The New Politics of Online Feminism

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This book was written while I was on a research fellowship funded by the Australian Research Council, at Monash University in Australia, on Kulin Nations country. This fellowship, over four years, allowed me the time to do the research and thinking required to write. It began during lockdown in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, was put on hiatus when I went on parental leave, and was then completed in the midst of an overseas move uprooting my partner, toddler, and dog from one hemisphere to the other. And so this book has seen times of smooth and bumpy travel, of acceleration, stasis, and slow motion.

This book is about cultures of knowledge, while also aiming to produce knowledge. You need time and space to write. But the sustained *social* dimension of knowledge production in the attention so generously given to my ideas has also been a condition of possibility for this book. The intellectual support from friends and thoughtful strangers, ranging from informal chats over coffee and wine to the input of anonymous peer reviewers and deep questions from conference audiences, has been instrumental to feeling that what I am saying is a *legitimate perspective* and can be shared. This kind of legitimation, I think, is quite rare and precious, particularly in considering the quandaries my participants faced in establishing their own "epistemic status," as Maria do Mar Pereira would say. So, my first thank-you goes to my participants for bringing their generosity and good faith to this

project. I share their quandaries and fears of exposure, of overstepping, of failing to do feminism right; indeed, the ambitious title of this book ("The *New* Politics") feels somewhat too big for my small academic niche. But this book is not about *new* as in a neat break with the past; it is more about defining a shift in feminist relationalities that might be particular but I don't think is random or arbitrary.

Thank you to Christina Scharff and Maria do Mar Pereira for their ongoing engagement, and deep reading of my work over some years. I also want to acknowledge Jonathan Dean for supporting my work and introducing it to Maria, allowing us to begin our intellectual collaboration. Thank you to Ros Gill, Esther Tordjmann, Zala Volcic, Maura Edmond, and Brett Hutchins, who all read chapters of this book at varying stages of its life cycle, and to Julia Coffey, with whom I worked on a small project on online feminism and conflictual feelings that helped to give birth to this book.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowing Right from Wrong

I know I'm not a bad feminist for moving in [with my boyfriend], but . . . how do I be a feminist and be in a heterosexual relationship and, and live with him and try not to repeat patriarchal ideas in my relationship and like, in my life?

Alice, age 26

I met Alice a year before she moved in with her boyfriend. Earnest, bright, and articulate, she was a graduate student researching sustainability in the creative industries, in Perth, a sunny metropolitan center on the west coast of Australia. She was passionate about her burgeoning research and was pondering the possibility of further study, or working for a nonprofit with similar goals. But her larger personal project was feminism: a feminism that was a whole worldview, expanding into understanding race, climate change, popular culture, presidential scandals and the rise of the far right in the United States, and massacres in Israel-Palestine, Lebanon, and Ukraine. More than a simple career trajectory, the obligation to practice feminism in the best way possible informed her personal lifestyle, choices, and ambitions. It led to a proliferation of questions that continually tested her in binary terms of authenticity and hypocrisy, success and failure, goodness and its opposite. Was it feminist to desire travel and overseas adventure,

given the very real climate crisis? Was it feminist to work in a sector that was so intertwined with capitalism, even if you had good intentions? How could you be feminist and be in a monogamous, long-term heterosexual relationship? Fed by a social media environment in which examples of feminist women "getting it wrong" were all too common, Alice agonized over how she could practice a feminism responsive to all the crises she strove to acknowledge. She often felt "overwhelmed by her womanhood," as she shared in the group workshop where I first met her.

Like other relatively resources-rich young women in my project, white middle-class Alice was seeking a way to buoy her identity to a position resisting the status quo. As sociologists such as Zygmunt Bauman have argued, living in the "liquid modernity" (2000) of Western economies means people like Alice are increasingly less embedded in social structures, and therefore are left on their own in designing their biographies. Certainly, while social structures have far from disappeared, the young feminists I spoke to grew up with cultural messaging foregrounding the abundance of life choices, at the same time that they were urged to see themselves as the future voices of social change. Growing up with social media and feeling the duty to "use her voice," Alice, similarly, felt passionately about the misogyny, racism, and denial of climate crisis that continued to frame high-profile culture wars across the Anglo-American news cycle. Social media, for her and others, was a central means of witnessing and engaging with the wrongs of the world. Structural issues ranging from police brutality to the underpayment of women in fast fashion felt extremely personal and were accessed from their phones on and off throughout the day, while commuting, at work, on the sofa, and in bed when they woke up. Such mediated connection, while seemingly voluntary, was also an obligation: How could you be feminist and care about such big-picture issues and then turn away from them, as fatiguing and distressing as it was to always be connected to social media? And how could you be feminist if you didn't know what was happening, when it was so important and seemingly so simple to educate yourself on matters of importance?

To be feminist in an age of social media, for many of my participants, was to feel pressured, pushed and pulled in many directions. As online culture changes the scale and contexts of communication, media studies scholars have highlighted the logics of "connective action" (Bennett and Segerberg 2012), and the guiding possibilities for "fighting back" through the structures of social media platforms: hashtags, organized counterpublics, and platforms for reporting harassment and assault (Jackson et al.

2020; Mendes et al. 2019). Yet, in the murkier temporalities and spaces of everyday life, the young feminists I spoke to struggled to orient and ground themselves. They lived not just with "discomfort," as the now popular social justice credo goes, but in a constant state of unease and emotional contradiction. Alice felt guilty about her social media detoxes, when she would consciously periodically delete apps such as Instagram and TikTok from her phone. She loved fashion but tried to never buy new clothes, knowing about the exploitation of women garment workers. She scrutinized her devotion to paid work, seeing it as a capitulation to the capitalist wheel. When I spoke to her, I wasn't sure that she did indeed know that she was not a bad feminist for moving into her boyfriend's flat.

Alice was not unique. My young feminist participants didn't simply feel unmoored; they felt increasingly under the microscope. To identify as feminist was not necessarily to feel liberated from constraints. Rather, it often meant you felt responsible for your own shackles and those of others. And in accepting this responsibility, it often meant feeling more, not less, bound to restrictive measures and practices of gender, incessantly circling around the questions *Am I a good person? Did I do bad? Could I be better*? in the broader project of producing a feminist self that somehow registered and embodied the right reaction to the diverse harms witnessed through one's screen. In this loop, an outward gaze absorbed a general outline of violence and backlash taking place across different contexts; it then turned inward with an intense, exacting energy. One's everyday practices and selfhood became the locus of responsibility, blame, and change; there were no excuses, given what was happening in the world. Against the everyday spectacle of extremism and violence, the only option was to know, and do better.

In Anglo-American media culture, as Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) has written, feminism has more recently achieved a certain point of "popularity" in comparison with its more ambivalent representations of the early twenty-first century. From the 1990s to the early 2000s, scholars noted the tendency for feminism to be represented in highly individualized ways, if at all, and often in direct repudiation of the collective gains of the 1970s and 1980s, in what Rosalind Gill (2007) analyzed as a "postfeminist" sensibility. Representations of "top girls" proliferated in commercial media, highlighting personal ambition and achievement under capitalism (McRobbie 2009). Such representations often directly disavowed what was characterized as a dowdy, overprotective feminism of the Western second wave. Empowered women didn't need feminism; they could solve

their own problems to overcome sexism through ingenuity and sheer willpower ("manifesting their desires," to borrow the motivation-speak that came slightly later).

