Interview with Paula Franzese

Barnard class of 1980

Conducted by Elizabeth Moye

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E. Moye:

So, the first thing I want to ask you is just for you to tell me a little bit about your decision to come to Barnard, as well as your experience here when you attended, if you could just ground me a little bit in the context of your experience here.

P. Franzese:

I applied for admission in 1976—the year I graduated from high school. And I was bound in one respect by geography. I come from a very traditional Italian-American family; my parents are immigrants, and when it came time for me to select a college my dad drew a circle with a 9-mile radius around our home in Brooklyn and said: “you can go to the best school within the 9 miles,” and [laughs] he meant it. And I took that to heart. I wanted to be relatively close to home, and I’m very thankful that Barnard was within that radius. And it was, no question, from the time I was in high school that Barnard would be, if I were fortunate enough to be admitted, the perfect place. And what attracted me so much to the College was its unique context—its unique relationship with a larger magnificent university—but also the mightiness and history of its very rich tradition, steeped in educating and empowering women. I was raised by parents who, although I don’t even think they had a name for it, were ardent feminists, and they believed deeply in equality—in the promise for all. I’m the oldest of three daughters, and my parents were deeply moved by what they knew of Barnard’s mission in educating and touching the future, by bringing vibrant, dazzling women to the fore. And I believe that they intuited what I came to know very intimately, and that is that, at Barnard, girls really do become women and find their voices, and find an affirming, nurturing, yet rigorous context in which to self-actualize. And that for me was one of the most poignant and gratifying aspects of my time on campus. And I must tell you, as a public-interest lawyer and academic, in all of the decades since, the attempts to diminish, or denigrate, or demean a woman’s worth persist, and we must be ever-vigilant, perhaps even hyper-vigilant, in protecting against those. Whether we call them either macro-based inequities or the more common micro-aggressions, a woman’s worth is [sighs] astonishingly still subject to question in so many domains across the planet—and closer to home. Barnard provides a wellspring and a very sustaining platform for all of its students and alumnae to stand, and stand firmly and resoundingly for a set of first principles, and I came to know what my first principles are in and out of the Barnard classroom.

E. Moye:

Sure. And you said you were President of SGA?

P. Franzese:

I was.

E. Moye:

So, did you feel like you were actively involved in Barnard?

P. Franzese:

Oh, yes.

E. Moye:

Did you feel like when you got here you allowed Barnard to shape you?

P. Franzese:

Yes, without a doubt. I arrived at Barnard—I was younger, only 16—part of the reason for my dad’s concern that I not go too far—and I was very involved in student government, and I was made to feel from my first tour of the campus, my first interview with admissions, to orientation, to all of the formative early events on campus, that my voice mattered, and what I had to say counted, and that I had a unique contribution to make, and that the College would rise up to [brief pause] inspire me to want to be heard. And I felt that inspiration—I did; it was an abiding common thread during all four of my years. I was very involved in the fabric of the community.

E. Moye:

Can I ask you, did you live on campus or did you commute from home?

P. Franzese:

For the first two years I commuted, and that was by choice. For the second two years I sought housing, and it’s interesting because the most contentious, quasi-political issue, of my time at Barnard (1976-1980) was the housing crisis. Barnard, at the time, did not have enough housing to accommodate every student who wished to live on campus and, unintentionally, had created a two-tier system. There were commuters and there were on campus residents, and many commuters felt marginalized, or disenfranchised, or less than those who lived on campus, and so much of it came to a boiling point when I was a junior moving into my senior year. And the College ultimately worked out some very fair and equitable accommodations to allow those who had been on waiting lists for housing to move forward and make a place, find space, for everyone who needed housing. But it was a stormy path to that end.

E. Moye:

That’s so interesting. Now, we have another student in our class who is researching how students who commuted got to school…

P. Franzese:

Yes.

E. Moye:

So, I would like to ask for her how you got to school?

P. Franzese:

I took the N train—which is called the BMT on the Manhattan subway line—and then the number 1 and 2 trains—the IRT. And, Lizzie, it’s incredible because now I’m a parent of a college-age child, and a soon-to-be Barnard freshman, and I am on the trains still; I grew up on the trains, but I’m astonished—now, as a parent, I would worry so much if my kids were on the trains at the times that I was, because, I remember, I would be, as a freshman and sophomore, a very young woman, studying until the library closed, which was about midnight, and then I would jump on the IRT, go down to Times Square, 42nd street, and then catch the BMT, and there are some unseemly presences at that time of the night—still today. And yet, thankfully, that was never an issue—at all—which may be a testament to the larger city; it may just be, [laughs] the angels in our midst, but I’m thankful that I was able to commute for two years without incident. The other good thing is that there was a corp d’esprit amongst commuters. I had many, many friends at Barnard who were commuters, and we would often commute together. So I would sometimes, even when the library closed, find someone to travel with, and that was a very good thing.

