

A Love-Hate Thing:

The Paradoxical Relationship between College Administrations and On-Campus Feminism

in the 1970's

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Fifty years ago, this paper would not have been able to be written. Until recent history, the female author of this paper would not have had the academic opportunity to write, especially regarding feminism, without fear of ridicule or invisibility. The academic resources for research on feminism would not have existed: women's issues were not recognized by academia. Likewise, the faculty support necessary for this paper would have been absent before the 1960's and 1970's. Around that time, feminism gained nationwide recognition as the Women's Liberation Movement emerged in the United States. While this movement transformed American society as a whole, its impact on higher academia is particularly interesting. In the decade that followed the movement's birth, colleges and universities were places of significant positive social shifts for women. A private liberal arts college in Pennsylvania, named Dickinson College, documented its own experience of this time of change. This documentation demonstrates that the positive changes for female college students during this time did not derive from feminist sympathies in college administrations. Indeed, college administrations in the 1970's possessed strong anti-feminist attitudes which directly contradicted and limited their feminist-friendly acts.

In the fall semester of 1971, four female students at Dickinson College submitted a request to the Student Senate for official acknowledgment as the Women's Group (Women's Group, Official Request). The club purposes listed on the request are evidence of the group's feminist identity. The purposes include but are not limited to "consciousness-raising" for women about their experiences, examining the "status of women at Dickinson," and exploring matters of sex "discrimination" (Women's Group, Official Request). These purposes make it clear that the Women's Group intended to pursue a more gender-equal campus. This goal of gender equality lines up closely with the agenda of the largest feminist organization of the time, the Women's

Liberation Movement. Indeed, Dickinson's Women's Group explicitly acknowledges in their request their group's connection to the "Women's Movement" (Women's Group, Official Request).

As described by Carol Giardina, the Women's Liberation Movement developed from humble beginnings into an influential faction with socially revolutionary ideas. They began as a small group of college women who organized in 1967 and named themselves the "West Side Group" (55). More and more groups formed, coalesced, and thus the movement began to take form. Rory Dicker describes the core values of the "second wave feminism," as the movement was also called (57). According to Dicker, the Movement's brand of feminism saw women's progress as their freedom from societal oppression and marginalization, or in other words as the end of gender inequality. The liberation feminists identified "traditional gender roles" as the source of gender inequality (Dicker 57). Traditional gender roles called for men to be the professionals of society and the breadwinners of the family; women were to be wives, housewives, and mothers (Dicker 57-58). Psychologist Mary Crawford expands on the implications of these gender roles. She describes how stay-at-home wives and mothers are financially dependent on their husbands' provision; in addition, the role of wife is secondary the husband's role as head of the family (Crawford 236-237). These financial and symbolic dependencies on men combine and translate into a power differential in which women are subordinated to men (Crawford 236-237, 264). In the time leading up to the Women's Liberation Movement, the subordination of women manifested itself in the lack of equal rights for them as professionals and reproductive sexual beings. To put it more explicitly, women were discriminated against in the professional world and were not allowed to have autonomy over their sexuality or reproduction (Dicker 57-58). The nature of women's oppression was thus

doubly harmful; it not only blocked women's agency, but moreover refused to even acknowledge that women possess agency. Women were kept powerless not because their capability was feared but because their incapability was presumed. The Women's Liberation Movement sought to free women from the cage of being underestimated.

Some feminist organizations, including the Women's Group at Dickinson College, carried out scientific analyses of women's situation in society with the (sometimes successful) goal to inform people's seeming ignorance regarding women. In early 1972, the Women's Group released a "Social Opinion" survey that was directed towards the women on Dickinson's campus. It inquired about the women's experiences on campus and about their opinions on women's issues including opposite sex relationships, women as professional academics, the Women's Liberation Movement, contraception, and gender traits (Women's Group, Social Opinion Survey). Forty percent of the survey responders used birth control despite the lack of any assistance or information from Dickinson College (Women's Group, Social Opinion Survey). Due to this large portion, and to women's basic need for a gynecologist, the Women's Group petitioned the school administration to institute gynecological services in the Health Center (Women's Group, Proposal for Action). By the beginning of the 1972 fall semester, the Office of Student Services had set up gynecological services for Dickinson students in doctors' offices in the surrounding town (Office of Student Services). The survey, as a tool of feminist social change, resulted in an encouraging outcome; the fulfillment of the request showed a sign of good faith between the administration and the Women's Group.

