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For Elisa and Coda.
May you grow up in a world that has real feminism in it;
and grow old in a world that no longer needs it.

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Preface

There have been countless moments throughout history when momentous social shifts occurred. We've shifted from thinking the earth was at the centre of the universe to realizing it's just one more planet to orbit the sun. We've shifted from feudal societies where accidents of birth determine who lives in luxury and who works to pay for that luxury, to societies governed by the principle of equal opportunity. We've stopped believing in 'humours', four fluids that make up the body in different proportions and determine people's mental and physical capacities. Many of us have shifted from belief in a god or gods creating life, to having an evolutionary understanding of the origins of life. We've stopped thinking it's acceptable to own people, or to keep people in conditions of slavery or servitude.

We could zoom in on any one of these moments in history and find our protagonists, people courageously challenging the prevailing orthodoxy, or working underground to help those harmed the most by that orthodoxy. Our narrative for these historical moments is often binary: the resisters, the rebels, the misfits, and the visionaries, versus everyone else. The people in the mainstream who go along with the status quo, and the people who see the problem and start to do something about it. The orthodox, and the heterodox.

There was a binary narrative like this for feminism, once: feminists were the rebels, the women who first started to ask questions about whether woman was really destined to be merely the wife and helpmate of man. Feminism was simple then. It was a single heterodoxy fighting for women's rights and opportunities. It challenged the perception that what woman appeared to be, itself a product of rigid social conditioning, was all she was capable of being. The orthodoxy it worked against, in place in many conservative countries and in many segments of progressive countries even today, was a set of ideas according to which men were meant to be masculine, women were meant to be feminine, and women were *for* the servicing of men and men's needs. Men and women were considered to be very different, and women were considered to be inferior. Feminism was *the* sex/gender heterodoxy then. This isn't *ancient* history, it was true as recently as the 1970s, but it's history nonetheless.

The moment we're in right now, when it comes to sex and gender, does not fit this binary structure. Now the heterodoxy is plural, and its factions are in fierce disagreement with each other. Here are two—very different—heterodox accounts of sex and gender:

Gender as identity. There is no sex/gender distinction, there is only gender.[1] Sex, the idea that humans can be sorted into two biological types, male and female, is an outdated concept. Sex is a spectrum; or there are many different sexes; or there is really no such thing as sex, just a set of bad ideas imposed onto arbitrary features of bodies.[2] Whatever sex is or was, it doesn't matter anymore. What matters is gender, in particular, gender understood as *identity.* Every human person has a gender identity, at minimum 'man', 'woman', or 'nonbinary'. This new way of sorting people into categories supersedes sex, but takes over the role that sex used to play, for example as the basis of romantic and sexual attractions between people, or as the trait determining which social spaces can be appropriately used. According to this view, transwomen are women, transmen are men, and nonbinary people are neither women nor men. A transwoman belongs on a women's sports team, or in a women's prison, or in a women's domestic violence refuge. Same-sex attractions are 'transphobic'.[3] Women-centred language is 'exclusionary' if it refers to biological traits.[4] Wearing pussy hats and t-shirts with uteruses printed on them to the women's march is bad; it suggests a connection between women and vulvas, women and uteruses.[5] But some men have vulvas and uteruses (transmen), and some women don't (transwomen).

Gender as social norms and expectations. There is a sex/gender distinction, and sex is indispensable to it. There are two sexes, male and female, and intersex conditions do not undermine this. Gender is a set of social norms and expectations imposed on the basis of sex. There is no understanding gender without sex. Women are subject to the expectation that they be feminine, men that they be masculine. Men are valued more highly than women. Understanding gender as norms imposed on the basis of sex allows us to make predictions, for example about who will be subject to social sanctions (masculine and other gender norm non-conforming women, feminine and other gender norm non-conforming men). And it allows us to think about the social construction of femininity, the ways that women have been 'made' to be feminine, both throughout history, and within an individual woman's lifetime. This understanding allows us to critique a range of social practices, for example the standards of beauty by which women are assessed. These may require women to spend more time and money, and accept more pain and discomfort, than men (for example, to purchase skincare regimens,

makeup, hair products, clothing and shoes; to take the extra time needed to apply makeup and style hair; to have body hair plucked, waxed, or lasered; to undergo cosmetic surgeries like breast implants, nose jobs, or labiaplasties).[6] It is the social construction of womanhood that causes some women to dis-identify with womanhood and in some cases attempt to disaffiliate from womanhood ('I am not like that, so I must not be a woman'). And conversely, it is the social construction of womanhood that attracts some people who are not female to identify with womanhood and in some cases affiliate with womanhood ('I am like that, so I must be a woman').

