by eighty-four of Rackin's former students. The English department voted again on Rackin's promotion on April 10, 1970, presumably in response to pressure by students of Rackin, the results of which were fourteen to twelve against granting Rackin tenure and promotion. One week later, College Dean William Stevens appointed a new committee to consider Rackin's promotion, which unanimously approved the proposal. On May 8, 1970, the Provost's Staff Conference again denied Rackin tenure and a promotion. Just two weeks later, the Committee on Academic Freedom ruled that waivers Rackin had signed were not valid. Since University rules demanded that faculty be terminated or tenured after six years, the Committee voted that Rackin be granted tenure. By July of 1970, the Provost's Staff Conference granted Rackin tenure "in the University of Pennsylvania," though she was denied promotion to associate professor and was stripped of her membership in the English department.²⁷ Rackin returned from a year-long leave of absence in the fall of 1971. She was assigned to teach in the General Honors program and was denied readmission to the English department, despite her repeated attempts to gain admission during the following year. By May of 1973, Rackin decided to file suit in federal District Court against the University of Pennsylvania and thirteen faculty and administrators.²⁸

The treatment of Rackin by male faculty and administrators after filing her complaint would only further the realization among Penn women that the problem was bigger than just her case. In October of 1974, WEOUP paid to publish a supplement to the weekly publication of *The Almanac*. In a sixteen-page annotated account of documents involved in the case, what would be widely known as the "Rackin Papers" shed a powerful, public light on the treatment of Rackin by the University throughout her battle for tenure. The papers, which would take months to

receive approval and were limited in scope (due to the fact that the Court acted on the University attorney's motion to seal the record after WEOUP announced their intentions to publish the papers), were a critical reminder of how important this moment was for all Penn women. Stated by WEOUP members in the introduction of the papers:

Dr. Rackin knocked on the door when the door was closed. She was invited as far as the foyer before some of the gentlemen in the club cried *Eek! A Woman!*—and then began the pushing and shoving. Men against, men for, and men neutral to feminism but committed to one view or the other of academic freedom alternated in throwing the lady out and helping her back through the door. When the final decision of the official membership committee was rendered, Dr. Rackin found she did indeed have membership. Whether or not she is allowed the full privileges and responsibilities that go with such membership will say a lot about how colleagues treat each other in a University community.²⁹

In response to the investigation, several male members of the English department faculty who had originally voted for Dr. Rackin's promotion and tenure signed a letter asking the Dean and Provost to "separate Mrs. Phyllis Rackin from any connection with our University Faculty as of June 30, 1972."³⁰ Later published in the Rackin papers, this letter was criticized for its lack of "sound research and care in self-expression" as well as a disregard for the integrity of an Academic Freedom Committee and lack of historical perspective.³¹ Rackin suspects that this came from a place of pressure by the department head, and claims that the only male English department professor who agreed that it was sex discrimination on record was the only African-Ameri-

can member of the department.³² This dismissal of Rackin's case and lack of support for her claims, however, would prove to be a compelling and public weapon for those who would help Rackin in her battle for equality. For Women for Equal Opportunity at the University of Pennsylvania, Phyllis Rackin was the "visible sign that affirmative action was not working at our university."³³ Rackin quickly realized how much she needed the support of WEOUP, but knew that its members needed her too.

In her discussion of WEOUP and her case in *Rocking the Boat*, Rackin makes note of perhaps the most important takeaway from her experience. She states, "[t]he lesson, in case anyone has forgotten, is that *sisterhood is powerful*."³⁴ The collective identity and determination for change shared by these women allowed them to create a strong network that used tactful approaches to achieve change. In fact, this kind of collective effort was not important but imperative according to the women of WEOUP. As Rackin described, "The kind of cooperative effort and shared skills and resources I have described here can achieve results that would be impossible for any of us working alone."³⁵ With regards to the Rackin case, it was a sense of shared struggle that allowed the case to become so public and powerful by its end. In a *Daily Pennsylvanian* article titled "The Rackin Case: A University Victory," Tracy echoes this sentiment stating, "[t]he struggle has been painful for all of us, but not without its rewarding moments: when tenacious journalists uncovered the facts and printed them, when individual faculty members took the time to read the Rackin Papers thoughtfully and began to apply moral pressure... when new administrators entered into the negotiations in a spirit that made settlement possible."³⁶ Through a collective, public effort they were able not only to battle the University but perhaps truly change the collective consciousness of both faculty and students, male and female, across campus.