E. Moye:

Okay. So, I’d like to move a little bit into our discussion of the Barnard and Columbia relationship.

P. Franzese:

Yes.

E. Moye:

So, I’d love to ask you if you could tell me a little bit about your own understanding, as well as your peers’ understanding, of Barnard’s relationship to Columbia while you were in school.

P. Franzese:

Yes. I was at Barnard before Columbia became co-ed. Therefore, the necessary coexistence between Columbia College and Barnard College was perhaps more evident, and more self-evident. Barnard was the women’s College of Columbia University. If you were a woman seeking to go to Columbia as an undergraduate, there was no other option, and, it’s interesting, because I wonder—and I do not know—if that contributed to a more harmonious space between the two institutions. I only know anecdotally that there’s sometimes some report of discord between Barnard College and Columbia College now where the women at one campus versus another, and my sense, as a visitor in the Barnard poli-sci department, is that that is more of an isolated set of occurrences than a common experience for people here today. But, at the time, we had a very peaceful coexistence. I will say that, while there was lots of cross-registration, in the ways that there are still today, and every opportunity to take advantage of all that the larger University community offered, I and my classmates, colleagues, and friends quickly perceived that the best classes overall were on the Barnard campus—that the quality of instruction, that the level of professor attention, that the meticulous attention to student actualization was much more evident for undergraduates at Barnard than it was across the street. So the vast preponderance of my classes were taken, by my choice, at Barnard and I am better because of it. I did take a few classes at Columbia and, I don’t want to generalize, but I was surprised, in each of those instances, to see that a significant part of the course was taught by a teaching assistant, most of the grading was done by a teaching assistant, and I was simply one of a sea of faces in a lecture hall. The Barnard experience was more intimate. We never had a teaching assistant, except for labs in our science and math offerings, and in the language lab, but the Barnard class—and I think about it now and it is such a source of pride and sometimes astonishment—we had some of the most revered intellectual powerhouses on the planet on the Barnard faculty, and that is still the case, too. And, by the way, I would put Professor McCaughey in that category. Extraordinary, iconic figures—they were teaching us on a regular basis, and not only teaching us, but had an open-door policy, so at any moment we could pop in to any of those esteemed professors’ offices, office-hours or not, and never be made to feel that we were intruding, always be made to feel welcome, always be made to know that our question, or concern, or paper topic, or draft, mattered. I go back to some of my Barnard papers—one of my most beloved mentors was Peter Juviler, who only recently passed—and I look at the comments on the papers and drafts—it’s extraordinary—pages of comments. And it is that commitment to excellence, that commitment to integrity of work product, but also process, that the means mattered as much as the ends, that I came to know about through the lens of my teachers. It mattered so much to them, and because of that I came to know how much it ought to, and did, matter to me.

E. Moye:

Okay, well that’s actually a really great segue into my questions on the merger itself. I’m very interested as to when you started hearing about the possibility of merger, as well as what you felt the general sentiment on this campus was regarding the merger. So, when you talk about the faculty and their extreme attention to Barnard students, whereas Columbia is much more of a graduate-school focused institution—I would argue even still—you know, I’m really interested to know how you felt that Barnard responded to being kind of sucked into that larger institution?