It is not uncommon that competing heterodoxies lose sight of the common enemy they have in the orthodoxy, and focus their opposition upon each other. For example in the documentary *Rebel Dykes* (2019), women involved in lesbian feminism in London in the 1980s describe a social landscape in which homophobia was rife, and there was a lack of legal rights and protections for gay and lesbian people. The second wave feminist movement, starting in the late 1960s and taking off in the early 1970s, had created a flourishing underground scene of lesbians, many of whom were separatists (refusing the company of men entirely). But the radical feminists and the lesbian separatists were critical of lesbian romance and lesbian sex that imitated heterosexuality, and they were vehemently opposed to male violence against women, which they saw lesbian sadomasochism as imitating. This created a conflict at the time, with the lesbians who wanted to explore and enjoy all forms of sexuality, including those which could be argued to be imitating heterosexuality or male violence. The 'rebel dykes' were leather-wearing, motorbike-riding, 'sex positive' lesbians, many involved in underground clubs where there were live lesbian sex shows, including performances of sadomasochistic sex. It is clear from the documentary that the opposition between the 'rebel dykes' and the other lesbian feminists was fierce, with some of the women interviewed in the film describing a raid by the radical feminists and lesbian separatists on one of their sex clubs, where the furniture was smashed with crow bars and women were threatened.

A similar opposition has emerged within the sex/gender heterodoxy today. In the place of crow bars there is excessive social sanctioning. From both sides there is social media dogpiling, and unpleasant, *ad hominem* attacks. From the gender-as-identity crowd against the gender-as-norms crowd there are open letters, campus protests, campaigns to get women fired (some of which have been successful), malicious accusations made in the media and on social media, campaigns to get women banned from online platforms (often successful), deplatformings, taking women to court,

forcing women out of political parties, the occasional physical assault, and more. The gender-as-norms crowd are diverted into expending enormous energy in defending themselves, and their views, rather than simply getting on with the work of feminism as they understand it.

Disagreement with gender as identity is taken to mean agreement with conservative or traditionalist views about gender. This is a failure to see 'beyond the binary' of disagreement about sex and gender. In this case there is not just the rebels and everyone else. There are two very different groups of rebels, who have very different ideas about what is wrong with the status quo, and what the best methods are for changing it. This is a book about one group of rebels under siege today, those resisting the political erasure of sex, and fighting to maintain the understanding of gender as norms, because of its immense utility in describing, understanding, and challenging sexist socialization. These rebels call themselves gender-critical feminists, referring to the idea that gender is something we should be critical of. I am one of them.

I wrote this book because I think gender-critical feminism presents the greatest challenge to conservative or traditionalist views about gender and has the best chance of overturning it. I think it is more ambitious, and significantly more appealing and coherent, than the alternative heterodox view of sex/gender. I worry about the future of feminism, because I do not see how we can fight for women's liberation when we have ceded any understanding of the trait on which women's oppression is based (namely sex) and the system which helps to perpetuate it (gender norms). Contemporary feminism is kind, inclusive, and affirming of women's choices, whatever they happen to be. Those traits have value, but they will not overturn thousands of years of oppression on the basis of sex, or earn women their liberation. I hope to persuade you that gender-critical feminism is the theory and movement that we need.

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In the radical feminist view, the new feminism is not just the revival of a serious political movement for social equality. It is the second wave of the most important revolution in history. Its aim: overthrow of the oldest, most rigid class/caste system in existence, the class system based on sex—a system consolidated over thousands of years, lending the archetypal male and female roles an undeserved legitimacy and seeming permanence.

Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*.[7]

1
Introduction

Something strange has happened to feminism in the last forty years. What was once a thriving social justice movement, led by women and for the political advancement of women's interests, has today morphed into something else entirely. For one thing, it doesn't seem to be particularly *for* women anymore. It's about a lot of different issues, some of which involve women and some of which don't. For another, it doesn't seem to be particularly *by* women anymore. Increasingly, men claim the authority to tell women who must be included in feminism, or what feminism must be like. There were always divisions and often factions, but today there are tribes and they are so polarized that there seems to be little chance of reconciling differences. Below I'll give two examples of how feminism has changed. Then I'll spend a little time emphasizing the points of agreement between different types of feminists, before explaining what I'm trying to do in this book, and how I've organized it.

A brief note on terminology, before we get started. I'll use 'male' and 'female' in the standard way, to refer to the two biological sexes. The former is the sex that all going well produces small mobile gametes (sperm), the latter is the sex that all going well produces large immobile gametes (eggs).[1] The meanings of these terms are contested, with some preferring to use them synonymously with 'man' and 'woman' with both referring exclusively to gender identity. But there are no other terms available to refer to sex, and the ability to refer to sex is indispensable to my project in this book. So that is how I will proceed.