In addition to this powerful sisterhood, Rackin emphasized the importance of WEOUP's use of publicity, ability to think politically, and willingness to work. Rackin learned from

an early point in her case that “the battle [she] had to fight was just as much political as it was legal and financial.”³⁷ The press coverage the case received was key. While Rackin herself was discouraged by her lawyers from making any statements to reporters, other members of WEOUP were not bound by this restriction and used it to their advantage. Both the year-long discussion of and ultimate publication of the Rackin papers in 1974 were especially important in gaining attention and support. The papers would be seen by women nationwide, and their financial and emotional support would prove to be a “watershed” moment for the case.³⁸ In the same year the papers were published, both the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Organization for Women contributed to the nationwide campaign for Rackin’s case.³⁹ The ACLU even stated that it was “ready to file” an *amicus curiae* brief in support of Rackin.

The use of publicity was not a new technique for feminist activists, but it is particularly relevant in the case of Penn in the 1970s. As the University launched itself into the intense competition for wealth, power, and prestige among the nation’s top research institutions, it found itself particularly vulnerable to people like Tracy and the power of WEOUP. As Rackin recalled, “Carol was brilliant at getting media attention for all the things we did – she always knew who to contact and what to say.” Beyond the calls to media outlets and correspondence with state and national legislators, the leaders of WEOUP made sure that their actions were being well publicized to other women, both at Penn and beyond. Published in *Rocking the Boat*, four prominent women involved in WEOUP and the women’s movement at Penn highlighted the importance of publicity as a means of recruiting new members, raising funds, and achieving substantial change in their essay “A Network of One’s Own.” “A critical mass of women dedicated to working effectively to eradicate discrimination can attract other women by succeeding,” they argued, and by “publicizing their success.”⁴⁰ The round-the-clock work being done to achieve this public success forged bonds among these

women that allowed students, faculty and staff of diverse backgrounds to find solidarity. Even if they had joined WEOUP for differing reasons, the connection formed among these women created a collective consciousness that would only strengthen the group's ability to tackle even bigger goals.

Although Carol Tracy's name is the dominant one in the narrative of WEOUP, the group was successful because of the diversity of backgrounds considered in the group's decision-making processes. As Rackin notes in her essay, "[a]lthough most of the responsibility fell on Carol... nothing was ever done in WEOUP by one woman without consulting others."⁴¹ In achieving successes for the individual, namely in the Rackin case, there seemed to be a necessary collective element weaved in. For WEOUP, where many women came in search of change and solutions that would improve their own experiences in different ways, this diversity proved extremely impactful. Rackin captures this sentiment, stating:

WEOUP grew strong because it reached out to include all sorts of women. Women who had achieved success within the system kept us well informed and prudent. Women who had been exploited and rejected by the system kept us honest and courageous. And Carol kept us all together.⁴²

Tracy was the spokesperson and the figurehead of WEOUP because in many ways she was willing to put everything on the line. In discussing her time as a secretary for the administration and the head of WEOUP, Tracy bluntly admitted, "I was always willing to get fired and they were willing to back me up."⁴³ Her bold actions would continue to be impactful, whether it was through less-public communication with legislators and administrators or aiding in the organization of one of the largest public demonstrations for women Penn had ever seen.

On March 27, 1973, the Penn Women's Study Planners (PWSP) invited radical feminist and author Robin Morgan to speak on campus. Due to at least six rapes having occurred on or near campus during the preceding week, Morgan chose to include in her discussion an analysis of rape culture and its prevalence on college campuses.⁴⁴ In a moment of public condemnation and shared sentiment among a large group of women, immediate action was deemed necessary. A Forum on Rape the following night made clear the need for Penn women to organize and approach the University "to encounter its indifference and to pressure for better security and for measures to improve the treatment of rape victims."⁴⁵ Following the event, over fifty women from the Penn community planned a rape rally and sit-in that would ultimately last four days and include the participation of several hundred women from across the Penn community. The sit-in was largely organized with the help of WEOUP, but it gained support from women across campus and captured the full attention of both male and female students and administrators. The sit-in continued until the demands of the group were met, and negotiations were held with Provost Elliot Stellar and other University administrators soon after.