P. Franzese:

Yeah. When I was on campus—and I was very much a student leader, very actively involved, as I mentioned—the most distracting matter of concern for Barnard students at the time was housing. Could we live on campus? Why couldn’t we live on campus? It was only towards the middle of my senior year, from ’79 to ’80, that this possibility, almost as a thought experiment, that Barnard and Columbia could merge began to be raised. And I remember… and now I speak for, certainly, so many in my class, the class of 1980, but also I believe I had a good sense of the pulse of the student body, the sense was, in response to the question, should Barnard and Columbia merge: “absolutely not, absolutely not.” What we have at Barnard is special; it’s extraordinary—this is a college committed to teaching women. That is its primary mission—it is a women’s college within a larger university. And I can recall, yes… did we then become more deliberative as the possibility of Columbia going co-ed independent of a merger was raised, were we more deliberative about what that might mean for the College? Absolutely, yes. We did; we thought about that as student body as well, and still concluded that, yes, Columbia could admit women if it wished, but Barnard would remain the same-sex women’s college that it is today. We would remain. And the real challenge for then President Futter, who was a Barnard alumna who then became President and had to negotiate during those transitional years—the blessing for Barnard is that President Futter was a brilliant lawyer, first and foremost, and a very superb, deft negotiator, and she was able, I think, in the years after I graduated—I was in law school then, but I kept abreast of what was happening here on campus—I was a graduate assistant in 616 during my years at law school. Her genius resided in her capacity, on behalf of the College, to negotiate an agreement wherein Barnard would remain, with all of its strengths and uniqueness intact, as a women’s college, still enjoying all of the benefits of its placement within a larger university community as Columbia decided that it would open its doors to women. And the calculation was that Barnard would not only survive the admission of women, but would thrive as it had thrived, and that has come to be. That was the right estimation of how things would go.

E. Moye:

Did you ever pick up any fear or any feeling that Barnard would become extinct when Columbia decided to admit women?

P. Franzese:

Interestingly, no. And that is such a great question, Lizzie, because I wonder why [laughs] we did not worry about that. It’s interesting because—I’m wondering now, because it hasn’t even occurred to me all of these 30-plus years since I graduated—I’m wondering whether part of it was [laughs] the sense that we are strong. It’s interesting because Barnard inculcates a sense in all of its stakeholders, all of its constituent members, a sense that each of us is powerful and strong. There is a certain invincibility as well, as Barnard women. We are trained to be prepared to take on the world. And I am wondering now if that sense of invincibility couldn’t help but inform our thinking about where we would be in the event of Columbia’s admitting women, because I don’t remember it being articulated at all: “Oh no, can Barnard survive? Will it continue to thrive if Columbia admits women?” The presumption was of course we’ll thrive, of course we’ll continue as we are, and the admission of women to Columbia College will give those women admitted a very good experience, but a different experience than the Barnard experience, and I think that forecast did come to be. I think that is the case. I don’t think that our thinking on the Barnard campus was fear-based or fear-motivated at the time. I don’t remember any panic. I remember thinking, now as a law student, as Columbia was going co-ed: “Oh that’s interesting.” And I do remember wondering how will that be for the Columbia women with the Barnard women. I wonder what that relationship will be like, but I simply presumed that it would be a very good experience for the women on both sides of Broadway, but different experiences, and that those who applied would need to sort out what they were seeking and whether or not the benefits of a women’s college were such that coming to Barnard would be the first choice. My daughter Nina, who will be coming in the fall, had the choice and the election to make: would it be a Columbia College experience or would it be a Barnard College experience. And, I will tell you, certainly the decks were stacked, because she’s been a future Barnard student since before birth. I was teaching here when I became pregnant for Nina and, just before I left to give birth, my class on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties presented me with this entire Barnard outfit—so beautiful—it was a little baby t-shirt, and a Barnard blanket, and Barnard little cap, and Nina came home from the hospital two days old wearing her Barnard outfit. And, Lizzie, it’s the cutest, because I have that—I framed that picture next to the letter of acceptance that she received from the College, and it’s just such a poignant extraordinary time. However, as a parent, I did not want to be too heavy-handed, and I gave Nina lots of latitude, and she looked around from coast to coast—and she looked at the Columbia College experience. And I said, “Nina you spend a day there.” And she did—enjoyed it very much—and then Nina spent a day here, and she did, and she sat in on classes and then she came to it—and she wrote about this in her Barnard application. She said, “Mom, there is a qualitative difference in the experience that I’m perceiving.” She said, “Perhaps it’s because I’m a young woman, perhaps it’s just more a visceral experience, independent of gender, but,” she said, “I have to tell you that the caliber of what was happening in the classroom, the nature of student participation in the classroom, and the spirit on both campuses was so different.” And she said, “I loved what I saw at Barnard. I felt that this was my home. It was calling me.” And that’s it. That’s what you hope to hear as a parent who wants the best for her child. It is ultimately a very quiet thing, this question of where do you belong, which campus, in a world of possibilities, and it is ultimately a visceral response. “Do I feel at home?” And Barnard’s tradition is so steeped in making a home for brilliant women, particularly at a time when there were few places that would educate girls and women, and we know still today that so many pockets of the world deem the education of girls and women a very dangerous thing. And here we are, steeped in a tradition that dares to speak truth to power, and dares to recognize and appreciate a woman’s worth, and dared to do so at a time when, historically, few other institutions would. There’s so much to be said about that tradition of excellence on which we stand still today.