This good faith was furthered by the office of the Dean of Women. Situated in the Office of Student Services at Dickinson in the early 1970's, Mary Frances Carson served as the Dean of Women. A retrospective interview with her about the 1970's revealed that many other positive

changes for women occurred on campus, in addition to the provision of gynecological services. The President of the College instituted a Commission on the Status of Women, women's seminars and conferences were organized, and a Women's Center was opened (Carson, Interview). Dean Carson herself was a sign and a catalyst of the changing times; the office of Dean of Women signaled the space for advocacy for women within the administration. This women's space meant not only that women belonged to the college in their own right, but also that women's voices had a platform from which they could be heard.

Other colleges employed people in offices comparable to that of Dean Carson at Dickinson. One example is provided by Susan K. Hippensteele and Mire Koikari; they detail the experience of a female administrator at the University of Hawaii who served as a "sex equity specialist" (Hippensteele and Koikari 1283). The "equity" pursued by the person in this office was the equity of sexuality for men and women; specifically, her job was to support and speak up for women who were robbed of their sexual autonomy through sexual harassment or assault (Hippensteele and Koikari 1282-1284). The job was created as a result of the student body pushing the need for women's sexual independence to be recognized (Hippensteele and Koikari 1281-1283). In this case, as it was at Dickinson, college administrations carried out positive actions *in response* to their students' call for feminist progress on campus but did not take proactive measures for that cause.

The positive, if reactive, responses from college administrations mirrors the positive responses to feminism in the political sphere. Mary Ann Danowitz Sagaria traces the interaction between feminism and politics to a time before the Women's Liberation Movement. She describes how independent feminist politicians and sects pressured President Kennedy to institute a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (Sagaria 162-163). This

Committee, in turn, was able to get the U.S. government to pass the Equal Pay Act illegalizing unequal pay based on gender (Sagaria 163). This shift was huge in and of itself and signified that government and feminism were able to have common goals. In 1969, the now-strong feminist movement pressured the government's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) into illegalizing employment discrimination on the basis of sex (Sagaria 163). Years later, presidential executive orders further demanded "equal opportunity" policies for the employment of both genders as well as proactive programs or "affirmative action" to ensure women's employment (Sagaria 163). The government seemed to be making strides for women in the professional world. Their actions supplied some of the changes that feminists demanded, and thus created a model of behavior for other institutions to adopt.

Indeed, some political actions like the Higher Education Act required that specific institutions imitate the government's pro-feminist behavior. The Higher Education Act required higher academia to comply with the Equal Pay Act and the relevant executive orders (Sagaria 164). Until the Higher Education Act, universities and colleges were not held legally responsible for creating gender-equal environments. The government's decision to require some modicum of gender equality on campuses was effective at creating a collaborative relationship between college administrations and feminist students. As seen at Dickinson, college heads instituted Women's Centers, dedicated administrative offices to women's issues, and founded Commissions on the Status of Women parallel to the federal government's commission of the same name (Carson, Interview). These actions signified a step forward for feminism on college campuses.

At first glance one might assume it indicates similar progress in administrations' embrace of the cause. The validity of such an assumption, however, is refuted by evidence of behind-the-

scenes pushback within college administrations against the very feminist activism, progress, and values that were emerging on their campuses. Sometimes this opposing force had no face or name; it was not always expressed explicitly by school officials but existed nonetheless in the form of persistent traditional anti-woman power structures. Long standing or traditional power structures are oftentimes invisible because they are so ingrained that they have come to be perceived as the natural way of things rather than manufactured social constructions (Crawford 27-28). For this reason, power structures such as those that existed in college administrations are best seen not by looking directly at them but rather by observing their imprint on those who experienced them. Roberta Salper, a feminist and a university administrator in the 1960's and 1970's, bears witness to this matter. She describes how, despite her profound passion for feminism, she was uncharacteristically moderate when she spoke on the matter *as* a university administrator (Salper 441-442). In explaining this break from her convictions, she says that there was an unquestioned understanding that within the administration "the envelope could be pushed just so far" (Salper 442). Here it is evident that college administrations were structured in such a way that there was no space for feminism. Thus restricted, feminists within administration understood that they could not fully express any feminist convictions. Salper's expression of the perceived necessity to censor herself as a feminist and make sure she did not push that "envelope" too far stands as an example of the androcentric, anti-feminist power structures still at play in college administrations of that time.