"It was a very, very big deal." Though not an active participant of the sit-in, Barbara Katz '74 has vivid memories of campus during those four days and just how impactful this event was for her as both a student and a woman when interviewed in 2017. Though it was not a new problem, it took public action for some women to realize just how personally connected to these issues they were. As Donna Lamb '73 commented seventeen years later, in an article in the *Daily Pennsylvanian*, "each of us had some experiences we thought were ours alone."⁴⁶ Forty years later, Katz admits that it is shocking that she and others would have ever considered the demands being put forth by this group of women as not completely obvious or necessary. "Why should there have been any question about it? That's what so puzzling – I guess this again reflects the context of the time," she commented.⁴⁷ In the

reality of today, the requests being presented by the sit-in participants seem completely ordinary, if not expected. Among these demands were: better lighting, safer bus transportation, reliable and extended alarm and telephone systems, a female security specialist, more women gynecologists in Health Services, publication of rapes and the University's policy for prevention and treatment of this crime, free self-defense classes, and funds for a women's center and a coordinator to program ongoing activities related to women's needs. Katz's confusion further strengthens the idea that at this moment in time, Penn was uncovering a new layer of private consciousness among campus females through the actions of feminist groups like WEOUP. When paired with public discussion and action, the power of this new awareness would force women to question the system and demand change.

A commitment to implement all these demands was made on the fourth day of the sit-in, during which a committee of women students, faculty, employees, community women, and University administrators was constructed to help see these commitments through. The event was a pivotal moment for women at Penn and a watershed moment for the women's movement behind it, though it also proved to be a revealing moment for administrative and female student relations. The sit-in took place in College Hall, the center of Penn's physical campus and the heart of the administration. An article in the *Daily Pennsylvanian* explains that these four days of negotiations were drawn out due to the University's need to understand what the demands entailed and what resources they had to respond to them before making a final decision.⁴⁸ Following the final negotiating session, Professor Carroll Smith Rosenberg read a statement on behalf of the other women affirming that the demonstration was designed "to impress upon the administration the deep concern and fear felt by women of the University," but asserting that its purpose was "not to place the women of the University in an adversary position to the administration."⁴⁹ The four-day sit-in proved that public action begets change, but the reality that such a public display of

protest was necessary in order to bring about change served as a reminder of the deeply-rooted patriarchal system these women were trying to uproot.

In President Meyerson's statement in the *Almanac* on April 10, 1973, he discusses at length the emphasis on increased security measures as a result of the sit-in. Only once does he mention the other demands that were presented at the sit-in, noting in the closing lines of his statement, "[w]e are aware that concerned women have a number of additional ideas for improving campus security and dealing with the special needs of women."⁵⁰ Though one of the largest events surrounding the women's movement on Penn's campus, the discussion among trustees and executives at official meetings was scarce. Only once was the topic officially discussed, and it centered on how safety measures would blend with the aesthetics of the campus. This discussion occurred in April of 1973 after Dean Emerson announced the steps recommended to increase the security of women on campus. The minutes note that a discussion following this announcement centered around the suggestion that additional lights be installed on campus and concluded that "careful consideration should be given to aesthetics." The lights, therefore, would have to blend naturally and be installed at the discretion of the University's landscape architect. No further comment was made about this sit-in or the requests for increased safety, speaking volumes about the priorities of Penn's trustees at the time.