E. Moye:

Well, you are leading me into all my next questions.

P. Franzese:

Oh, good!

E. Moye:

But, first I would like to say that your daughter sounds like a very intelligent, incredible young woman.

P. Franzese:

Lizzie, thank you so much! I, this is again biased, I’m so proud of her. And she really is discerning. Except she didn’t like the t-shirt and pajama pants that say “Barnard,” I picked, but otherwise, [laughs] I picked them for her, but otherwise she really is a discerning person. Thank you for that!

E. Moye:

Yeah! So, I would love to ask you what your understanding of women’s rights was at this time? This is something that I’m very interested in for this project. Because, you know, I’m wondering if the perspective of the women’s movement at this time had anything to do with what seems like a negative attitude toward merging with Columbia.

P. Franzese:

Yes.

E. Moye:

So, if our feminist stance, that I think still holds today, you know, affected the sentiment on campus.

Anser:

Oh, yes. I’m sure it did—very much so. Because if you think about it, 1976, the women’s movement was finally being felt in institutions of higher learning, and our class was entering just on the cusp, having reaped the benefits of the generation before us, their sacrifices. So here I am, with my classmates, entering Barnard, having read *The Feminine Mystique*, having read so much of Gloria Steinem, having been subscribers to what was then *Ms. Magazine*, and we were all either self-described feminists, or came to Barnard and soon came to associate with all that feminism meant. And, essentially, at bottom, it meant what it still means today, and that is parity, it means equality. It’s interesting because I hear some students, less so here, but in law school, in the Law Academy, who shy away from the label “feminist” in favor of “humanist.” And I think it misses the point. Certainly, you’re both, yes, but to be a feminist is so important for men and women to declare, because to repudiate feminism is not only to misunderstand it, but to also assume that the work is done. It’s not done. And it’s alarming to me as I hear younger women, my students, often say: “Well of course I’ll have a career, but then I want to take a break. I’m gonna have kids. I want to raise my kids, and then I’ll re-enter.” Well, we know, from the work of people like Anne-Marie Slaughter and Ann Crittenden and so many others, reentry is so daunting a task. It is so difficult once one has opted out. We know as well that there are institutionalized policies in the U.S. that find us lagging behind at least 200 other comparable nations that offer opportunities to integrate parenting and work, family and work, meaningful life with work. We don’t have any of the protections taken for granted in so many of our counterparts across the planet. We have [sighs] not just glass ceilings that persist, but we’ve got, today, the micro-aggressions—I’m doing a program for women in the courts with the American Bar Association on micro-inequities and barriers to equality, and those would include, for example, the woman who’s on a board, sitting, with all of the other board members, all of whom happen to be male, because the number of women represented on Boards of Directors within the Fortune 500 is abysmal compared to the levels of male representation. But the one woman in the room, who is made to feel marginalized, or not heard, or who makes a point and is ignored, as if the point was never made, only to hear 10 minutes later, a male colleague make the same point and be told: “that’s excellent, that’s what we need.” There are lots of ways to marginalize or not see girls and women. [Sighs] The beauty industry creates an [brief pause] unattainable aesthetic as the aspiration statement, and the studies make plain that the greater the degree of a girl’s and woman’s internalization of an external beauty referent, the lesser the degree of her political efficacy and participation. What does that mean? When we have, irrespective of one’s feelings about the merits of each candidate, a race that includes Sarah Palin and Hilary Clinton, and to see mainstream media headlines proclaim, “It’s the Bitch versus the Ditz,” tells us that we have not come as far as we think. There is a soft war that I perceive that imposes barriers, more difficult sometimes to tease out, but barriers nonetheless. So, yes, feminism informed our determinations and perceptions then, as it does today, and now we’ve got new waves. Third-wave feminism. We’ve got post-modern feminism. We’ve got various iterations, but all built around the same theme. The struggle for equality is not over.

E. Moye:

That is certainly true. And I hope that Barnard is still fighting against that. I would like to ask you what you thought about other students, faculty—namely faculty and administration—worries that Barnard would lose its emphasis on undergraduate education, and its students, if we proceeded with the merger. So, while I, you know, understand that most Barnard students were thinking that we wouldn’t merge, did you sense a renewal of appreciation for the emphasis on undergraduate education during this time?