In some cases, anti-feminism was more directly evident within college administrations, though it was still concealed from the world outside the administrations through the feminist-friendly actions discussed earlier. At Dickinson College, the most striking evidence of anti-feminism is in a series of letters between administrators which cover their response to the survey

of the Women's Group mentioned previously. First of all, the number of people involved in this correspondence indicate that there was serious concern about the survey across many levels of the administration; this was no isolated instance of one official mentioning the survey in a letter to another official. Rather, the correspondence involved the president of the college, the Dean of Women Mary Carson, a trustee, the president of the board of trustees, and others who had a clear but unspecified association with the administration.

The correspondence, consisting of letters and memorandums, urged the college to distance itself from the survey and from the Women's Group – indeed, this often seemed to be the main purpose of the pieces. One of the biggest themes across all the letters and memorandums was the writers' purposeful detachment from the Women's Group and their survey. Even the Dean of Women made sure to emphasize that she was not closely affiliated with the Women's Group. She draws the distinction between herself and the Group when she describes them as “formed on their own,” (Carson, Memo, March 1972) and “their [own] organization and not [...] my office” (Carson, Letter). Additionally, she separates herself from them by repeatedly expressing her displeasure that they credited her by name on their survey. She writes twice that she “personally wish[ed that] they had not attached her name” to something that was *their* work and not her own (Carson, Letter; Carson, Memo, March 1972). The implication is clear: the Women's Group and the administration are mutually exclusive entities.

This assertion, that “no one in authority at the College provided [...] assistance” to the Women's Group and the survey, is present in each and every letter and memorandum with only one exception (Kaylor). Importantly, that exception does not actually contradict the administration's overall negative consensus on the Women's Group. In the letter which does not declare the administration's separation from the Women's Group, a trustee named Schafmeister

angrily accuses Dean Carson of supporting the Women's Group and masterminding the survey. In his own words, he says that alumni and student parents are as disturbed as he is by the possibility that Dean Carson "encourage[d] – in fact, stimulate[d] and urge[d the] development" of the survey (Schafmeister). That this possibility is framed negatively makes it clear that Schafmeister views the Women's Group and their survey with similar negativity. Indeed, he makes this negative attitude explicit when he describes them as requiring "appropriate counseling," and as members of an "organization formed for the purpose of bringing down all Dickinson women to [their] pitiful level" (Schafmeister). Calling the group "pitiful" expresses not only dislike but also disdain. This strong disregard is reiterated by the other administrators including the college president, who cut off communication with Schafmeister after the latter insinuated an administration-Women's Group connection (Rubendall to Schafmeister). The timing of the president's action suggests not that the president disagreed with Schafmeister's negative evaluation of the Women's Group, but rather that the president in fact agreed with that evaluation and consequently took offense at the suggestion that the administration supported the Women's Group. This interpretation is backed up by the president's later statement that he and other administrators were "shocked by its [the survey's] offensiveness" (Rubendall to Witwer). Another administrator provides evidence of negativity directed at the Women's Group and (in his own words) their "cheap, tawdry, ill-mannered, [...] vulgarity" (Witwer). Thus, the administration's intense dislike of the feminist presence on campus is one of the most salient lessons of the documents.

Related to the emphatic assertions of detachment and aversion in regards to the Women's Group is the recurring marginalization of the group throughout the correspondence. The administration consistently describes members of the group as different from other Dickinson

women and students. Dean Carson describes them repeatedly as not “traditional,” not the “type” of women who are on “sorority rosters or the Resident Adviser list” (Carson, Memo, March 1972; Carson, Memo, May 1972). Other administrators express the same sentiment by describing the Women’s Group a “small” or “newly formed” group, apart from the “main” or “mainstream” (Carson, Letter; Carson, Memo, March 1972; Kaylor; Rubendall to Depuy; Rubendall to Witwer). President Rubendall recognized the Women’s Group’s connection to the Women’s Liberation Movement twice and, in another example of marginalization, both times he downplayed the influence of the Women’s Group and the movement; he describes them as youthful whims which had “little impact” on the college (Rubendall to Depuy; Rubdenall to Witwer). Furthermore, the administrators made the intentional decision to not officially comment on the survey so as to not remind people about it if they had forgotten it (Kaylor; Rubendall to Witwer). By doing this, they show their desire to cut off any conversation about feminism; this effectively silences the representatives of feminism on campus. This marginalization is the manifestation of the distance and animosity with which the college administration considered its feminist students.