This postfeminist status quo, however, has seen a shift in recent years. Feminism is now marketable across feminized domains of consumer culture, from luxury brands to fast-moving consumer goods. In the late 2010s, Dior began producing T-shirts using direct slogans from second wave feminist activism; *Vogue* has continued in this vein in highlighting women as agents of change. The words *feminism* and *feminist* are commonsense identifiers in popular reality TV franchises such as *The Real Housewives*; and feminism and women's self-flourishing are no longer seen as at odds. Operating in an "economy of visibility," according to Banet-Weiser (2018), feminism and women's aspiration, confidence, and competence are increasingly conflated across brand culture and lifestyle media. As feminism has become increasingly au fait in media culture, it can now seem naïve or even ill-informed, for women at least, to reject it in a blanket fashion.

In this book, I chart some connections in these individualized dynamics for young feminists who have grown up with social media, and for whom social media was a central, everyday means of connecting with feminism and feminist ideas. Yet I also outline transformations in the understood significance of feminism. For my participants, feminism often did not give a confidence boost; rather, it was associated with a continual punitive scrutiny, of the self, but also of others, and an ongoing imperative to be in the right when you were always at risk of getting it wrong. Far from popular mediated representations of a happy feminist simplicity, equating feminist confidence and positivity with self-worth (Orgad and Gill 2021), social media feminist cultures propagated ongoing mechanisms for self-measurement and continual self-modification, in tandem with an individualized ideal of goodness. In the invocations of "good" and "bad" feminism that frequently haunted my participants' observations, what struck me was how these categories often neatly mapped onto a historical "bedrock" (Hall 1988, 141) of representations of good and bad women. Good feminists, named as intersectional feminists, negated themselves, were grateful for their privilege, included others, and were "nice." While one aspired to be good, to take everybody into account, one was always only one thoughtless misstep away from being bad, being selfish, not knowing one's place, taking up too much space. And not knowing one's place, or one's lane, based on one's identity traits was a cardinal sin in the identity politics of social media.

Drawing on ethnographic work with fifty young feminists based in Australia who shared their social media use with me over three points in time over 2021–22, I want to highlight how social media heightened the personal stakes of feminism. Social media feminist culture required all feminists to stay connected, keep up to date on relevant trends and events, and continually work on improving their feminist selves. In the insistence on a singular right but many wrongs, on the imperative to have the complete picture and never leave anything out, and to consistently present the same polished face to the world, these knowledge cultures set ever-higher but ever-narrower personal standards of what being feminist meant. The result was that, for many of my participants, feminism became a set of rules, and relatedly, an ongoing means of regulating conduct. To be feminist in what I term these "online knowledge cultures" was to continually demonstrate awareness of the ever-shifting parameters around appropriate identity practices, curating one's media consumption to align with a "perfect" intersectional politics, and avoiding those singled out as "problematic." It was to be able to describe your gendered needs and vulnerabilities with the right language but continually defer them to show you were appropriately aware of your privilege and did not take up too much space or attention. Indeed, there was a sense that claiming the identity of feminist meant you were always already empowered. My participants, who were predominantly women and gender-diverse people, showed how participation in feminist social media cultures recast them as responsible guardians of feminism rather than its legitimate beneficiaries.

In everyday life, then, feminism on social media was not only about participating in activism, petitions, or awareness-raising, accessing feminist news and debates, or even encountering concepts such as *toxicity* and *patriarchy* and adjectives such as *problematic* and *complicit*. Under the guise of achieving a better, more "intersectional" feminism, social media recast feminism as a universalizing knowledge project, centered on refashioning the feminist knower themselves. And in the age of answers notionally being one Google search away, and given the saturation of feminist discourses throughout institutional and everyday media culture, being a feminist knower and being devoted to ongoing learning became a default position for normativity and belonging. Further, I want to highlight how the call of this social media feminism was intensively gendered in its address. It required "good girls." By this, I mean not that it was relevant only to girls, or that it was explicitly styled for women only, but that it emerged with acute salience for my participants in the aftermath of ideals of "empowered girls"

(Dobson and Harris 2015) and inclusive leadership in the institutionalized youth cultures in which they were often embedded. It revived historically embedded expectations of women's primary responsibility for care and social reproduction, now presented in a refreshed form as contemporary responsibilities of inclusion. This goodness also drew on cultural fantasies of Western middle-class femininity (Daniels 2021; Moreton-Robinson 2006; Sullivan 2014) in underscoring claims to moral authority. Producing binaries of whiteness and color as ahistorical, transnational phenomena, my young Australian participants were invited to conflate their experiences with those of their usually North American counterparts, adopting a bird's-eye view of scandals, tragedies, and other phenomena that rapidly rolled through their social media feeds.

Identities thus took on certain rigidities. But the notion of goodness was mobile, able to incorporate ever-shifting, higher standards of intersectionality, while maintaining the risk of moral opprobrium, and indeed, misogyny, if you slipped up and were bad. I thus foreground goodness rather than perfection in my analysis here, in order to give a sense of classed and racialized salience of this gendered ideal, as well as the heightened stakes of failure in the binary landscape of social media. To be imperfect on social media meant you could be therapeutically framed as trying to be better. But if you weren't good, as demonstrated by the ritual social media fury catalyzed by the mistakes of famous women, you could be violently put in your place.

FROM EMPOWERMENT TO INCLUSION

I should now better situate the cultural context from which I speak and how this inflects the question of diversity within feminism that is central to the arguments of this book. As Ien Ang (2003) neatly puts it, Australia's "main social institutions and basic cultural orientations are identifiably Western, and as a nation it is categorized in the international order as a part of 'the West'" (201). Yet its position as a settler colonial nation located south of the Asian continent has always complicated the felt security of this whiteness, placing Australia "on the periphery of the Euro-American core," and producing a sense of "non-metropolitan, post-colonial whiteness" (201). Whiteness has often been described as "fragile" in terms of its reactivity in being challenged (Daniels 2016), but in the context of this book, I am noting in particular how this uncertainty renders antipodean whiteness highly dependent on transnational Anglo-American sources of media. In

a "double reflection" (Gülçiçek 2024) imagining Australia as an extension but not epicenter of the West, a crucial place is given to American popular culture, debates, and concepts in local progressive political identities seeking to define themselves against parochial examples of whiteness as sources of cultural "cringe" (Phillips 2006). This can render Australian feminisms more amenable to postnational notions of multicultural feminist community in which differences between the United States and the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia are minimized but registered sequentially as more "forward-thinking" or "backward" on a line of progress.

Australia's settler colonial foundations also produce a political imaginary centering an Anglo-Celtic majority as natural and authoritative mediators of diversity within its borders (Hage 2000). Simultaneously paying penance for the "original sin" of colonization (Ang 2003, 202; see also Ahmed 2004b), and welcoming contemporary diversity, such an imaginary separates the "bad" past and "good" present, obfuscating how the histories of both colonized Indigenous peoples and racialized settlers were intertwined in programs of genocide, land appropriation, indentured labor, regulation of sexuality, and Eurocentric border control (Curthoys and Mitchell 2020; Lo and Kanamori 2013; Stephenson 2007). Against this backdrop, the centrality of white women as "mediators" of Australian feminism has sharpened the sense of feminism as inclusive mission, such that Indigenous feminists such as Aileen Moreton-Robinson have forcefully articulated that they do not want to be "included" in white feminism (2000a; 2000b, 174), and certainly not a version of feminism in which the experience of racialized people in the United States is seen as more foundationally instructive than the history of racial oppression in Australia (2000b, 2006). As I discuss further in chapters 1 and 2, this can also render local, everyday practices of whiteness more invisible even as or, particularly when race is explicitly discussed, when it becomes something to be identified textually, in media elsewhere.