P. Franzese:

Yes. Very much so. The perception—and I don’t know if this yields to any hard empirical data; I believe that this would be very difficult to quantify—the perception is that the Columbia campus is very committed to its graduate institutions and very committed to its graduate students—training the next generation of professionals, whether in business, law, medicine, the arts, journalism, the sciences—and that undergraduate education suffered, and, to enrich further still graduate students’ experiences, they would often assume the role of teacher—hence, teaching assistants in the undergraduate classes, and that the undergraduate experience was more of a throwaway. It was of lesser moment in the crown that is Columbia. I don’t know—I think that that is an overstatement, and I think that that perception is most likely unfair because, certainly, I’ve taught many Barnard students and many Columbia College students who have had rich and varied very strong undergraduate experiences on both campuses. But, whether accurate or not, that was certainly the perception then—that Columbia was invested in its graduate teaching and not so much in the undergraduate tradition. The idea of Columbia admitting women, as opposed to Barnard merging into Columbia, presented an opportunity for us at Barnard to remind ourselves of what we stood for and who we were. The real challenge was for us to rise up and answer the question: “Who do we think we are? Who do we think we are?” And it’s so interesting because I tell my students every woman of substance has to be ready to answer that question for herself: “Who do you think you are?” Because, invariably, a woman who dares to speak truth to power and is in her own power will be asked if it’s not said to her face, it will be said behind her back, “who does she think she is?” It’s important to have your own answer to the question and not let the world answer for you. To know what you stand for, to know what your first principles are. And it became very clear, as the institution and its stakeholders were in the conversation, that we needed to remind ourselves of who we thought we were and what it is we stood for. Who did we think we are? We thought that we were an institution, fiercely committed to being at the forefront of educating women. What were our first principles? What did we stand for? A quality educational experience for every single matriculate, every single student, where every student mattered, every voice mattered. Where students felt heard, respected, seen, nurtured; where students were encouraged to grow. And there’s a wisdom in the Talmud that is so beautiful and someone gave it to me on a bracelet, the words are inscribed: “Behind every blade of grass is a gentle voice whispering ‘grow, grow.’” Barnard is that voice: “Grow, grow.” And each of us is the blade of grass. And, rather than have to deal with the forces that would stomp on those precious first bursts of growth, we were encouraged, we were nurtured, we were watered, and able to bask in a larger light that came from the tradition that we were now a part of. The concern was, absolutely, that that mission and focus would inescapably be compromised if we became subsumed by a greater whole, a larger whole. That who we were would no longer be if we became part of a larger monolithic institution. And Columbia was perceived as this goliath, this very big bastion of learning, whereas Barnard was a more nuanced piece of a larger whole, and it was important to preserve the piece.

E. Moye:

And did you feel the sentiment from, you know, other students or did you also feel this from the institution at large? So, from the faculty, from the administration, from the students—where did you feel this coming from the strongest?

P. Franzese:

Such a great question, because it wasn’t a matter of indoctrination, and I don’t recall any teacher in any class ever speaking to these issues. I do—since I was a student leader—and this is another testament to Barnard—the administration had an open-door policy. So, we would be in conversations with then President Jacqueline Mattfeld, we were in communications with Dorothy Denburg, an administrator who was spectacular, with Barbara Schmitter, another superb, accessible administrator. We were in dialogue and there, I think, that we came to learn more of the College’s position. And it was raised more as a hypothetical than ever as a real possibility. So it was never: “Dean, President: Will Barnard merge?” It was more: “We’re not gonna merge?” And then the discussion would proceed—again, because I don’t remember it ever being a real issue for us. Now, it’ll be interesting for you to talk with students and faculty here in 1981, 1982, 1983, just as the merger talks were being finessed and then finalized. I remember, as I said, when the announcement came, I was happy for Columbia; I thought it was good for Columbia, and I really did not think it was good or bad for Barnard. It was just opening up Columbia and allowing women to have a different kind of experience on the Columbia campus.

E. Moye:

Sure. And, you know, a lot of the research I have done has pointed to the fact that there’s this idea that Columbia seemed like this overwhelming force ready to kind of take Barnard by storm. But it doesn’t seem from your perspective that that feeling was around.