The change in collective consciousness, however, did not always manifest itself in widespread activism or action among Penn students. The student activism at Penn does not carry the legacy of that at Berkeley, Columbia, or Cornell. For many women who attended Penn at the time, they felt little connection to the larger women's movement. When interviewed in 2017, several women expressed recognition of issues like a lack of female faculty or small disparities between men and women on campus, but the narrative rarely went in the direction of true connection to the movement. As Barbara Meyerson Katz '74 de-

scribed the atmosphere for women during her time at Penn, she noted that “the big thing is that the overall atmosphere I felt was very supportive of undergraduate women and I think we were aware of issues female faculty were having but that wasn’t really our fight - that was their fight - and in some ways, that’s sort of naïve but I think we were very idealistic.”⁵¹ For Katz and many other women, the emphasis was focusing on their own careers and long-term goals.

Tracy made the key distinction between the two groups of women involved with the movement at Penn: “women’s libbers” and “true feminists.” The latter, she clarified, is always only going to attract a smaller group of people because these are women who are “wholeheartedly committed to the mission of social justice” as opposed to their own personal equality and career advancement.⁵² As captured by Tracy’s distinction, a lot of women at Penn in the 1970s remained focused on their own careers and opportunities rather than on the narrative of social justice. This is perhaps evidenced in the large amount of programming put forth by the Penn Women’s Center and other campus organizations for female students that focused on career advancement, power, and equality in the workplace. Caryl Pederson ’72 recalls her experience with the women’s movement at Penn as wanting to be a feminist so that she could have fully equal opportunity and the ability to pursue all career paths. For Pederson, the movement was less about discussions about social justice, but rather “the hiring position - that’s what we were fighting for.”⁵³ Historian Mark Lloyd places this sentiment in a more national perspective in *Becoming Penn*, arguing that “[t]he attitudes of Penn undergraduates ... reflected the central tendency of civic and political quiescence and careerism that marked the 1970s generation of American college students. Newspaper accounts and University reports of the 1970s reveal this shift in student attitudes from ideology and global issues to self-referential concerns.”⁵⁴ For other women, their focus was on activism beyond campus. This was the case for Philadelphia native Sherie Ernst ’74. Throughout her

time at Penn, she discussed a feeling of apathy among students that ultimately pushed her towards activist groups off-campus.⁵⁵ To an activist, it may have appeared that nothing was going on but, even without high-profile activism, students were beginning to rethink things as a result of a dialogue about the place of gender happening at Penn.

The activism at Penn, and more specifically the sit-in of 1973, is best understood by looking at the conversation being fostered across the University community. The sit-in, though partially sparked by the highly-concentrated number of rapes that occurred on campus in March of 1973, was a result of a collective consciousness that had been growing within the larger Penn community throughout the early 1970s. Across campus, Penn students were becoming increasingly aware as issues of equality started to overwhelm the campus culture in a public domain. In November of 1972, undergraduate student Alice Shane wrote a series of opinion pieces for the student newspaper criticizing the women's movement. She claimed, "[w]omen prefer being taken care of. When Steinem & Co. claims that the ladies are dying to take their place in the world, it's hardly the truth." Supplementing these claims with multiple examples of women in her consciousness raising groups, Shane essentially criticized the core mission of the movement as frivolous and inauthentic. Her testimony, however, would not be received without significant backlash. Over the next several weeks and months, students wrote in to the newspaper with arguments against their classmate. This included a response from four female members of the Penn Women's Liberation group, a women's group unaffiliated with WEOUP, who argued that Shane's articles "denigrated the women's movement" and "demonstrate a real lack of understanding of the basic issues of liberation."

Signs of this ongoing struggle with identity and the roots of a movement could be seen in the continuing dialogue happening both in and outside the classroom at Penn. After the anti-rape sit-in in 1973, student Frank McDevitt wrote a piece

criticizing the goals and motives of the women who organized the event. In this piece, he argues that “[t]he women’s groups have only polarized opinions on campus by distorting reality to win the support of the women of the University,” and asserts that if women think that the way they dress has no effect on a man then they are sadly mistaken. He criticizes fellow student Susan MacDonald who, in her letter to the *Daily Pennsylvanian*, defined rape as a “political act of terrorization done by men to women” and blamed on the “sexist value system” as the reason for the continued lack of concern about the issue. McDevitt argues that “[MacDonald’s letter] is a good example of political rhetoric which does little except alienate the few concerned men on campus.”⁵⁶ Student Ruth Weil ’73 countered McDevitt’s piece, pointing out that “[t]he fact that McDevitt expresses a real fear and aversion to women banding together to exert any sort of pressure and power, is vivid evidence of the existence of the sexist value system to which Susan MacDonald refers.”⁵⁷ The dialogue among students about individual consciousness in such a public format again reflects the element of duality in change for women at Penn. In promoting this conversation in such a public format, other students were forced to confront their own thoughts and beliefs. This growing dialogue between students helps to contextualize how public action and change occurred, since it shows how people at Penn were wrestling with a new set of questions and, as a result, discovering that the answers to such questions did not lie in complacency.