There is a rich breadth of scholarly work that examines how feminist digital activism responds to the challenges of misogyny arising through differing geopolitical and national histories, using online groups, hashtags, and platform affordances (Beta 2022; Dimitrovska 2024; Errázuriz 2021; Jeong and Lee 2018; Mendes et al. 2019; Pain 2021; Yin and Sun 2021). The Hollywood-led online activism around #MeToo in 2017 that fueled significant transnational conversation and feminist activity online and offline shows that ideas that travel are not simply spread but recreated and made to matter through the politics of emplaced, lived histories and contexts. This

book aims to contribute to understandings of the contextual transformation of what feminism is, and does, by analyzing social media feminism as a set of knowledge cultures (Cetina 2007) informing everyday life. In a moment when feminist television, film, art, and online content have proliferated, to identify as "feminist" in the West is increasingly to adopt a knowing position through practices of appraisal, evaluation, position, and distinction. In the Australian national context, such knowledge cultures are driven by Anglo-American mediated events and analysis, and, more broadly, by the cultural shift in the West whereby feminism's significance is not primarily defined by discrete forms of activism but as a style or genre (Cattien 2019) of cultural production, consumption, and identification. Through this lens, I examine how social media feminism as an everyday knowledge culture has its own contextual rules and logics, and provides frameworks through which to understand personal experience, setting personal expectations and political priorities. I am influenced by a wealth of scholarship that has shown how feminism, in Western social contexts, is often highly mediated, and how such mediation, often through commercial and privatized channels, has ambivalent effects.

In contrast to its varied histories, mobilizations, disputes, and contestations, scholars have observed how commercial Anglo-American media culture from the late twentieth century onward has tended to privilege a simplified, individualized account of feminism. Addressed most directly to women as its subjects, feminism has been articulated as a personalized but malleable set of aspirations and practices, spanning a focus on hard work and achievement under capitalism (McRobbie 2020), "confidence" (Orgad and Gill 2021), and consumption and visibility (Savolainen et al. 2022), all of which coalesce in an increasing lack of distinction between "influencing" and "activism" online (Scharff 2023a). Thus, as popular culture has incorporated, repudiated, and reformed feminism according to accounts of postfeminism (Gill 2007), popular feminism (Banet-Weiser 2018), and fourth wave feminism (Rivers 2017), the co-constitution of neoliberalism and feminism has led to the intensification of practices of self-governing addressed to women: self-monitoring, benchmarking, self-branding, and working on making one's feelings fit the relentless positivity of empowered femininity.

Recently, Angela McRobbie (2015) has also argued that there has been a turn to "perfection" and "resilience" (2020) in the endless competition with oneself required in the new sexual contract. Women must benchmark themselves and achieve against continually raised measures of improve-

ment. Rosalind Gill (2023) observes the sharpening of expectations of feminine perfection as social media both normalizes and heightens the stakes of visibility. These demands of perfection speak to an internalized continual self-surveillance as social surveillance becomes part of the fabric of a media culture structured by the expansion of norms of celebrity. Thus the impetus to perfect how one practices identity has only intensified with the increased personalization of media in the growth of social media and convergent culture. Those traditionally addressed as media consumers are recast as active participants and cocreators of a media environment promoting "permanent visibility" (Bartky 1997, quoting Foucault), involving the scrutiny and surveillance not just of those nominally famous but, potentially, of everyone.

From studies of digital culture focusing on antiracism, I also continue critical engagement with how the Internet draws on and reforms structures of racialization. Safiya Noble and Brendesha M. Tynes (2016) make a call for intersectional critical race technology studies, given the pregiven whiteness and maleness of the Western Internet. It is important to understand how intersectionality operates in practice, rather than "in theory" (Noble and Tynes 2016; Bailey and Trudy 2018; Steele 2021; Steele et al. 2023). While feminist spaces might seem prima facie to offer spaces of counterculture to this dominant culture, as Jessie Daniels (2016, 2021) has noted for some time, such whiteness also continues to shape feminist spaces as an unspoken norm. This book shows how this continues notwithstanding and even precisely due to the fact that certain popular discourses of "popular intersectionality" (Schindel 2024) have now saturated broader culture. Such movements dovetail with the rise of "wokeness" as a marker of identity (Sobande et al. 2022), increasingly producing a (white) subject who is always visibly ready to acknowledge their privilege and "clear the floor" for others. While derided by an increasingly vocal right-wing constituency, both the pressures and the trending nature of the display of a progressive, inclusive "woke" identity signal the amenability of intersectional ideas, in the current moment, to commercial culture (Kanai and Gill 2020). For this reason, it is not enough to insist that feminism can be "corrected" by intersectionality in this conjuncture (Nash 2019; see also Dean 2023); it is crucial to understand how the intersectionality of popular culture, social media culture, and institutional culture produces its own common sense that carries far more weight in everyday practice than scholarly debates over its definitional accuracy (Cho et al. 2013).

The dynamics of the popularization of intersectionality and the continuation of whiteness and neoliberalism as normal, have, of course, been

identified by scholars such as Sara Ahmed (2004a, 2004b, 2012), Patricia Hill Collins (2015), Gail Lewis (2013), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003, 2013), and Jennifer C. Nash (2019) in relation to how intersectionality has traveled in the transnational, neoliberal academy, not to mention Kimberlé Crenshaw, in conjunction with other critical race scholars appraising the field (Cho et al. 2013; Andrews et al. 2023). My work is indebted to the intellectual labor of these scholars. What I aim to further highlight in my focus on the experience of online knowledge cultures, and in aiming to apply an intersectional analysis to the empirical transformations of intersectionality as a concept, are the multifaceted consequences of its travels. Therefore, I identify not only how claims to good, inclusive white authority may be strengthened through the invocation of intersectionality but also how social media knowledge cultures produce intersectionality as a personal benchmark, a form of self-governance that may be used to throw individual legitimacy into question, either through self-scrutiny or by an unknown critical audience poised to call out failings. How intersectional can you make your everyday actions? How intersectional *can you be*?

Indeed, where the implicit driving message of past decades of popular feminist media culture has been "how to be an empowered woman," the question of how to uplift more marginalized others has now become ascendant as this empowerment has now seemingly been achieved. This turn to intersectionality arises in this gendered context of regulation, and is shaped by the inclusive-expansive logics of social media. For my participants, this required that they be always already aware of the local and global, and be able to react in an informed fashion to the miscellaneous and the catastrophic. In short, as social media brought the world into my participants' feeds, the world was brought into the ambit of their personal feminism. Participants lived with an ambient, repetitive sense of potential deficit, with the injunction to react and act in the right way in connection with the flow of events. In seeking to be a good intersectional citizen, you could always learn more; you could always be left behind. In the rhythms of social media culture, where it has become all-important to be fully informed, even as the impossibility of being fully informed also presents itself (Andrejevic 2013), this produced existential conundrums. It provided a measure of goodness and badness that was felt intensely by most (though not all) white participants in my study, while my participants of color were more likely to feel such anxieties projected onto them.