1.1 Women's Issues, from Centre to Margin

Two examples help to illustrate the shift in what is considered to be the subject matter or concern of feminism.[2] The first is about activism, the second about academia.

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Women's day march. According to the International Women's Day (IWD) website, the 8th of March 'is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women', which 'marks a call to action for accelerating women's equality'. The first IWD gathering was in 1911, which makes the day more than a hundred years old. The image on their website linking through to the themes for IWD 2020 included posters saying 'I will challenge gender stereotypes and bias', and 'I will call out gendered actions or assumptions'.[3] The website is full of photographs of strong, empowered women: women of colour standing making the 'equals' sign with their arms; women working in technology, business, and health; women in sports and the arts. So far so good—all of this seems like a fairly standard approach to feminist activism.

And yet, the IWD Melbourne Collective, the group who organize the march for the city of Australia where I live, issued a list of demands in advance of IWD 2019 which were puzzlingly distant from this kind of feminism. This was their full list of demands:

1. Justice for First Nations peoples, Indigenous workers' rights, and land rights
2. An end to all forms of violence against women and children
3. An end to all imperialist wars
4. An end to racism
5. Access to permanent residence and citizenship rights for all refugees and migrant workers
6. Secure and decent employment for all, and equal pay for equal work
7. A living wage for all women in all industries
8. The right to organize unions and take collective action, including industrial action and solidarity action, free from violence, intimidation, and legal harassment
9. Health and safety at work, just compensation, and rehabilitation
10. Paid parental leave and affordable childcare
11. Full rights and freedom from violence for people of all sexual orientations
12. Full rights and freedom from violence for intersex people
13. Listen to sex worker peer organizations, and support the rights, health, and safety of sex workers, including the full decriminalisation of all forms of sex work
14. Justice for people with disabilities—freedom from violence, full access to public spaces, and an end to all forms of discrimination

15. Full reproductive rights for all women
16. Free and accessible healthcare for all
17. Affordable housing for all
18. Social security and a just welfare system
19. Free and accessible education for all
20. An end to environmental destruction, and compensation for all victims worldwide.[4]

Note the language here. First Nations *peoples*, Indigenous *workers*, *refugees*, migrant *workers*, employment for *all*, *parental* leave, *people* of all sexual orientations, intersex *people*, sex *workers*, *people* with disabilities, healthcare for *all*, housing for *all*, education for *all*, compensation for *victims* of environmental destruction. Out of twenty demands, the word 'women' appears only three times: 'an end to all forms of violence against women and children', 'a living wage for all women in all industries', and 'full reproductive rights for all women'. One might have expected the one day a year that is about women to have a list of demands relating exclusively to women's interests.

My point is not that feminist collectives should limit themselves to making demands that are good *only* for women. One of the IWD Melbourne Collective's demands was 'paid parental leave and affordable childcare'. This is a demand that will benefit both men and women. But it will *largely* benefit women, because in most countries—including Australia—workplaces grant more paid maternity leave than paternity leave, and in many countries there is not adequate affordable childcare, which creates a structure of economic incentives that encourage women to spend more time out of work, sometimes giving up their careers entirely. Some things that are good for women will have incidental benefits for men, and *that* they will have these benefits is no reason at all for feminists not to want them.

But consider another of the collective's demands, namely 'justice for people with disabilities—freedom from violence, full access to public spaces, and an end to all forms of discrimination'. This will benefit women, because some people with disabilities are women. But women are not disproportionately represented among the community of people with disabilities (in Australia it is 17.8 per cent females and 17.6 per cent males).[5] This is not a feminist demand; it's a demand that could be made by anyone interested in justice and equality. Most of the collective's list is like that.

When the list of demands issued by a women's collective are general demands for justice and equality, feminism is in trouble. Demands for

justice and equality are no bad things, but doing global justice and calling it feminism *is* a bad thing, because it suggests to the world that there is a lot of feminism going on, when there is really much less than there appears to be. Radical and gender-critical feminists on social media frequently ask, 'why are women the only people who aren't allowed to centre themselves in their own liberation movement?'[6]

It's important to distinguish two questions. One is *what is feminism*, what does a theory and movement that deserves the name look like? The other is *whether we should be feminists*, which is the same as asking what social causes we should each choose to fight for. In this book I'll be talking only about the former. Women are a little more than half the global population, and some of the obstacles they face are extremely serious. Whether or not this is *the most important* social cause and thus has a claim to everyone's time and energy, it's *an important* social cause and thus has a claim to at least some people's time and energy.