This collective consciousness was being shared publicly by male members of the Penn community as well. In his article, “Women and Change,” published by *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, student Peter Oliver claims, “in my mind I have a vision of a society of the future that in some way will be better, a society which will benefit men as well as women. Such a society, however, can only exist with a heightened social consciousness, a consciousness dial must be shared by everyone, and not something determined by established social codes.”⁵⁸ His rhetoric is one shared by oth-

er male contributors on this topic. The success and equality of women did not have to come at a cost to men. This is a sentiment shared by the women of WEOUP, who argued that “the brightest and ablest men are secure enough not to have to prop up their identities by suppressing women as a class.”⁵⁹ In this regard, consciousness raising can be seen as both a cause and effect. As women at Penn achieved substantial change through the Rackin case and 1973 sit-in, the political and social consciousness of men on Penn’s campus also began to show signs of change.

This change in collective consciousness among both men and women could also be seen through a growing interest in a women’s studies program at Penn. Women’s courses were first offered at Penn in the spring of 1971. By February of 1972, a group of students and faculty known as the Penn Women’s Studies Planners released a proposal for a more complete women’s studies program. The report, which was compiled and written after substantive research of other women’s studies programs at universities nationwide, boasted the benefits of a separate academic discipline for women. The report concluded with a step-by-step process for creating, funding, and maintaining a Department of Women’s Studies at Penn. The University ultimately added a women’s studies program within the College of Thematic Studies in November of 1972. Though not a separate department, this program introduced an interdisciplinary track for students to take courses relating to women’s studies offered through other departments, such as “Psychology of Women” and “Women and the Law.”⁶⁰ By the spring of 1974, over 160 students were enrolled in the College of Thematic Studies’ Women’s Program. As Tracy stated in a 1974 *Almanac* article titled “Women at Penn: Where Are We Now,” women’s studies was a program Penn undergraduate women needed and appreciated. She claims, “what we have achieved we deserve to know, and when we have not achieved we need to know why not.”⁶¹

The Women’s Studies Program opened up a dialogue that had not been addressed in an academic setting before at Penn. As

scholar Christopher Loss argues in his article “‘Women’s Studies is in a Lot of Ways – Consciousness Raising’: The Educational Origins of Identity Politics,” the campus-based second wave “worked from the top-down and the bottom-up, eventually meeting in the women’s studies classroom.”⁶² Beryl Kaplan, a Barnard student enrolled in a course called “Determinants of Sex” in 1972, made the assertion that “[e]ducation is a basic foundation for any kind of movement. Women’s studies is in a lot of ways—consciousness raising.”⁶³ Another student described it as an organizing tool, getting a woman to realize her own oppression so she can deal with it. Essentially, the promise of equality being sought out through legal action and protest was further strengthened by the institutionalization of women’s studies inside the core of academia. As a 1973 Penn Press release asserts, “[the women’s movement’s] influence goes far beyond pressure for admitting more women students or hiring more women faculty... it is beginning to alter the questions scholars are asking and the methods they are using.”⁶⁴ From the humanities to the sciences, the introduction of women’s studies “led students to unforeseen intellectual and emotional destinations, to new points of embarkation.”⁶⁵ Here again, consciousness raising can be seen as both a cause and effect. Students and faculty who pushed for the creation of the program had already formed a collective consciousness that recognized the necessity of women’s studies courses, and the ultimate implementation of such courses would have a profound impact on the consciousness of other Penn women.