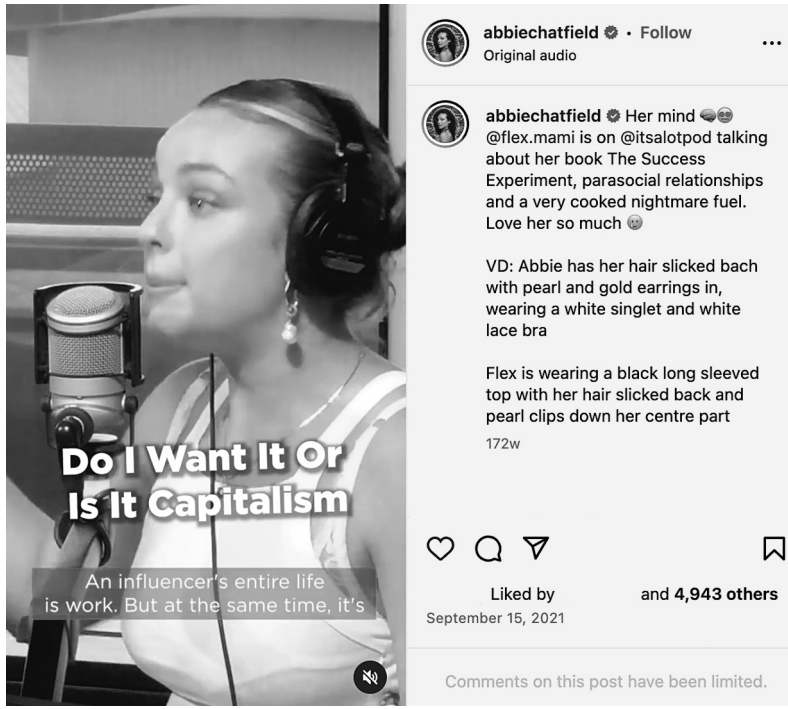
Take Alice. She had been using social media since she was in high school, mainly Instagram and Tumblr; she now, like many others, had a

love-hate relationship with social media, regularly deleting apps from her phone, only to reinstall them sometime later. Margot, another young white woman in my study, similarly spoke of the "toxicity" of TikTok in presuming the worst of every social citizen; she referred to a time when she was "offline" with relief. And yet you could not indefinitely remain offline, if you wished to remain part of feminism's march toward progress. These pressures were acknowledged by everyone in my study, regardless of gender identity. But because of the implicit centrality of women to feminism, and the singular emphasis on inclusion as good feminist practice, these pressures operated more intensively for women participants whose racial and class identities were deemed privileged. For these participants, the question of how to comfortably inhabit the subjectivity of being a feminist woman seemed to pose more distressing questions than it solved.

Thus, the version of intersectional feminism that circulated as best practice, in highlighting white women as the most privileged beneficiaries of feminism, and inclusion as the endpoint of such intersectionality, thus paradoxically centered young white women just as they were told to disavow their identities. They were to speak out against injustice whenever witnessed, involving a self-conscious appointment of authority and willingness to enforce the feminist "law." But they were also to include, consider all others before the self, and practice a self-conscious negation ("You're not supposed to center yourself, that's a big no-no," as Bella, one of my participants, put it). These practices also relied on a quantitative, classificatory imagination of identity, ranking legitimacy as a multiplication of vectors of oppression.

This "popular intersectionality" (Schindel 2024) led to much skepticism from my participants of color as to what "intersectionality even meant anymore." Such an intersectional framework required white women to act as feminism's guardians, holding the power to include, and to call out. For some of my white participants, this indeed seemed to buttress messages that they heard since childhood that they were born to be leaders. Middle-class, self-identified extravert Gabi, for example, seemed to feel confident in adopting the role of good intersectional leader, making sure that "everyone had a seat at the table"; this version of intersectionality reinforced her rightful place in being a spokesperson; she saw no contradiction in being a white woman leader who "amplified" others' voices. For others, like soft-spoken Alice, it created continual existential anxieties—of trying but failing, of never living up to her best intentions.

For this reason, it should not have surprised me when Alice revealed the personal reassurance provided by Abbie Chatfield, an Australian femi-



I.1 Abbie Chatfield, "Do I Want It or Is It Capitalism?" Instagram post, September 15, 2021. Screenshot by author.

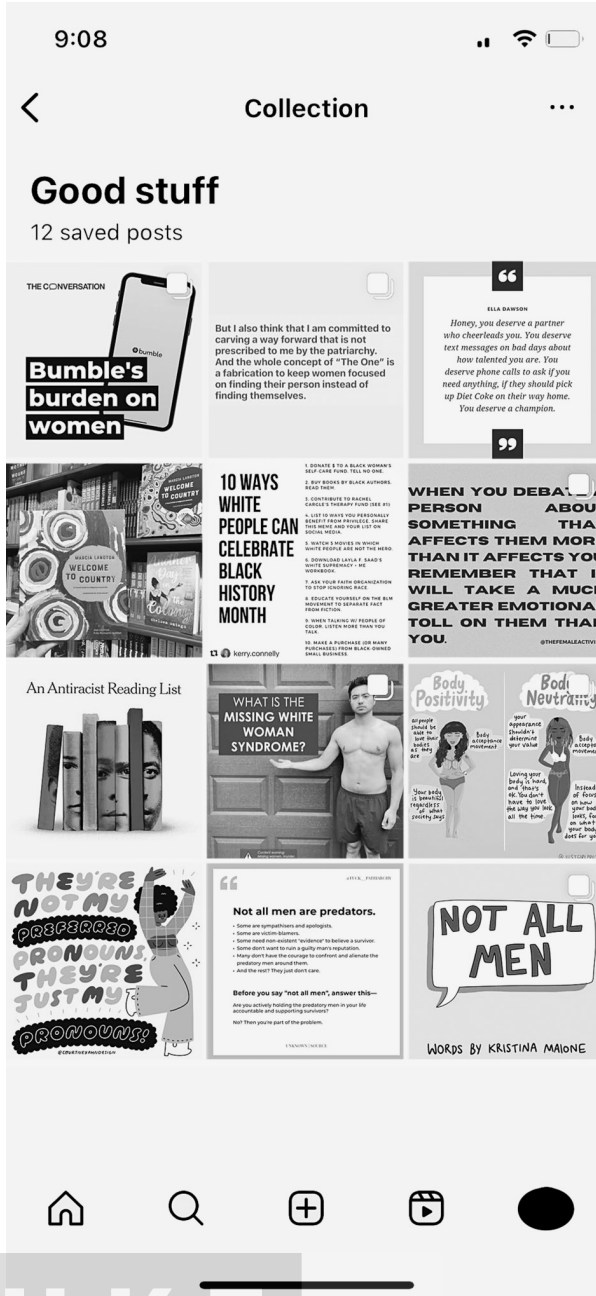
nist influencer and former *Bachelor* contestant (see figure I.1). Blonde, attractive Chatfield was a clear stalwart of commercial media, mixing her own podcast and social media presence with hosting and judging on reality TV, and brand ambassadorships. She had always proudly positioned herself against the derisions of high-culture commentators. Most importantly, Chatfield gave emotional and personal *license*. She was a personality who refused shame, and spoke with a sense of legitimacy and curiosity without purporting to be an authority. She embraced "low" culture in continued work on reality TV, and following horrifying social media bullying after her appearance on *The Bachelor*, she had emerged triumphant as a media personality in her own right. Although Chatfield was starkly different in her career trajectory, personality, and feminist practice, Alice said, "I think she's really amazing. And I think she is a big reason why I've been able to broaden my understanding of feminism and . . . what it, what it means to be a woman."