I'm not interested in persuading you that you should abandon disability justice movements in favour of feminism. We need both. I'm interested in persuading you that *if* feminism is the social cause you choose, that cause might not be what you think it is (and what influential organizations and self-styled spokeswomen represent it as being). As radical feminist Julia Beck has said, 'if feminism was reduced to one word, it would be "no!" '[7] In this case, the 'no' is an answer to the question 'would you mind just taking care of these other 6,789 social justice issues while you're at it?'.

Women's studies. The University of Sydney was one of the first universities in the world to offer a course in women's studies, taught by Australian feminist Madge Dawson in 1956.[8] The course was called 'Women in a Changing World', which focused on the social, economic, and political situation of women in the liberal democracies of western Europe. Sydney's *Arts and Social Sciences Undergraduate Handbook 2020* lists no subject areas under either women's studies or feminism, but does list gender studies. From its description it is clear that this is not a shift in name only, but in content:

> Gender studies challenges and enriches our understanding of masculinity, femininity, transgender, sexuality and identity, and provides a framework for considering social and cultural issues gender impacts, ranging from debates about marriage equality and new forms of intimacy to gendered forms of labour, violence and representational practices; and how gender relates to other salient experiences such as race, coloniality, sexuality, class, and ability.[9]

Women's studies is about women; gender studies is about everyone.

Of the top five universities in Australia,[10] four don't have women's studies courses anymore (University of Melbourne, Australian National University, University of Sydney, and University of Queensland) but they do have gender studies (Queensland only as a minor, the others as a major); only the University of New South Wales, Sydney, has a course that tries to combine the two, namely 'Women's and Gender Studies'. They describe it as being about 'women, feminism, gender, sex, and sexualities'.[11]

During the school year 1969–70, Phyllis Chesler—one of the most prominent feminists of the second wave[12]—taught one of the first classes in women's studies in the United States (US), at what was then Richmond College in New York City. The class become a minor and then a major. In her memoir, *A Politically Incorrect Feminist*, Chesler talks about how she and five students went and sat in the office of the head of department and refused to leave until he approved the funding to cover her other teaching, so that she could teach the class (which she had completed all the paperwork and had initial approval for, but which at the last minute had been refused on grounds of insufficient funding).[13]

Marilyn Boxer said of the time that 'merely to assert that women should be studied was a radical act'.[14] According to Alice Ginsberg, editor of *The Evolution of American Women's Studies*, women's studies was political, functioning as 'the "academic arm" of the women's movement', 'restoring lost histories', and 'allowing silenced voices to be heard'.[15] In 2009, there were over 800 women's studies programmes in the US. Ginsberg said 'we can't overlook the significance of the apostrophe in the name women's studies. Born from the women's movement, women are finally claiming *their own* lost histories and taking the lead in challenging the social construction of knowledge'.[16]

While the first class happened in 1956 (and perhaps even earlier elsewhere), women's studies programmes weren't commonplace until the 1970s, and they were already starting to be broadened out and renamed in 2009. Even assuming they became commonplace in the early 1970s, which is probably a generous assumption, that's still less than forty years before they were massively diluted. Not a very long period for women to restore their lost histories, recover silenced voices, and teach young women about the history of women's rights struggles and women's oppression.

Compare it to classes and courses dedicated to histories of racial oppression. Universities in New Zealand offer courses in Maori studies, teaching Maori language, history, politics, and performing arts.[17] Imagine if after roughly forty years of this it was decided that those courses should be

broadened out to include all minority ethnic and new immigrant groups in New Zealand, and after a while we renamed all the courses 'minority ethnic studies' and spent most of the time in them talking about Tuvaluan and Maldivian climate refugees. Or worse: at least that might plausibly be justified as a 'focusing on the least well-off' in some possible future state of New Zealand. Imagine instead all the time is spent talking about economic migrants from wealthy European countries.

There's nothing wrong with courses being replaced in principle. Maybe they're about technologies that become obsolete, or science that goes out of date. But these are not good parallels for women's history. The thousands of years' long history of women's oppression, and the struggle for women's rights starting in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1832,[18] and still in progress, would be important even if women had achieved full social justice—it's unlikely that we'll stop teaching civil rights history when we achieve racial justice. The way people are capable of treating one another is an important part of human history and something we should all remain aware of, lest history repeat. But it's not only history. Women have not achieved full social justice yet. Women's studies matters.

