

The Case for Feminism

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Do you call yourself a feminist? If so, you're in the minority. According to one poll, only 18 percent of Americans use that word to describe themselves.¹ Why so few? In part, it may be because harsh stereotypes of feminists abound. Feminists are angry, loud-mouthed man-haters who want women to rule the world, right? If this is what it means to be a feminist, few people will proudly claim the label. But this raises the question: What *does* it mean to be a feminist today?

It may be a sign of women's progress that a growing number of people have begun to question the need for feminism.² Indeed, contemporary feminists would be remiss to deny the great strides women have made since the movement's origins in the late eighteenth century. Not that long ago, women couldn't vote, own property, pursue an education, file for divorce, or legally accuse their husbands of rape. It's thanks to feminism's forerunners that Western women no longer endure such formal disadvantages. Yet we'd be equally remiss to deny the ongoing reality of gendered violence and oppression in Western society today. Feminism remains vitally important.

This chapter presents the case for Western feminism, with a particular focus on the American campus context. I focus on the American context not because feminism is most urgent here, but because the argument for feminism elsewhere is relatively easier to make. In many parts of the world, feminists are still battling women's hunger, child marriage, forced female genital cutting, female infanticide, compulsory veiling, the widespread lack of education for girls, and more. If there's a legitimate controversy about the importance of feminism, it's in places where these problems have largely (though not entirely!) been addressed.³

1. What Is Feminism?

“I’m automatically attracted to beautiful [women]—I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star they let you do it. You can do anything. . . . Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything.”⁴ Many feminists were dismayed when they heard presidential candidate Donald Trump utter these words. After all, the refusal to “even wait” to kiss or grab a woman demonstrates an overt disregard for her agency and an egregious abuse of power. That he was elected regardless suggested to many that Trump’s disrespectful attitude toward women may be widespread. Indeed, it’s telling that Trump excused himself not by suggesting that he’d made an idiosyncratic, one-off remark. Instead, Trump noted the prevalence of such talk, or “locker room banter” as he called it, stating that, “Bill Clinton has said far worse to me on the golf course.”⁵

Regardless of what Bill Clinton may or may not have said, Trump is certainly correct that he’s far from alone in treating women as sex objects. We can say that a person is treated as a sex object when she’s used as a tool for another’s sexual purposes without her consent.⁶ To be kissed, groped, or penetrated without your consent is to be seriously violated; it’s to be treated less like a self-ruling agent and more like a thing. Women today routinely face such violations, whether they take the form of sexual harassment, assault, or rape. The size of the recent #MeToo movement demonstrates this point vividly. In the wake of revelations of widespread sexual abuse by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, millions of women across varying levels of privilege joined together online to share their experiences of sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, and sexual violence with the Twitter hashtag “Me Too.” Individual stories range in severity, but the ubiquity of accusations points to an overwhelmingly common experience of violation at the hands of men. In addition to these harms, feminists identify other forms of violence that disproportionately target women as a group, such as marital rape (not made illegal in the United

States until 1993), coercive controlling violence or “intimate terrorism,”⁷ and intimate partner homicide.⁸

Such realities have led many feminists to conclude that women are oppressed. In fact, Marilyn Frye calls this “a fundamental claim of feminism.”⁹ But what does it mean to be oppressed? Feminist Daniel Silvermint offers a helpful definition: a person is oppressed when their objective well-being is pervasively and wrongfully hindered. Objective well-being refers to those elements that make life better, such as “having self-respect, making progress in your plans and projects, being happy, experiencing connection, having and exercising autonomy, being secure, being healthy, and possessing at least some items of material value or other valuable external goods.”¹⁰ If any of these elements is pervasively and wrongfully hindered, this view says that you are oppressed.

Consider the prevalence of sexual violence against women on campus.¹¹ While individual reactions to rape vary, victims tend to suffer a host of deleterious physical, emotional, and behavioral consequences, collectively termed “rape trauma syndrome.”¹² As a result, many elements of victims’ objective well-being are compromised—for example, their ability to have self-respect, exercise autonomy, make progress in their plans, be happy, or be secure. Not only that, but the prevalence of rape is just one element of a larger “rape culture.” Rape culture refers to the *normalization* of women’s sexual violability in Western culture, as seen in widespread depictions of coercive sexual interactions with women in mainstream pornography, music, film, and more. For many feminists, rape culture, sexism, and ongoing violence against women demonstrate that women as a group experience systematic and wrongful harm. They are thus oppressed.