What speaking to Alice, Jessica, and others illustrated to me was the centrality of social media, both as a source of continual information through which one was meant to stay "on the pulse" of feminism, and in its direct governing of the emotional life of young feminists and young women, in particular. Feminism was not experienced as something separate from the pressures of body image, academic achievement, workplace success, and so on; rather, in its mediated structuring of everyday life and as an overarching benchmark against which to measure one's practices, feminist social media culture was something from which my young participants often, guiltily, needed to detox.

THEORIZING EVERYDAY FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE CULTURES

Before going on to outline the arguments of this book in more detail, I clarify two premises on which they are based. First, the significance of a personal feminist identity for young feminists was shaped by the centrality of online culture in their everyday experience. The continual dipping in and out, the lingering feelings and changes in position after passing time in these social media, and the ongoing urge to stay connected mean that social media occupied a continual thread in the experience of the everyday. Second, through being led by what my participants defined as their "feminist social media feed," this book focuses on dispersed online feminist cultures involving the circulation of resources, culture, and artifacts that seek primarily to inform and provide perspectives, and were defined as feminist from the viewpoints of my participants themselves. Most often, this involved showing me social media content on their phones. This book features the content my participants shared, but it has mostly been rescreenshot by me for the purposes of consistent image quality and anonymization. Participants shared brief snapshots into what they had noticed in the last week, or carefully saved or favorited assemblages of posts they had thought were noteworthy, such as the Instagram grid in figure I.2.

At other times, my participants would talk about scandals and social media flare-ups that had too many posts to actually document but left a deeply felt imprint. Stepping sideways from the focus of much scholarship on self-identifying activists and discrete feminist campaigns and platforms, this view highlights how digital culture is in fact implicated in the everydayness of feminism, a feminism that sometimes involves only a "minimal agency" (Lugones 2003). Indeed, as social media hummed in the background of the everyday for my participants, I contend that more broadly,



1.2 "Good stuff" Instagram collection, February 20, 2025. Screenshot by author.

online feminist culture is experienced not primarily as activism but as a sensibility directed toward the constant reception of "updates," corresponding to the requirements of digital citizenship in the Information Age. Having an ambient, 360-degree awareness of what is happening becomes an important baseline of belonging in contemporary feminism, despite the fact that such awareness is also premised, among other things, on exclusions of class (Scharff 2023b) and significant labor (Gleeson 2016; Mendes 2022).

Consequently, one of this book's central contentions is that knowledge and being in the know become indelible parts of contemporary feminist culture when social media is a routine element of everyday experience. Given the glut of information online—or "infoglut," as Mark Andrejevic (2013) has put it—together with the identity focus of neoliberal cultures more broadly, the ability to identify, classify, and position becomes more important than a deep expertise in any corpus of knowledge itself. In short, knowing what is happening, and the right position to take on it, become dominant heuristics and ways of managing how to belong in feminist cultures connected with social media.

This book, then, does not necessarily position these online feminist knowledge cultures as a circuit of marginal, or subaltern, knowledges, although they sometimes are. Seeing such knowledge cultures as entangled with the messiness of everyday life, existing forms of inequality and privilege as distributed through my participants' experiences, and the consumer capitalist rhythms of social media, online everyday feminism is positioned as a space of power relations with its own processes of domination and peripheralization. As scholars ranging from Charlotte Brunsdon (2005) to Srila Roy (2015, 2022) have argued, feminism, perhaps, has always been entangled with the governing of identity, both of self and of others. Contemporary feminisms in diverse locations are shaped by governing forces like situated neoliberalisms, while also carrying their own histories that shape how feminist subjects make intelligible and normalize certain "standards" of empowerment. Such insights underline the importance of understanding how feminism is always already entangled with power relations, especially when the everyday, as a site of media saturation, is increasingly colonized by capitalist practices of surveillance and value extraction. Thus, everyday feminist spaces are not simply subsumed by power, but neither are they purely spaces of resistance, as Margaret Davies (2008) neatly surmises.

Continuing a long feminist preoccupation with the everyday and with the mundane, in connection with insights into how seemingly private sites are causally connected to public forms of power (Enloe 2011), this book mobilizes this lens to understand the situation of young people in which distinctions between online and offline and producers and consumers of ideas and images become more tenuous. Maria Lugones's view of agency lends itself to thinking through the politics of the minute negotiations of the everyday, as the digital, in the locations that my participants inhabit, becomes an unremarkable and taken-for-granted element of daily routine and sociality. It is useful because it corresponds to the conditions of my participants' lives, but it also powerfully attests to the complexity of the ways in which identity is subject to power:

> a variegated,
> dominated,
> in resistance to a variety of intermeshed and interlocking
> oppressions,
> aggregate that
> pulls in different ways,
> sometimes in unison,
> but more often in many directions (19)

This kind of agency is located within simultaneous spatialities and temporalities of resistance and oppression that encounter, overlay, and crisscross each other, meaning that "a person may be both oppressed and resistant *and act in accordance with both logics*" (25; my italics). In Lugones's view, the necessary simultaneity of the logics of domination and resistance means that it is futile to conceptualize or desire a pure agency "against" domination, in contradistinction to the ressentiment articulated in common liberal articulations of resistance. Like Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology, central to the analysis of political orientation and possibilities of movement in this book, this perspective is relational, multidirectional, and refuses a bird's-eye view in understanding the possible movements and negotiations from an embodied and located position.

This diffuse approach thus eschews neat distinctions between space and actor, agent and object, that can implicitly inform accounts of online identity politics and activism. That is to say, although I refer to Instagram and TikTok, Facebook and Twitter (now X), I do not necessarily understand them as pregiven, discrete spaces into which my participants enter

and exit. Space, as political geographers note, is fundamentally a question of relationality and temporality, rather than physical or virtual coordinates (Goonewardena et al. 2008). Further, the naturalization of certain spaces as "empty" or as "occupied" is often a political endeavor (Veracini 2011) that shapes who may play "host," who is a "guest," or who is displaced. As Lugones (2003) writes, there is no position on the map that is not criss-crossed by power, as "your spot lies at the intersection of all the spatial venues where you may, must, or cannot live or move. Those intersections also spatialize your relations and your condition with respect to the asymmetries of power that constitute those relations" (21).

The position that you occupy, in short, is shaped by the complex power relations that follow you and unfold wherever you go. Such a view, focusing on the politics of spatiality invited through social media, not just "in" it, permits the identification of new kinds of feminist relationality and selves that are imagined and practiced day to day. These include, as I discuss in this book, the imagined belonging in a vaguely transnational, multicultural feminist "community" in which there are certain rules and expectations for membership; new identity practices as a feminist involving continued learning, ongoing measurement, aspiration, and self-motivation; and relational practices with acquaintances, strangers, and loved ones. Such relationality is not bounded by the borders of each so-called platform (a label, which as Rianka Singh and Sarah Sharma (2019) note, can obfuscate more than it clarifies in its claim to neutral, flat space).