This doesn't mean gender studies programmes shouldn't exist. There are different phenomena we may be interested in. One is women's oppression, another is the many social groups that have suffered collateral damage in the oppression of women. For example, as femininity was imposed onto women and then women were disparaged, femininity came to be disparaged independently, and this had negative effects on anyone who was feminine whether they were a woman or not. As superiority was claimed for men, masculinity was imposed and while this came with benefits it also came with some harms. We might want to talk about this wider phenomenon, which would mean talking about all of the social groups—including, but not limited to, women—that have been impacted by women's oppression, looking for common causes and common impacts. But we might just as well want to focus on the narrower phenomenon, the original victims of sexism, the group that remains the largest constituency of those harmed by sexism, namely women. Women's studies did that; gender studies does not.

1.2 What Feminists Can Agree About

In writing a book about feminism, explaining disagreements and defending a particular position, it is easy to give the impression that *everything* is a

disagreement. But that just isn't the case. Feminists of very different types can want the same outcomes for different reasons, or the same outcomes for the same reasons—it's just that once they've secured them, some will stop and others will carry on. Visions for a feminist future can have different levels of ambition, so that they overlap in part. One perspective within feminism has become dominant (on the left at least) and crowded out alternative perspectives, which has increased the toxicity of disagreements between its position on particular issues and that of other types of feminism. I'll be defending a feminism that has disagreements with the dominant perspective in three particularly charged areas (the sex industry, trans/gender, and intersectionality). But that shouldn't be taken to suggest that there isn't, nonetheless, a lot of common ground, at least when it comes to outcomes. Below are some examples.

Male violence against women and girls. Feminists of all types can agree that male violence against women and girls is a problem and needs to be addressed. It is uncontroversial that this includes phenomena like trafficking into sexual slavery, acid attacks, honour killings, domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, child abuse, and child marriage (which, when between a girl child and an adult man, will generally also involve rape).[19] Even those who disagree about the status of 'sex work' and how the sex industry should be regulated (if at all) can agree that the violence within the industry is a problem, including the murder, trafficking, rape, sexual assault, child abuse, and physical assault that go on across it.

Full control of reproduction. Feminists of most types (the exception being some religious feminists) can agree that a woman must have the right to choose when and whether to have a family. This means having control over her sexuality (when and whether she has sex, and whether that sex will risk pregnancy—so she needs sexual autonomy and access to contraceptives), and *both* being able to have an abortion if she decides that is what she wants, *and* being able to *not have* an abortion if she decides that is what she wants. This means she needs it not to be the case that a controlling state, or controlling individual, can force her to do one thing or the other (a one-child state policy, or a husband, may force her to abort; a state where abortion is illegal, or a religious husband, may force her to carry a pregnancy to term).

Feminists of many, or at least most, types can agree that there are good reasons why women need to have abortions, regardless of whether they have further opinions about this. Chesler writes for example, in criticizing people who protest outside abortion clinics, of

> A woman who requires a medical abortion; a woman who chooses not to carry a seriously ill fetus to term; a mother of five who cannot afford another child; a woman who needs radiation for cancer and whose physician has advised her to have an abortion; a rape-impregnated victim; a young woman who cannot afford to raise a child and also work a full-time job so she can attend college.[20]

Sexual objectification and beauty standards. Lisa Taddeo writes in her book *Three Women* (2019) 'One inheritance of living under the male gaze for centuries is that heterosexual women often look at other women the way a man would'.[21] Feminists of all types can agree on the negative impacts on women that our culture of sexual and aesthetic objectification of women has had, and be interested in finding ways to disrupt this objectification and see women represented as, and understood to be, full human persons. This is likely to mean changes to public spaces (billboards and posters), the media (particularly advertising), and film and television (how female characters are depicted). This may also have knock-on effects for other feminist issues, like increasing equality of sexual pleasure (women will get more if men don't think women are *for* the sexual pleasure of men), reducing rape and sexual assault (at least where this is caused by sexual entitlement), and increasing the representation of women in politics, leadership, and industries where they have been underrepresented (by impacting stereotypes and expectations).

Women at work. Feminists since long before the second wave have been concerned about women's access to work, whether about their being permitted to work (or work in particular industries), or about their pay and benefits in comparison to men, or about their underrepresentation within specific industries and in leadership positions across all industries.[22] Most types of feminists can agree that equal opportunity is important, so that at the very least we should be working to get rid of direct and indirect discrimination. They can also probably agree that it is likely that serious differences in the numbers of men and women in particular industries suggest that *either* there has been discrimination *or* there is a 'pipeline problem', which means that at some earlier point in time, perhaps even in early childhood, there have been influences that have steered some towards, and others away from, those industries.[23]

It is likely that feminists can agree on early childhood interventions, and educational campaigns, designed to tackle these inequalities, such as programmes to get girls interested in science, technology, engineering, and

maths (STEM). None of this requires signing on to preferential hiring (where of two equally qualified candidates, preference is given to the woman), or affirmative action (where preference is given to the woman even if she is worse-qualified, so long as she is sufficiently qualified), about which there is likely to be more disagreement tracking different fundamental commitments.[24] Neither does it require settling *why* it is important for women to work, or even saying *that* they should necessarily work.