But what exactly does it mean to say women *as a group* are oppressed? Is the queen of England oppressed?¹³ If so, does her oppression share anything in common with that of a disabled white mother on welfare? Or a Hispanic trans woman in prison? Feminists have theorized women's oppression since the dawn of the nineteenth century. But it was early black feminists who first noted the shortcomings with stand-alone treatments of sexism—and thus the need for *intersectionality*. It may be fine for the law to treat black men as victims of racism, or white women as victims of sexism. But how should the law treat black women? Since black women are not black *or* women—but rather *black women*—to treat them as victims of sexism alone (or racism alone) risks erasing their experience at the intersection. Indeed, this is precisely what happened in the 1970s when General Motors was brought up on charges of discrimination against black women employees.¹⁴ In its defense, General Motors claimed it did not discriminate against blacks or women—it employed black men and white women. General Motors escaped discrimination charges only because black women are neither black men nor white women. Positioned at the intersection, black women were ignored.

In their battle against oppression, modern feminists pull from these insights. They maintain that an adequate feminism must acknowledge that gender is raced and race is gendered, while appreciating also that race and gender intersect with further aspects of identity—such as religion, age, class, ethnicity, and sexuality. In other words, modern feminism acknowledges that “a real-life person is not . . . a woman on Monday, a member of the working class on Tuesday, and a woman of African descent on Wednesday.”¹⁵ Today's feminists thus respond to the charge that past feminists purported to speak for *all* women while in fact speaking only for a *particular* type of woman—namely, a white, middle-class, heterosexual, and cisgender one. In so doing, modern feminism cautions against simple generalizations that lump all women

together under the heading “oppressed,” including the queen, the mother on welfare, and the trans woman in prison. After all, the queen’s experience of her gender is inextricably bound up with her royal status. Is she oppressed, let alone in any way that resembles the experience of the mother on welfare, or the trans woman in prison? Such examples motivate intersectional feminism’s rejection of sweeping claims about the oppression of any one group such as “women,” since oppression is experienced differently—or not at all—by a group’s different members. Thus enlarged in scope, modern feminism is best defined as the intersectional movement to combat gender oppression.

2. Gender Oppression

With this background in mind, we can begin to explore some manifestations of gender oppression in the West. Consider first the prevalence of the *gender binary*. The gender binary says there are only two biological sexes (male and female) that correspond to only two gender expressions (masculine and feminine) and only two gender roles (man and woman). The gender binary is also *heteronormative*—it says heterosexuality is natural and normal for men and women. Consider what people sometimes say to a pregnant friend upon discovering their fetus is sexed male. The fetus kicks and a friend exclaims, “He’s going to be a football player!” Together, the friends fantasize about the child’s future, and the kind of woman he may one day marry. Based only on the fetus’s assigned sex, a host of assumptions about the future child’s gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation are made. If this sounds like a familiar narrative, it’s because it reflects the gender binary—the dominant view of gender in our culture’s imaginary.

Importantly for contemporary feminists, the gender binary is also *punitive*; it deems any deviation from itself abnormal or wrong, with oppressive, violent, and even fatal consequences for those who don’t conform—such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex,¹⁶ transgender, and genderqueer individuals. Those who deviate in less overt ways from the gender binary are also

punished for doing so, such as cisgender heterosexual women and men who defy expected norms of feminine or masculine expression. For example, feminist philosopher Kate Manne argues that misogyny is best understood as the set of negative consequences visited upon women who violate norms of “good” femininity. These norms suggest that ideal women serve the dominant men in their lives with various goods such as adoration, praise, sexual services, food, comfort, and so on.¹⁷ “Good” women are “men’s attentive, loving subordinates.”¹⁸ These aren’t the women misogyny targets. To the contrary, women who play the part of men’s attentive, loving subordinates are rewarded — not punished. “Bad” women, on the other hand, violate these expectations—and are punished as a result.