My use of the framework of everyday knowledge cultures is to describe and take seriously my participants' practices of knowledge seeking and accumulation. I also situate this drive to know within the classed social allocation and withholding of "epistemic status" (Pereira 2017), just as online culture conflates knowledge with access to information. In this vein, this book attends to how knowledge is enacted through its multifaceted mobilization—to gain access to resources, to make oneself intelligible, to handle the everyday. The everyday world, according to Philomena Essed (1991) in her germinal book on everyday racism, "is a world in which one must learn to maneuver and a world that one must learn to handle. . . . This at least includes knowledge of language, norms, customs and rules, and knowledge to use the means and resources that make living possible (or successful) in a given environment" (48).

Essed highlights the role of knowledge, both explicit and implicit—and its connection to means and resources—in navigating and orienting the self. In this book, then, I attend to explicit knowledge articulated and trans-

lated in the citation of concepts—*intersectionality*, *patriarchy*, and *privilege* as terms that circulate and are given by participants—as well as the tacit, implicit, and embodied knowledges that underpin knowledge practices.

METHODOLOGICAL AND PERSONAL FOUNDATIONS

Attending to the highly contextual, active, and everyday negotiation of feminist knowledge requires grappling with messiness, circling back, and revision. This book has notably been a challenge to write. I met with my participants three times over the space of two years, once in a group setting and twice in follow-up interviews, to give participants the possibility to revise and revisit their narratives—something that I had noticed was not easy on social media—and in order to track shifts over time. These interviews were designed as semistructured but in practice were led by what my participants sought to point out as meaningful in their feeds, and in their lives. Given the status of feminism as a set of beliefs without a clear canon (McRobbie 2009), I was thus oriented by what my participants defined as what "feminist social media" was for them. My participants engaged with a diverse range of social media—almost all with Instagram, and many with TikTok. YouTube was used by some who were devoted to watching long, thoughtful treatises on popular culture, and Facebook feminist groups were used by those who hadn't yet quit but otherwise had mostly abandoned Facebook. Many had loved but ceased to use Tumblr. Participants used social media to keep abreast of updates from news media, NGOs, and community organizations. In this instance, social media was more of a channel to relay happenings from elsewhere. But social media was also engaged with as a world of its own, with its own culture, reference points, debates, and movements, as with the content produced by the queer, feminist, and antiracist influencers participants followed. And sometimes an offline event would catalyze and then become dominated by its discursive life on social media—such as with the Met Gala faux pas of supermodel Cara Delevingne and politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, or the Hollywood litigation launched by Johnny Depp against Amber Heard in 2022.

The challenge of this book has also stemmed from trying to understand and contextualize, as best I could, the diverse life experiences of my participants themselves. These feminist young people had a variety of histories, backgrounds, and predilections. They were at different stages of their experience of youth, aged nineteen to twenty-eight in the first year of this

project, often meaning different experiences of employment, educational institutions, and, simply, life stages. They were students, writers, retail and hospitality workers, administrative and corporate professionals, and advocates at NGOs. While much research in youth studies with a social justice bent presumes the researcher has significantly more cultural and economic capital than participants (see also Stiegler 2024), this was not always the case for some of my participants who had impressive CVs and stellar career trajectories. Many had histories—as well as fresh experiences—of family, partner, and stranger violence. Some, despite setbacks, had clearly been high achievers throughout their lives and smoothly proceeded from school to university to full employment; others had had life events interrupt their educational and employment journeys; for others, class, disability, chronic illness, and neurodivergence had always narrowed what was practically possible. Most were Australian-born, but some were migrants working or who had worked toward permanent residency and citizenship. Ethnicities included Anglo-Celtic, Uruguayan, Bosnian, Venezuelan, Indian, Filipina, Indonesian, Timorese, French, German, Singaporean, Chinese, Nigerian, Taiwanese, Lebanese, Indigenous/Torres Strait Islander, Persian, Malay, Mauritian, Italian, and Greek, and, I note, these cultural designations did not always neatly map onto racial self-identifications of "person of color" (POC), "Black/Blak," or white. Though identities did not necessarily remain stable through the timeline of the project, approximately half identified as queer, and the vast majority were cisgender women, an identity I share. Those who had moved across gendered lines described themselves as trans women, trans masc, nonbinary, or questioning. All, however, had been personally addressed by mediated discourses of femininity for a substantial time in their lives, even if they did not currently identify as women or as femmes. In this book's emphasis on knowledge cultures, I signal racial or ethnic identity consistently when I quote my participants, and note class in relation to knowledge practices and position taking. I have adopted this admittedly imperfect practice to harness the insights of Lorraine Code (2006) and Maivân Clech Lâm (1994) in relation to how whiteness is central in the authorization of knowledge; and I draw on the work of Beverley Skeggs (2004), who explains how class is enacted through perspectives and practices that are then communicated as legitimate *knowledge*.

The broader challenges of this book, I must note, are also to do with grappling with my own perspective and the responsibilities of being a feminist scholar. Much of the time I felt straightforward empathy for and with my participants (if such straightforwardness is possible, given the problem-

atic history of empathy, as Carolyn Pedwell [2014] has written). Meeting with them several times, I recognized but was materially distanced from the pain, the struggles, the anxieties, and the joys they shared with me, insulated by my position as a researcher enjoying full-time employment who did not need social media in the same way as my young participants for my social life and connections with the world. But both as a privileged researcher and as a daughter of Japanese migrants in Australia, a settler colonial state in which fears of "the yellow peril" have been formative in national culture, I sometimes felt unease in the face of accounts of expertise and authority, practices that reinforced whiteness even and particularly as participants took care to acknowledge their white privilege and how they "couldn't know" the experience of a person of color. Sometimes I wished I could simply inhabit the position of just supporting what my participants said. I wondered if it was mean-spirited to question the intersectional intentions of some. I wanted (and want) to be a good feminist researcher—a "nice lady"—and take their words at face value. But my very desire for simpler feelings, and a simpler orientation to feminist work, reminded me of the complicated nature of power and identities. It also reminded me of how I was connected to my participants' own fears of anticipating conflict and punishment, their struggles to articulate their own perspectives in the mediated regulation of diversity.

In our differing positions, I am immensely grateful for the consistent, ongoing generosity and openness of my participants. This book would literally be nothing without them. For this reason, I think it most important, rather than dwelling on my own agonizations, to say something about the shared struggles of negotiating contemporary feminism in an age of seeming information abundance and ever-present scrutiny. For these young people, what emerged was a clear sense of the challenges of finding a sustainable but not sterile political orientation. For young people who are addressed as feminism's subjects of the future, being a contemporary feminist is often experienced as a continual series of individual "shoulds" and "oughts" in line with the "always on" rhythms of social media. The urgency of these challenges is also unevenly gendered; as Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (2011) have argued, women are often positioned as neoliberalism's ideal, flexible, self-improving subjects. This book shows how the pressures of mediated feminism operate differently according to the contextual complexity of one's own inhabiting of intersections. But there were clear patterns. The discourse of individual feminist responsibility, while not explicitly *naming* women as an audience, clearly addressed my women participants

on a personal, felt level. The intensity of this responsibility was also shot through by what one of my nonbinary participants termed an "uptick in misogyny" in a mediated world where criticism and abuse travels quickly, without context, without warning. As feminism becomes a set of expectations of cleaning up the world, it also becomes burdened with misogynistic expectations that devalue the work of care, and that view women as sites of intervention and blame, to be stripped of their privilege when progress isn't quick enough or falls short.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