Equality of sexual pleasure. Feminists of all different types, even those at war over the sex industry, can also agree that the sheer quantity of bad and unwanted sex women are having all around the world is a serious feminist issue.[25] While feminists have long since agreed that rape and sexual assault are feminist issues, there is not as much attention given to bad and unwanted sex. This includes sex women have as a matter of duty, perhaps to preserve relationships; the casual sex women sign up for in the hopes of mutual satisfaction, but which ends up being unsatisfying; the sex which women end up having because the ways that they signal its being unwanted are not heeded by men. Feminists of different types can agree that it would be better if there were more equality in sexual pleasure, and focus on ways to make this happen—from more emphasis on consent as a clear and effective signal,[26] through to campus programmes in self-defence and assertiveness,[27] through to programmes in sex education and sexual equality[28] (particularly for boys).

1.3 Leftist Mansplaining of Feminism

'You should be able to rely on the Left to be on the side of feminists', wrote Julie Bindel in 2018. 'And yet, in recent years, I have experienced far more direct sexism from these so-called feminist "socialist" men than Tory ones.'[29] She criticizes leftist men for defending men's consumption of pornography, including Owen Jones who defended a politician's consumption of pornography at work;[30] and for supporting a decriminalized sex industry, which is exploitative of women. She also complains that these men lecture women about their understandings of what a woman is, as though they have superior knowledge about that. She writes:

> [Owen] Jones is also notorious for lecturing women about who actually has the right to decide who is female or not; he regularly berates anyone who dares suggest that people with penises are not actually women. In one

> of his articles, he declared that the group of people he terms 'transphobes' (who refuse to accept men as women) will be consigned to the 'wrong side of history' for their views.[31]

It's not surprising that someone like Owen Jones, a leftist journalist who writes frequently for *The Guardian*, thinks he gets a say in the question of what a woman/female is, because the dominant form of feminism has encouraged this by declaring that 'feminism is for everybody'.[32] Jane Mansbridge, a second-wave feminist and Harvard professor, says that feminists in the 1960s and 1970s saw their collectives as 'pre-figuring change in the society', which means, testing out the changes they desired for wider society on a smaller scale. She said, 'I consider the women's movement the least hierarchical, the most open and the most inclusive social movement that I have ever come across', but worried that the way the movement handled conflict was 'adversarial' and that this didn't bode well for wider social transformation.[33] On this way of thinking about the feminist movement, as a precursor to a wider transformation that is something like *justice for everyone*, gatekeeping membership doesn't make a lot of sense.

It might seem appealing to be so warm and inclusive, but here is an alternative view. Declaring that feminism is for everybody, and welcoming men into feminism not merely as allies but as people who can *be* feminist thinkers, leaders, and activists if they so desire, guts feminism of one of its most important accomplishments, which is the self-determination of women.[34] Women, as an oppressed class/caste,[35] have the right to form political associations to fight sex-based injustice and to advance their political interests. Women have the right to figure out, separately from men, what exactly they think it means to be a woman, *if it means anything at all.* Men, throughout history, have created and imposed femininity onto women. In order to achieve liberation, women must escape from men's ideas about women. From this it follows that *men do not get any say in what a woman is, and men cannot be feminists*.[36]

For those who like the idea that feminism is evolving from a movement for women into a movement for social justice more generally, it's worth asking why it's *women* who are being asked to (or are asking themselves to) take on this enormous project. It's perfectly conceivable that a division of labour between groups focused on specific constituencies' issues would be more effective, and that all of these groups could link up as allies at some point—when they have made sufficient gains—in order to form a broader base for a more general social justice movement. But it's hardly the case that

women's issues, globally, have been resolved and we've now got some time on our hands to take on a bit more work. These issues are far from solved. And I don't see anyone telling Black Lives Matter, or Extinction Rebellion, that they should adopt a broader agenda, and stop being so narrowly focused on a 'single issue'.

This question of men's place in feminism has become particularly fraught when it comes to transgender issues. It is one thing to say that men like Owen Jones should be quiet about what a woman is because that's not a question *he* gets to have a say in. It's another to say that the increasing numbers of male people who 'identify as women' *also* simply don't get a say. Where leftist feminists may disagree over the question of whether men can be feminists, and that disagreement has practical implications such as whether it's permissible for feminists to bring boyfriends to the 'Reclaim the Night' march,[37] this doesn't generally cause a schism where those who disagree will end friendships and working relationships.