P. Franzese:

No, no. I certainly never perceived that Columbia would strong-arm a result to the detriment of Barnard, or be coercive in trying to force Barnard into a merger. No, I never felt that. Columbia was always a friendly neighbor, but the kind of neighbor, at least for me and so many of my classmates, that you didn’t see that often. It was just a friendly neighbor. It was a very fine presence. I remember I’d go to Butler sometimes when I had research to do, and the Barnard library might not have all of the materials available, but I didn’t like it there. Again, it was a feeling. I didn’t feel at home there. It was daunting to me. Maybe it was too big. Maybe there were too many people whose faces I didn’t recognize. At Barnard I came to recognize just about everyone. It was more intimate. It was more familiar. It was home. I would walk across the Columbia campus; I remember, when the weather was nice, we’d sometimes sit on the steps of Low Library, but, even that, it was like visiting a neighbor’s house. It never felt like I was home. I’d sit on the Barnard lawn—that was home. I’d sit in front of what was then Macintosh, now the Diana Center—that was home. I’d sit in Lehman Library—that was home. I remember the exact carrel that I called mine. There was a sense of: “This is attainable. I can make this home.” It’s the difference between living in a really fine house, or living in this huge, palatial labyrinth of a space that you never really get to feel a part of. It’s very interesting—a very interesting perception. But that was always mine. So, yeah, we had neighborly relations, but was the perception that Columbia would be a thug or brutish? No. I never perceived that. I never heard that sentiment.

E. Moye:

So, you know I think a lot of what you’re saying is something that I still feel today, which is that I appreciate the resources that Columbia has to offer, but they don’t seem incredibly necessary for me. And, you know, I’m wondering if you could speak to that a little bit because I feel that that probably had something to do with why Barnard didn’t see a merger as necessary.

P. Franzese:

Right. Right. We are free standing. We’re independent. It’s akin to—I’m raising a son and a daughter—and I always tell both, but especially my daughter: “Carve out your own career, have your own income. Be independent financially. Cultivate independence of mind. Cultivate independence of spirit. Freedom is essential. Have autonomy—because that is a predicate to self-actualization.” And, that was the Barnard ethos. We were independent. We were financially independent. We had our own library. We had our own recreational facilities. We had our own dormitories. We had our own academic buildings. We had our own faculty—a very esteemed faculty. And when Columbia admitted women there was not a migration of Barnard faculty endeavoring to either move across the street or move away from this campus. Our faculty remained deeply committed to the education, principally, of women. So, yes, we were independent. And that was extremely helpful to the calculus, because we could therefore avoid fear-based thinking. We weren’t motivated by the fear of: “Oh no, where will we go for a library? Oh no, where will we go for a gym?” We had what we needed. We were independent. And what a great model for girls and women. My daughter loves Beyonce, and, it’s interesting, that Beyonce is a brand of feminism—and that streak of independence that she would speak to—and I know all the soundtracks because they play, still, throughout my house [laughs] because Nina is still at home—[sings] “all the women independent”—that’s the whole idea. That’s the ethos. We were independent. So, did we need Columbia? No. Were we happy to be a part of the University? Absolutely. Columbia University tradition is glorious, and their light shines on us just as our light shines on them. So, we have a very interesting symbiosis. It is not a co-dependence, it is an interdependence. It is a relationship. And what a wonderful model for how relationships, personally and professionally, ought to be: two pillars, able to stand apart from each other and honor the space between them. And that’s what we’ve done—metaphorically and quite literally. Broadway is the divider space, but we can live in the gap. Neither pillar depends on the other to stand, but is better because the other is nearby.

E. Moye:

Sure. You know, I’m very curious about what wave of feminism you believe this period at Barnard to have represented?