By now, I hope it is clear that the "new" politics described in this book are situated very much in existing social and cultural stratifications and histories. But as I describe in the first two chapters in part I of this book, these politics also derive from a preoccupation with the constantly new and a desire to stay on top of continual updates and hot-button topics. Part I outlines the cultural and conceptual norms of online feminist knowledge cultures, beginning by situating the deeply felt, embodied expectations of being a good feminist knower. In chapter 1, "Everyday Reactivism, or, Never Look Away," I track the moral imperative for online feminists to rapidly and correctly react to whatever they are presented with. This required my young participants to be "always ready": ready to use what resources were on offer; to always already know about the issues that they were accessing through their social media feeds; and to immediately take a visible stance to show where they stood. In short, they were required to show the right feelings, positions, and hot takes in relation to a range of issues; such feelings were connected to the display of knowledge. Young people felt intense pressures not only to check all boxes but to do so continuously, rapidly, in response to the flows and rhythms of online culture. Such orientations required significant and constant emotional energy connected to the demands of always already knowing and furnished a standard of being algorithmically tuned into the pain of the world. Removing oneself from this interpellating stream of content, while pragmatically necessary at times, was seen as deviating from a rule. As one white participant guiltily put it when discussing her deliberate withdrawal from online culture at times: "I realize that I have the privilege to disconnect from issues." This vigilant orientation also led to the felt need to have a stance on particular issues.

For my younger participants in particular, the felt imperative to take a stand was draining—as well as anxiety provoking, given the constantly

looming threat of punitive reactions ranging from shunning to abuse. With the exception of those working in collectives or for professional social justice organizations, the continuous stretching across numerous issues and the potential fallout meant that most participants did not regularly post or talk publicly on social media. The god's-eye view of the world accessed through digital culture opened up a flow of often US-centered content that one "had to know" but that did not necessarily open pathways for local action. "Social justice burnout," as evinced a number of my participants, "is real"; and digital culture, while offering rich experiences to learn from—serving as a personal "woke manual," as one participant put it—also opened the door to continual demands beyond the pressures and stresses from study, work, and other areas of participants' lives.

In chapter 2, "In Your Lane and Knowing Your Place," I outline how feminist social media culture lays a common ground for participation, requiring that you know where you belong in the landscape of identity oppression. This common ground was often defined, simply, as "intersectionality," and set the contemporary boundaries, relationalities, and inhabitable positions of feminist culture for my participants. It was the most cited concept by my cohort overall; it indexed inclusive feminist futures moving beyond an exclusionary past. In a sense, it was both a map—and a compass. It told you where you were but also directed you where to look. But its uses often diverged from its critical origins, as Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013) have noted, paradoxically, in its rapid and frequent circulation, and in the desire for a better, up-to-date feminism, becoming a static concept limiting room to move and maneuver.

Broadly, intersectionality, as it circulated in social media culture, explained belonging and exclusion to my participants, directing them to particular concerns, and making certain deficits visible. But the application of intersectionality operated differently because of the unequal terrain that my participants negotiated. My white participants were invested in showing intersectionality as a framework "close to hand" (Ahmed 2019); they evinced an earnestness to display a full embrace of the concept that translated into following people of color online and buying their art and writing (see also Edmond 2022). For my white middle-class feminists, intersectional feminism was an idealized feminism, something that served or "platformed" others, putting them on the map, echoing the "deference politics" critiqued by Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò (2022). But because of intersectionality's practical translation as infinite inclusion and acknowledgment of injury, this openness had to be defined and tabulated in order to be manageable,

particularly when participants were frequently overwhelmed by the continuous online flow of claims of need, harm, and oppression to which they were exposed. This in turn was shaped by what Paul Gilroy called the turn to "generic racial identity," in which a "fantasy version of African-American culture" is exported via global consumer culture, turning the historical differences of the world into a single, Western-oriented currency capturing "privilege" versus "disadvantage" (Gilroy and Yancy 2015).

Online, this meant that the application of an intersectional framework involved the counting of multiple oppressions as though they were fungible units, seen in participants' fears of claiming and overclaiming oppressions and attention in the online economy. The obverse of this was that "privileged" categories such as whiteness moved to the background, with other "disadvantaged" intersections being brought forward, shielding whiteness from visibility. More broadly, then, intersectionality was not simply a framework to be mobilized in connection with participants' encounters with injustice. Rather, it was a synecdoche for how feminists positioned themselves in an imagined relationality with other feminists, constructing relations of who always already belonged in feminism and who needed to be welcomed into belonging.

Part II of the book explores in more detail the patterns of personal negotiation of these recognized frameworks and rules. Chapter 3, "Leadership Journeys and Intersectional Resources," explains how the understanding of a journey of self-empowerment and inclusive leadership was ingrained as a means of navigating the feminist intersectional grid; but the material resources and conditions to do so sustainably were often not to hand. In much feminist media studies literature, scholars have identified the push for empowerment and "girlpower" as one of the central and dominant translations of feminism in the public sphere (Banet-Weiser 2018; Dobson and Harris 2015; Edell et al. 2018), and this was reinforced by feminist social media culture carrying high expectations of individual agency and its instrumentalization through the visible use of voice online. Leadership was something that my participants discussed across differing class backgrounds and ethnicities, as injunctions to "be the change" were indeed pervasive in the cultural and institutional environments that shaped my young participants' lives.

Leadership thus provided a lens through which participants understood the direction of their lives. It required them to be individual role models, and set an ascending line they were meant to climb. It also brought significant pressures and an associated vocabulary of continual growth and

self-improvement through which to describe their experience. As Shani Orgad and Rosalind Gill (2021) have argued, the language of confidence has become omnipresent in feminized media culture. Of course, this vocabulary and relationality did sometimes seem to fit the trajectory of some of my participants. But sometimes the disjuncture between this narration of ongoing empowerment and its palpable lack of self-confidence was striking to me, as I discussed with one white working-class participant in particular. The sheer accessibility of the language of individual leadership and self-empowerment often obscured the real material, classed, and gendered challenges that my feminists were negotiating.

This leadership claim was also underlined by the language of inclusion, bringing people to the table, inevitably centering a speaker who was "better off" than the named subject of inclusion. Privileged feminists thus were directed to negate or background their own experiences, and enthusiastically embrace inclusion as the pillar on which their authority rested. Their included counterparts notably showed a much more ambivalent orientation in connection with intersectional leadership. As Mariana Ortega (2006) describes in the "great wanting" for white feminists for intersectionality, intensified by the accessibility and "always on" nature of social media culture, disadvantaged identities and experiences could be converted into resources for others' intersectional journeys of leadership and discovery. These journeys could mean the experience of extension for some, and the experience of fixing, objectification, and classification for others. But the young feminists who were also more "privileged" on paper—that is, white, middle-class, ambitious, and talented—showed how they also were used up and burned out in their efforts to actually embody feminist leadership in fighting the everydayness of harassment and abuse of power in their organizations. They, too, were frozen in place in other ways. For many, in the inward-looking gaze of the intersectional grid, men, with the exception of obvious, high-profile abusers, were largely exempt from everyday scrutiny; these young women thus were understood as the most privileged feminist identities in this grid, creating ongoing anxieties in the compulsion to account for themselves.