Consider, for instance, the disparate reactions to women versus men in positions of authority on campus. Some studies have found that students give lower ratings to instructors they believe are women as opposed to men.¹⁹ Another study suggests that women professors are rated more highly when they conform to feminine gender expectations such as being nurturing.²⁰ This same study also found that students use gender-specific derogatory language to describe women professors they dislike, such as “bitch, bitchy, bitch toward male students, witch, and feminazi.”²¹ Such language suggests that students are disappointed in their women professors not simply as professors but as *women* who fail to live up to norms of “good” femininity.²²

Norms of “good” femininity are also at play in campus sex. Indeed, attention to norms of “good” femininity complicates all-too-simple discussions of campus sex that focus nearly exclusively on the buzzword *consent*. Granted, affirmative consent is important — consent that is conscious, unambiguous, and voluntary. However, feminism also reminds us that campus sex takes place in a wider social context that teaches women to please or submit in line with norms of “good” femininity. This means that women may sometimes consent to sex not because they *truly*

want it. Rather, they may consent to sex because they want to please men, serve men, or avoid negative consequences such as being called a “tease” or a “prude” by disappointed men.

The gender binary also pressures women to adhere to expensive, time-consuming, and stringent standards of feminine appearance. Mirror space in women’s bathrooms can resemble a veritable battleground shortly before an off-campus party. Whether women obey or resist feminine appearance norms, several elements of their well-being may be hindered, including their happiness, health, self-respect, self-determination, and even employment prospects.²³

For instance, sexualized depictions of extremely thin women pervade the media so much so that we often see them in inapt contexts, such as advertisements for food and cars. Or, consider feminine beauty norms like the expectation to “prettify” yourself by shaving your legs, waxing your eyebrows, dyeing your hair, manicuring your nails, or wearing makeup. Across race and class lines, women devote countless hours (not to mention funds) to cultivating their appearance because the beauty industry tells them their natural bodies are inadequate. In addition to such pressures, common practices like catcalling or ranking women on a ten-point scale of “hotness” also cause many women to feel they are undergoing a constant evaluation of their appearance. Unsurprisingly, women internalize these constant messages, often with dire consequences; ongoing media and social pressure to be thin and sexy has been linked to the high prevalence of eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia among women.²⁴

To appreciate some especially oppressive effects of the gender binary, let’s look to those who are *gender variant*, such as transgender and genderqueer people. Transgender people’s gender identity differs from that typically associated with their birth-assigned sex. This is in contrast to cisgender people—the Latin *cis* meaning “on the same side as.” For example, if you were designated male at birth and identify as a woman, you are transgender. If you were designated

male at birth and identify as a man, you are cisgender. Some trans people reject the traditional gender binary entirely and identify as neither exclusively a man nor a woman; these people are genderqueer.²⁵ Consider now the prevalence of transphobia—prejudice against trans people. Trans people widely report experiences of harassment and discrimination from many sources such as housing facilities, employers, health care providers, police officers, and retail store owners.²⁶ Such harassment and discrimination hinder many elements of trans people’s well-being such as their happiness, health, financial security, and safety. For instance, compared to the general US population, trans people experience twice the rate of poverty and three times the rate of unemployment.²⁷ Trans people are also overrepresented in jails, prisons, and detention centers, where they may be placed in gender-inappropriate facilities and suffer physical or sexual assault.²⁸ Finally, according to a survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality, trans people are a staggering nine times more likely than the general US population to attempt suicide.²⁹

As an intersectional approach would predict, identity factors also complicate *which* trans individuals experience the most oppression. For instance, trans people of color and trans people with disabilities report even higher rates of poverty and unemployment.³⁰ As Peter Cava explains, trans people experience varying degrees of oppression based on their “race, class, physical ability, mental ability, sexual orientation, age, religion, nationality, immigration status, body size, and other identities. It also matters whether we are transfeminine or transmasculine, whether we live as trans part-time or full-time, whether we transition hormonally, whether we transition surgically, and whether we are read as members of our self-identified genders.”³¹ In other words, not all trans people face similar obstacles, and the ones they do face are significantly shaped by their particular identities.