In November of 1978, Penn hosted a conference for all women at the University, including faculty, staff, and students. “A Women’s Program for the Eighties” was the first major conference for Penn women since 1971. In those seven years, the position of women at Penn had changed dramatically. The women at Penn who pushed for change in the 1970s used tactics made familiar by a larger women’s movement at the time. They capitalized on a university conscious of its public image and rallied women around a shared struggle and a call for collective action.

In doing so, they were able to achieve change that would have a lasting impact and set precedent for future generations of Penn women. From changes in employment practices to the creation of a women's studies program and a women's center, Penn women had successfully transformed the University to one that was more accepting and accommodating to the female population. Members of groups like WEOUP and women like Phyllis Rackin and Carol Tracy put their careers on the line to change Penn for their colleagues, peers, and the women who would come after them. Their actions, however, would by no means remedy all of the problems women face at Penn.

The discussion at the 1971 conference would be echoed again in 1978 and the topics of discrimination, equal opportunity, and quality of life for Penn women would continue for decades after WEOUP first made their mark with a four-day sit-in in College Hall. The coming decades would bring progress as well as new challenges. Though WEOUP would disappear and Carol Tracy would move on to fight new battles, the tactics Penn women used to bring about change would maintain elements of similarity to the Meyerson era for years to come. The ways that women approach issues on campus today is by no means the same as women who arrived at Penn over forty years ago, though elements of pushing for equality through discussion, consciousness raising, and public action still remain present. In the twenty-first century, there are still committees and reports that look into the potential lack of equal opportunity for women at Penn with regards to career advancement and salary. In 2016, a University task force on sexual assault was formed only after an explicit fraternity email was plastered by a group of female students across campus, making national headlines and sparking widespread conversation among the female student body. In December of 2017, an entire issue of the student-run magazine *34th Street* was composed of pieces from sexual assault survivors in hopes of raising awareness among the Penn community about an issue that too often goes undiscussed. As student Orly Greenberg

commented in the issue's Letter from the Editor, "[w]e would be doing a disservice to all victims—and, in fact, everyone—by not publishing these stories. They're ugly and hard but they're true. They're real. To pretend that assault doesn't exist, or that it doesn't exist at Penn, is to be part of the problem."⁶⁶ The story of women at Penn, though it ultimately serves as only a piece of the narrative of all women at the University during this time, is worth telling not only because it serves as a new perspective on the larger women's movement of the 1970s. Rather, it shows just how relevant this narrative is to today's campus culture as Penn continues to shape and understand its gender environment in many of the same ways it did forty years prior.

Notes

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- ⁵ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation In the Civil Rights Movement & The New Left*, (New York: Random House, 1979): 227.
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²¹ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 19.

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²⁴ Carol Tracy, Phyllis Rackin, et al., "The Rackin Papers," 2.

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²⁶ Phyllis Rackin, "Not By Lawyers Alone: Ten Practical Lessons for Academic Litigants" in *Rocking the Boat*, (New York: Modern Language Association, 1981): 50.

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³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

³¹ *Ibid.*

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⁴⁴ Betsy Sandel and Susan MacDonald "Women's Movement: Many-Faceted," *Daily Pennsylvanian* (Philadelphia, PA), July 1, 1973.

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⁵² Carol Tracy, Interviewed by Kristen Ierardi, October 2017.

⁵³ Carly Pederson, Interviewed by Kristen Ierardi, September 2017.

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⁵⁵ Sherie Ernst, Interviewed by Kristen Ierardi, September 2017.

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Images

Page 39: Women's liberation march from Farrugut Square to Lafayette Park, photographed by Warren K. Leffler, originally published in USA Today (August 26, 1970), accessed May 6, 2018 via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leffler_-_WomensLib1970_WashingtonDC.jpg.

Page 45: "Eleanor Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy (President's Commission on the Status of Women)," from the National Archives and Records Administration (February 12, 1962), accessed on May 6, 2018 via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eleanor_Roosevelt_and_John_F._Kennedy_\(President%27s_Commission_on_the_Status_of_Women\)_-_NARA_-_195581.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eleanor_Roosevelt_and_John_F._Kennedy_(President%27s_Commission_on_the_Status_of_Women)_-_NARA_-_195581.jpg).