Chapter 4 is simply named "Don't Be That Girl." It describes how my young feminists' identities were centrally regulated by this injunction, which circulated repetitively, implicitly, and explicitly through pop culture news cycles in their social media feeds. In feminist social media cultures that simultaneously promoted the twin imperatives to be visible and to scrutinize, to be publicly visible meant you were always possibly about to be

taught a lesson about right and wrong. And yet, while it was underlined that right and wrong were clear, inhabitable positions, the line between getting it right (being authentic and correct) and getting it wrong (being "fake" or "performative") was often slippery in practice. This was because the position of feminist guardian meant you had to remain constantly vigilant and ready to react; it promoted a lens of readiness to critique, or to ostracize, on the basis of a heuristic of red flags. Certain identities were more likely to trigger these flags, on the basis of one's being presumed to be more open or more closed, more privileged or more disadvantaged. The more visible, and thus, presumably privileged, a woman was in popular culture, the more likely she would, at some point, attract such critique. An ever-moving social media feast of famous women who were denounced as problematic, or simply fake, showed how identities were turned into texts to be analyzed, magnifying women's absences and missteps, often under the guise that they needed to be taught an intersectional lesson. To elude this disciplining was a feat: in the words of one of my participants on a feminist public figure she followed on Instagram, "She literally hasn't fucked up once and that I cannot believe."

The gendered nature of these everyday practices of critique, ostracization, and denunciation illustrated the paradox my participants found themselves in. To be feminist was to adopt ever-higher standards of what could be expected of individual women, as certain types of feminism were conflated with certain types of women that were constantly put under the microscope and found wanting. This had a direct impact not only on my participants who were women but also on the spheres of possible action for my participants of other genders who did not possess socially recognized masculine entitlements to space. Combined with unsustainable demands of being in the know and the anxieties of continual public comparison and anticipated callouts, this produced an untenable position for many. "Girlboss" feminism was unanimously rejected, but often most vehemently by young women who indeed sought to be leaders. White middle-class participants, in particular, adopted a sophisticated, mobile lexicon of disavowal. In the constant dance of association/disassociation in these connective cultures of judgment, to protect your own position as a good feminist, you could not align yourself or show an affinity with a woman or feminist in the public eye without carefully demonstrating your knowledge of their potential problematic elements and associations. As Ahmed (2012) notes in relation to the unhappy performativity of declarations, a description of a problem can be protective; you might insulate yourself against critique.

The final part of this book makes the argument for slowing down and lowering the stakes of everyday feminism, and resetting the terms of the relationship among structure, the individual, and the everyday. Too often, the most accessible imaginaries of feminist collectivity for my participants were in fact hierarchical, competitive, and demanding: an aggregate of individual actions rather than a complex tapestry of interdependence. They lived in a mediated world where they were continually confronted with the increasingly mainstream circulation of extreme and blatant cis- and trans-misogyny. They were always on. My participants found it difficult to rest. They had punishing expectations of their own individual political efficacy, in a world where paying attention to one's own needs was a gratification to be always deferred. In chapter 5, "Quiet Publics and Lowercase Feminism," I suggest that feminisms in the local, repetitive domains of the everyday should be oriented toward mutual sustenance. This requires a more modest view, alive to the possibilities of felt connections or "little bridges." These included spaces that were not formally activist or feminist but instead offered low-stakes, welcoming social spaces, such as trans-inclusive sporting groups and university social clubs. In the space and time to listen, podcasts became quiet publics of low-risk feminist sociality. They provided a temporality and spatiality of connection for embodied actors whose dialogue could not simply be reduced to an informational text, scrolled past in a matter of seconds. In the plurality of voices they often showcased, they also provided positions that could be tried out, thought through, and compared with one's own personal experience. Importantly, apart from the podcast as a medium, these spaces could not necessarily be replicated en masse, but the practices that created such spatiotemporalities *could* be adopted in the everyday. Their delimited duration and place-based nature was part of the important work of grounding, bridging, and allowing spaces of co-presence and co-dwelling.

My participants were pushed to always move on: from one news event, scandal, or problematic situation to another; from occupying the position of being a beneficiary of feminism to being an agentic guardian of it. In chapter 6, "Registering Experience: Moving Between, but Not Moving On," I suggest that in everyday contexts, what most benefited my feminist participants was a sense of being brought back to earth, without being cut down from a lofty height, a grounding that enabled them to practice not a purportedly intersectional bird's-eye view but a continual transversal gaze from self to other (Yuval-Davis 2023). I show how this movement allowed for a sense of being held, and for comparison, reflection, and the space to

learn from nonidentical experiences. This was particularly powerful for participants with disabilities, chronic illnesses, and reproductive and sexual health issues, and for those who wondered why their intimate relationships always made them feel less than worthy. A feminist framework helped them to sense that a lack of credibility and legitimacy was *not their fault*. While hardly a silver bullet, it helped them to not give up, to continue the search for adaptive measures, the right diagnosis, more respect. As such, the most potent aspects of online feminist knowledge cultures did not necessarily lie in the big concepts of "patriarchy," "intersectionality," "neoliberalism," and so on. In the everyday, what enlivened my young feminists was a general, nonspecific affective shift in feeling what was unfair and what ought to be the norm. Feminism was also most sustaining as a sense of permission and mutual attention. What was most rewarding in university classrooms, in vernacular niches of online discussion, and even in the group workshops of my project was the acknowledgment and legitimacy of partial knowing and attending to personal experience. Specific experience-focused, anonymous spaces of online discussion also validated attending to the minutiae of everyday experience, theorizing from the bottom up, as opposed to applying a category across the board. Such affective orientations did not have the same appearance of an aggregate of thousands of "likes" or comments but allowed my feminist participants a temporality and spatiality that permitted them to pause, catch their breath, and go on.

This final observation signals that we cannot give up on the possibilities of mediated or online feminism, but we do need to better understand the material everyday conditions in which young people are situated, to more rigorously conceptualize what is possible and sustainable in the rhythms and spatialities of the everyday. In particular, everyday feelings are crucial to understanding the politics of commonsense knowledges, their effects, and how they interweave the personal, the social, and the structural. We cannot reduce knowledge, mediated online or otherwise, to a "tool" or "resource," or to abstract ideas that can be picked up or discarded, and divorced from the self. Feminist knowledge engenders certain orientations, and while feminist theorizing of the world can help to explain dating mishaps, relationship breakdowns, violence, being overlooked at work, or emotional exhaustion, it is not something that can neatly be left behind. Despite the clear demands that my participants faced in their "always on" worlds, the fact that they elected to share their time with me, a stranger, at multiple points over several years, I think signifies an investment in feminism that cannot simply be erased or worn away.

In concluding, I make the call that in an increasingly mediatized world, we need more everyday poetry, not more information. By poetry, I refer to Louise Rosenblatt's notion of reading as poetic transaction, requiring spaces of imagining, lingering, and dwelling that counter the objectification of knowledge, identity, and experience into calculable units and linear relationalities. The mandates of transparency, authenticity, and visibility in social media culture translated ideas into binary terms and imbued them with a moralizing force: *passive* or *active*; *feminist* or *patriarchal*; *feminist* or *complicit*; *good* or *bad*. Most disturbingly, the subjectivity of feminist "knower" positioned my young feminists as always already knowing and inoculated against harm, and thus put them to work in highly individualized ways. They were pushed to adopt the language of leadership and inclusion in hollow terms that did not necessarily serve themselves or others; they were encouraged and authorized to turn on women as failing to embody the ever-moving, ever-higher standards of "good" feminism to which they subjected themselves; and they were, paradoxically, prohibited from taking up space on the basis of the gendered politics of their own experience. What they needed were spaces of sociality that helped them to endure without defensiveness, the time to listen and be listened to, and the validation that they, too, were living with and affected by the violence of this current moment.