But disagreement *does* cause this schism when it comes to transgender issues. Many feminists today tend to use self-identification as the sole criterion for being a woman. For them, what it means to be a woman is to be a person of either sex who identifies as a woman. Identifying as a woman has no specific content, for example relating to appearance, behaviour, or character. To identify as something sounds like a mental state, one that manifests solely in a person's declaration that they are, in fact, a woman. When some women refuse to include male people with this mental state as feminist thinkers, leaders, and activists, those feminists see them as *discriminating against women*. And of course, all feminists can agree that feminism is for all women, whether or not it is also for all men. So this becomes a very serious, and highly moralized, point of disagreement.

1.4 The Great Gulf of Feminism

Reading through accounts of the second wave in the US, it is clear that there has always been in-fighting within feminist collectives.[38] Phyllis Chesler's colourful description of the movement gives a sense of this: 'In our midst was the usual assortment of scoundrels, sadists, bullies, con artists, liars, loners, and incompetents, not to mention the high-functioning psychopaths, schizophrenics, manic depressives, and suicide artists. I loved them all'.[39] Jo Freeman wrote in 1976 about 'trashing', the phenomenon of feminist women attacking and undermining one another. She says 'It took three

trashings to convince me to drop out…I felt psychologically mangled to the point where I knew I couldn't go on'.[40]

Still, *being together* inside feminist collectives where there were issues between some individuals and others, and between some individuals and all the rest, is something very different to *not being together at all*. We've gone from fallouts and factions within a somewhat cohesive feminist movement to tribalism of the most extravagant kind, where feminists of different types are quite literally protected from hearing each other's criticisms and alternative viewpoints. These protections come in the form of social media mechanisms allowing blocking (including, on Twitter, the option to subscribe to large blocklists, the most notorious of which inside radical and gender-critical feminist circles is 'TERFblocker'), and muting; and in real life, cutting ties with people and refusing to participate in the same events or be on the same platforms.

For example, five days before the conference 'Historical Materialism' was scheduled to begin at the University of Sydney in 2018, the organizers emailed Caroline Norma—a radical feminist academic—to tell her she'd been removed from the conference programme and her registration fee had been refunded. Their reason was that comments made by Norma in an earlier media piece about the left driving women out were inconsistent with the conference's commitment to 'an inclusive space for people with diverse gender identities'.[41] In the earlier piece, she had argued that transgenderism was 'wedge politics', a way for leftists to purge feminists from their ranks.[42] Apparently academics, not usually expected to mindlessly agree with one another, had decided that women with the 'wrong' views on gender must be excised from a conference programme in the name of diversity. A quick glance through the conference programme suggests that most of the speakers were men.[43] Norma was eventually reinstated to the programme, but ended up presenting without the other panellists and to a largely empty audience, which she speculates was due to an open letter encouraging conference attendees to boycott.[44]

Why are we excising our dissidents rather than celebrating them for the role they play in forcing us all to defend our ideas and think more clearly? Why has feminism become a matter of tribes, rather than a matter of issues? In principle, it should be possible to be a feminist who thinks that sex work is work but transwomen are not women, or transwomen are women but sex work is institutionalized violence against women.[45] But in practice, it is very difficult to hold this combination of views, because having the 'wrong' views on sex work or trans issues makes you an enemy to the relevant tribe.

Feminism today is more polarized than ever before, which leads to each side misunderstanding the other, and sometimes demonizing the other, rather than having the kind of open dialogue that leads to mutual understanding, constructive (rather than destructive) disagreement, and the finding of common ground. This is just as disastrous inside the feminist movement as it is in democratic politics more broadly.

1.5 Gender-Critical Feminism

The remedy for the version of feminism that has become about everything and for everyone is gender-critical feminism. This is a feminism that has its roots in radical feminism, influential during the second wave, before the various cultural influences that broadened out the scope and constituency of feminism came along. But it won't do to simply rewind the clock sixty years. Radical feminists themselves got many things right, but some things wrong.[46] And they couldn't speak to social conditions that hadn't yet arisen, like the massive expansion of the pornography industry, or the institutional adoption of the ideology of gender identity.