P. Franzese:

Yeah. This was the aftermath of, certainly, what we saw playing out in the early 1970s—late 1960s, early 1970s—’72, ’73, ’74. I do not like the moniker the “bra-burning feminist” because that was such a blip, that was such a small footnote in the trajectory of the women’s movement that that actually did occur, and it’s unfortunate because it’s used to parody and caricaturize so much of the integrity of the women’s movement, but we were coming on the heels of what, certainly, Gloria Steinem was most emblematic of. And it was a progressive form of feminism. It was anchored in some anger. Absolutely. “Fight the machine. Fight the man. Fight the attempt at subjugation. There are oppressive forces, and we must be ever vigilant to defend against those.” It was anchored in an appreciation of the disparities in perception that would marginalize or seek to marginalize women and exalt men. Gloria Steinem wrote an essay called “If Men Could Menstruate,” and that was so interesting and informative in terms of shaping, I think, a lot of our thinking when I was on campus. The double standard that persists—if men were able to bear children and have children, how different would prevision and accommodation, for not just birthing, but parental leave and childcare? How different would it be? So we were a part—and this is when *Ms. Magazine* was still viable—we were a part of that “having it all” ethos—that you could have it all. That has been tempered considerably with the passage of time. It is now, perhaps, you can have it all, but not at the same time. Or, you can perhaps have it all, but do you really want to? The self-actualization is more relevant, it seems today, than the collective good. We felt, at the time, at Barnard, that we were representing a movement—we were the daughters of a movement—and that we needed to be standard bearers and carry the banner for countless others who didn’t have access yet to higher education, countless others who were marginalized and at the fringes. We had a sense of privilege—in the highest and best use of the term—we were privileged to have this opportunity—we were elite, but not elitist—and with that privilege came great responsibility. And we all perceived that we would be dispatched to change the world. And what’s interesting to me is that, at our reunions, often classmates will say, “that was a blessing, but also a curse.” Classmates will say, for example, “I’m just a pediatrician, so I haven’t really changed the world. I haven’t rewritten all of the emergency medical care laws, and I haven’t become the surgeon general of the United States. Because we were told, explicitly and implicitly: “the world is yours, take power.” And we came to embrace a very big view of what that meant, so that a lot of my friends internalized a sense that they fell short of the mark because they weren’t Secretary of State or they hadn’t devised the cure for cancer. We were told to think big, and I think what may have been missing from the message was that the best change is often incremental and that we must never confuse small with insignificant—that every act of excellence, every act of kindness matters, and that nuance is essential—that you don’t have to be sweeping or grand with a gesture. And I think that it is important to always temper the message “go out and change the world” with that—that that exhortation means many different things, and it ought to. There should be choice. There should be choice. But Barnard also helped us, and still today continues in the tradition of helping its students, question how free the various choices are—because so many choices become coercive because of institutional impediments to equality. There are so many difficulties with couples inspiring mutually respectful unions, living out their value system—because so many would include in their value system equal distribution of labor at home, equal responsibility for parenting, and yet, we’ve devised so many institutionalized impediments, even to the idea of co-parenting, that it becomes hard for people to realize, in practice, what theoretically their values actually are. And when there’s a dissonance between values and reality, people start to offer all sorts of justifications, deducing backwards, and those become contrived. And people will sometimes speak to, “well we made this choice,” perhaps not realizing that actually the choice was made for you by a set of institutional forces put into law, mostly by privileged white males, that actually subverts some of your core first principles. So we were made very aware of that. That’s the brand of feminism that I think we grew up on—we were fed by. I think it resonates, still today. We live in a time where here in the United States— and we won’t even get to the dismal conditions that girls and women face across the planet—but in the U.S., the attempts at either sexualizing, objectifying, demeaning, denigrating, infantilizing girls and women loom large. We have an entire set of industries—that includes the pornography industry; that includes video games, and gamers, and gaming; that includes Madison Avenue advertisers; that includes mainstream media; beauty magazines; the cosmetics industry; the diet industry—that endeavors to transmit the message that “You girls, you women are less than, until you buy our product, or until you look like this photo-shopped model, or until you are perceived as an object of desire.” The invisibility that so many women report when they reach a [air quotes] “certain age” is real. The way that [sighs] women come up against all sorts of very insidious biases born of some very dark undercurrents. I was reading the article on the Yik-Yak app. It was on the cover of yesterday’s *New York Times*. And how the anonymity of social media, the facelessness of the Internet, has occasioned the most vile, venomous, assaultive forms of speech—most often against women and against girls. That article recounts how students, under the cloak of anonymity—which the Yik-Yak app provides—were conducting the most despicable chat, during class, about the three professors who were teaching the class, all of whom were female. The idea that Curt Schilling, the baseball pitcher, tells of, on Twitter, of his daughter being admitted to college on a softball scholarship, and then receives all sorts of tweets sexually threatening his daughter, promising to rape her, to teach her a good lesson and make a woman out of her once she gets onto campus, objectifying her, and making a proud dad’s comments about his scholar, athlete daughter all about her sexual desirability, or not. That is cause for alarm. And, whether you think that this trolling thugery of social media is more the exception than the rule, it’s loud. It may not be the majority, but it certainly is loud. And we need to be in the business of educating women, and also men—and increasingly I find a lot of men in my class, two classes, that I teach here—and heightening awareness, stirring the pot of consciousness, so that it includes a knowledge of history of women in this country and an abiding appreciation and respect for the capacity to be part of change—because we still need a lot of change.

E. Moye:

Sure. You know, in the final moments of the interview, which has been so great.

P. Franzese:
Good. It’s gone so fast, Lizzie!

E. Moye:

I know! Amazing, right?