The existence of negative attitudes towards feminism on college campuses was evident not only at Dickinson College but also at colleges and universities all across the country. In 1970, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) sent out a survey to undergraduate institutions. The survey was very similar to that which the Dickinson Women’s Group would produce two years later; both surveys inquired about the social climate for women on college campuses. The findings from the AAUW survey showed that colleges and universities practiced a greater amount of discriminatory practices than they purported themselves to practice (Oltman 24). In other words, they reported themselves as more feminist-friendly than they were

in reality (Oltman 24). Interestingly, the colleges surveyed were members of the American Association of University Women, and so they were likely more positive towards women than other colleges (Oltman 1). Certainly, as stated above, they considered themselves to be sensitive to women's needs. For example, 90% of the colleges reported gender-blind policies for promotion (Oltman 24). When their policies were actually examined however, it was found that the same 90% of colleges had fewer women than men in the powerful administrative, faculty, and student offices (Oltman 24). It is important to recognize the responsible actors hidden behind the term "colleges" in the previous sentence. At each of the colleges that employed fewer women than men in powerful roles, there were decision makers who participated in various sexist promotion processes. Administrators, trustees, and alumna chose to promote men. Whether intentional or unintentional, that choice characterized their administrations as resistant to an empowered female presence on campus.

Their resistance to feminism did not exist in isolation; rather, it was a reflection of anti-feminist practices and sentiments pervasive in the rest of American society. In politics, the gains for women were juxtaposed to their losses. When protestors rallied for it, the federal government passed the Equal Pay Act (Dicker 68). Before passing it, however, politicians modified it to require equal pay for men and women only if the men and women did equal work (Dicker 68). In the 1970's, women were primarily kept in spheres of employment that were separate from men; they did not do exactly the same work and so they were not guaranteed equal pay (Dicker 68). Thus, the government, like the colleges and universities, began a pattern of acting in a "big talk, small game" way that suggested full support for feminism but that actually only delivered partial or conditional support. Indeed, the federal government's approach to

supporting feminism set a precedence and example for the governance of sub-societies, like colleges and universities.

Another societal example of anti-feminism, and a particularly influential one, is the media. Imogen Tyler reveals that the media in the 1970's predominantly defined feminism as "selfishness" and a function of "a new destructive narcissism within American society" (173). Narcissism, a disordered psychological state, is a weighty label that shows society's depth of contempt for feminists at the time. This widespread negative representation of feminists and feminism validated the anti-feminist convictions of administrators like Schafmeister who, like the media, questioned the Women's Group in regards to "the state of their mental health" (Schafmeister). It is clear, therefore, the anti-feminism of college administrations in the 1970's was a function not only of the administrations themselves but also of the time and place in which they existed. Without support for it from society, anti-feminism would not have been able to persist so successfully on college campuses in the 1970's.

Given that the nature of the college administration-feminist relationship was so anti-feminist, the question arises of how to explain the administrative actions that benefited women. If administrators did not believe in the cause, why did they act as though they did? A clue to the answer of that question is contained in that set of correspondence from Dickinson in 1972. In a memorandum to the Dickinson president, Paul Kaylor mentions that the Dean Carson began to interact more with the Women's Group so as to "channel" their efforts. This example clearly shows how negative attitudes to feminism may be connected to positive actions. A positive action – greater collaboration between the administration and the student feminist group – is undertaken to "channel," or in other words, *control* the group (Kaylor). The desire to control the group speaks to the administration's negative belief that the group was out of control and

intolerable without the administration's supervision. This example illustrates that college administrations, for the purpose of keeping women disempowered, would adopt the very practices meant to empower women. In other words, college administrations participated in feminist activity so as to, through their participation, mold the feminist activity to their liking. In academic terms, college administrations of the 1970's co-opted feminism. In colloquial terms, they hijacked it. Ultimately, they would have feminism on their own terms.

In spite of the limitations imposed on feminism by this co-option, looking to the difference in women's rights between now and then illustrates the fact that there was significant progress. This goes to show that activism should not be abandoned when threatened by an institution or society that is unprepared or unwilling to whole-heartedly embrace the cause. Activism's effectiveness may be diminished by co-option but it is not extinguished. Small steps forward are better than giving up and staying in the same place. Fifty years ago, this paper would not have been able to be written. Here it is today, a testament to the change produced in the face of adversity.

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