Gender-critical feminism is both a continuation of radical feminism and distinct from it. There are many women who describe themselves as gender-critical feminists, who are talking and writing and doing activism and together slowly building a shared idea of what gender-critical feminism is. Some think of it as a new name for an old position, while others see it as a new position. Many perceive it as being focused on a single issue, namely the social uptake of gender identity. One of the arguments I will make in this book is that this is a mistake. Gender-critical feminism is a general feminist theory (albeit one that is still a work in progress). The fact that it currently gives the bulk of its attention to a single issue is explained by the urgency of that issue, and not anything more fundamental to the theory of gender-critical feminism itself. It is about being critical of gender, and this has implications for a wide range of feminist issues, not just gender identity.[47]

Philip Pettit made the following observation in a 1993 paper when he talked about trying to distinguish the political theories of liberalism and republicanism:

> there is a problem facing anyone who tries to describe the intellectual profile of a tradition like liberalism or republicanism. This is that traditions

> of this kind do not come with their intellectual profile already well defined. The traditions are identified and unified, individuals are selected as representatives and exemplars of the traditions, on a variety of intellectually incidental bases…One basis may be the figures acknowledged as heroes or anti-heroes, another texts taken as authoritative or heretical, yet another the events depicted as glorious or tragic, and so on across a range of possibilities.[48]

The same is true for gender-critical feminism. There is disparate theory and activism being produced across multiple countries. (The Women's Human Rights Campaign, which is gender-critical, has country contacts in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, UK, and the US).[49] I will make decisions about how to unify that theory and activism that may not be to the liking of everyone who thinks of themselves as a gender-critical feminist. My heroes may not be the same as those of another gender-critical feminist; the work I take as authoritative may not be the same as what some other gender-critical feminists do; I may see particular events in a different light to other gender-critical feminists.

We will inevitably end up with something that is covered in my fingerprints. In talking with other gender-critical feminists, I have found my conclusions on the sex industry and trans/gender to be widely shared, even if not all the ideas that take me to them are. But I have taken particular liberties with intersectionality. On that topic I am arguing with everyone—radical, gender-critical, and liberal alike.

I have three aims in this book. First, I want to convince you that the version of feminism that gets the most airtime today barely deserves the name. I don't mean this in the petty way where we sneer across our differences of opinion muttering *that's not real feminism*.[50] Rather I mean, the socially dominant form of feminism—which is a distorted version of liberal intersectional feminism—has literally left a gap where a women-centred social justice movement used to be. This is an attempt to describe a theory that fills that gap.

Second, I want to show you how helpful philosophical ideas can be in diagnosing mistakes in arguments about feminism, explaining disagreements between feminists, and in articulating a clear vision of a feminism that has re-centred women. Theory—philosophical and otherwise—sometimes gets a bad reputation inside social justice movements. As one author puts it,

'For many, academic feminism is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron, selling out feminism's commitment to everyday [practice]'.[51] There seems to be a sense, from at least some quarters, that feminist theory is elitist and unnecessary. There are real problems to be solved, on the ground, after all.

In anticipating objections to her radical proposal for women's liberation,[52] Shulamith Firestone considers what 'operates to destroy serious consideration of feminism: the failure of past social experiments'.[53] One reason she gives for such failures is 'lack of theory', commenting 'one senses the immense frustration of people trying to liberate themselves without having a well-thought-out ideology to guide them'.[54] She goes through a number of partially successful and failed feminist social experiments too, diagnosing the reasons for failure as including 'There was no development of a feminist consciousness and analysis prior to the initiation of the experiment'.[55] Theory is crucial, and philosophy is a great tool for both creating it and critiquing it.

Third, I want to reintroduce you to radical feminism, through some of the ideas of the most interesting and influential figures of the second wave, women many of whose ideas are lost to feminists today. As Louise Perry described them in an article for *Quillette* in 2019, these are 'women who produced influential work that is now often forgotten, or else misremembered by Third Wave feminists keen to distance themselves from their feminist foremothers'.[56] In revisiting their ideas we will be in a better position to articulate a version of feminism that is both *by* and *for* women.

Finally, a note on the organization of the book, and where to look if you're after something in particular. I have divided it into two parts, the first focused on explaining what gender-critical feminism is, and the second more reflective, raising further questions for gender-critical feminism. The core of the book is the first part, Chapters 2–6. It introduces gender-critical feminism and explains that it has its roots in radical feminism, which in turn warrants a fuller presentation of radical feminist theory and radical feminists' ideas (Chapter 2). It then moves back to gender-critical feminism and explains some differences between the two (Chapter 3). Having established that gender-critical feminism is a new iteration of radical feminism, it then picks up on two issues that have been important to each—the sex industry (Chapter 4) as being central to radical feminist concerns, and trans/gender (Chapter 5) as being central to gender-critical feminist concerns.

I'll argue for the abolition of the sex industry in its entirety (which means pornography as well as prostitution); and the continued protection of