P. Franzese:

I’m so happy!

E. Moye:

I would just like to end with two questions. And I’ll let you know what they are so you can kind of see how they relate to each other. But one is, you know, I would love for you to just tell me what your perspective was. Really from your own, you know… a lot of the questions I have been asking you have been about how you felt the sentiment was on campus, but I would love to first know, you know, what your perspective of merging was from the minute you heard about it, or how you really felt from your own mind. And also, you know, you’re a faculty member here, you’re very involved with Barnard, especially with your daughter coming here in the fall, just if your perception has changed, or how you feel that, you know, not merging—the environment that has continued to foster, or, you know, changed here?

P. Franzese:

Yes. Personally, I was dismissive of the merger idea, and in three words my response was: “of course not.” We will not merge. And now as a professor of property law, as well, I’m mindful that when we speak of mergers, historically… for example, in property we have a form of land ownership called a “tenancy by the entirety” and it can only exist between married couples, historically husband and wife. The premise was that the two shall become one, but the “one,” it was understood, was the husband. So the two shall become one, meaning the woman will be subsumed into the male experience. And that informed some of my thinking about the possibility of a merger—that all that was extraordinary about Barnard as a free-standing women’s college would be compromised as the two became one—the one being Columbia College with all of the pluses and negatives that a Columbia College experience would occasion. Personally, I did not want that. By the time it even became an idea, to be thought about, I was so steeped in the elegance, and integrity, and virtues of the Barnard tradition of excellence, that the notion of losing that was unthinkable. It was a nonstarter—for me. Thereafter, how do I feel Barnard is standing today…

E. Moye:

Yeah. And if you feel that, you know, not merging has been the best thing that could happen to Barnard, or if your views have changed on it?

P. Franzese:

Right. My view has not changed. It is a testament to the power of the Barnard tradition, and the market demand for quality women’s colleges—and I will amend that to say for a women’s college like Barnard, because we’re uniquely situated for so many reasons, including geography, here we are in the midst of the most dynamic island on the planet: New York City—the need, the market demand, for us has persisted, indeed it has only grown; it has not shrunk. Our relevance has only grown. It is a blessing and curse that the quest for equality persists. That it’s by no means over, and that we are still pushing a ball up the mountain, and as long as there is that mountain to climb, unless and until we can all get to an equal playing field in all domains, there will be a need to educate, empower, enlighten, equip, furnish young women with the skill set to not only make change, but be the change. There is an art to comporting oneself, with having been steeped in the richness and diversity of the Barnard tradition, that is recognizable to all others who have been similarly exposed. And by that I mean, in my travels—and I travel across the country as an ethicist; I work to inform other state and local governments’ ethics, reform efforts; I give lots of talks, and have taught at many institutions—and always I’ll come across one person in the room who is lit from within, who is not only lighting up the room, but is a conciliator, a statesperson, who has an ethos that is both ethically based and also practical. There is that person, that same person who has finesse and a certain grace, and a certain confidence that’s not hitting you over the head; it is a nuanced certitude and, 9 times out of 10, when I say to that person, irrespective of where she went to law school: “Where did you go to college?” She says, “I went to Barnard!” [Laughs] And, Lizzie, I can get you names, because I smile every single time. I was in Chicago last week, and it happened last week. I hear from people who will say to me, knowing my Barnard affiliation and how proud I am of it, and how deeply I believe in our tradition: “Oh Professor Franzese, you’ll never believe it, but I spoke with the corporation council for—wherever—and she was amazing. And, then, guess what, she went to Barnard!” Barnard women—that is a special brand. We’re a special species, and we belong to each other as much as we belong to the world. And that tradition, that strength, has not been compromised in the years since Columbia went co-ed. It has continued in spite of Columbia going co-ed. It has not continued because of Columbia going co-ed; it would have continued irrespective of what Columbia chose to do. But the Barnard College experience and all that it brings to one’s life remains as vibrant as it ever has, I believe, as an active member of this dynamic community. And its resilience and grace under the furies of our times, and the changing winds of our times, bears living witness to the potency of its mission.

E. Moye:

Wow. Well I think that’s a wonderful place to end.

P. Franzese:

That’s great! [Claps and laughs] You should excerpt this. We should use this—for promotion

E. Moye:

I know!

P. Franzese:

That is how I feel, Lizzie Thank you for giving me the chance. I was dubious—I thought what am I gonna say for an hour? But it went so fast. You were so great. Thank you for such thoughtful questions.