In keeping with contemporary feminist theory, feminist activism on campus has also become notably more intersectional. On Valentine's day, for instance, many college campuses participate in V-Day—a global movement to end violence against women. V-Day was started by activist and playwright Eve Ensler. As part of the event, many college campuses perform Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*—a celebrated political play about women's experiences with sex, rape, sexual assault, childbirth, menstruation, vaginal health, and more. However, students across campuses have sought to add a more diverse set of experiences to Ensler's original production, first performed in 1996.³² On my own campus for instance, students organized a remixed version of the play to include selections by women of color, trans, and genderqueer individuals in an effort to draw attention to varied gender identities and expressions. Indeed, it's crucial to acknowledge the experiences of trans and genderqueer students in campus discussions about sexual violence and assault; according to one recent study, the highest rates of sexual assault and misconduct were reported by female, transgender, and genderqueer students.³³

Feminist analyses are more successful when they theorize oppression through an intersectional lens. The more attentive feminists are to the differences among us, the more accurate our feminism will be. For instance, like feminists of the past, feminists today are sometimes criticized for offering theories of oppression insufficiently attentive to race and class dynamics.³⁴ Others have invented terms to capture further intersectional realities. For instance, Moya Bailey coined the term *misogynoir* to describe the sexism directed toward black women in particular. The term *transmisogynoir* was also invented to capture the fact that “Being trans comes at a high cost, but being black and trans can cost you your life.”³⁵ But despite their observation of such patterns, intersectional feminists remind us not to assume a shared experience for *all* black trans women or *all* white cis men—or *all* the members of any group for that matter.

In sum, deviations from the gender binary have discriminatory and often oppressive consequences for those who don't conform. However, whether you're a victim of oppression also depends crucially on your particular experience as shaped by the many facets of your identity.³⁶ Instead of promoting blanket generalizations, an intersectional feminist approach highlights the internal diversity within groups in an effort to describe more accurately which people tend to experience the worst hindrances to their well-being.

3. Challenges for Intersectional Feminism

Intersectionality has been dubbed “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies . . . has made so far.”³⁷ The explosion of intersectional theory in the humanities has been remarkable. Among the many disciplines that make use of intersectionality are history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, ethnic studies, queer studies, feminist studies, legal studies, and the humanities more broadly.³⁸ But major uptake of any theory comes with its own problems. One such problem concerns misapplications of intersectionality that reinforce a flawed view of identity. That is, although intersectionality is a tool that helps us understand oppression,³⁹ it can be misapplied to foster oppositional, painful, or static understandings of identity.

Consider one example. To teach intersectionality, many college campuses employ an educational exercise called the privilege walk. A privilege walk begins with all students standing in a straight line. Students take one step forward or back depending on how privileged they are with respect to a particular question. Is English your first language? If yes, step forward. Can you find Band-Aids the color of your skin at the local convenience store? If no, step back. Can you walk alone at night without fear? If yes, step forward. Can you kiss your partner in public without fear of ridicule or violence? If no, step back. At the end of a privilege walk, students are in a fixed spatial arrangement that visually represents their various degrees of privilege. The benefits of such an exercise are clear; it teaches awareness of how certain aspects of your identity make life

more easily lived. It also teaches students to think critically about parts of their identity they never saw as related to privilege.

Yet there are risks too. First, the privilege walk threatens to teach students to divide themselves into two main opposing camps: privileged versus oppressed. If the “oppressed” are regarded as victims of the “privileged,” then sentiments of good will and generosity can quickly be replaced by sentiments of ill will and resentment. Consider an opinion piece in which one student wrote that “ontologically speaking, white death will mean liberation for all. . . . Until then, remember this: I hate you because you shouldn’t exist.”⁴⁰ To be clear, such a reprehensible view is certainly not the guaranteed result of an exercise like the privilege walk. However, the “us-versus-them” thinking encouraged by such an exercise can increase the chances that fellow students regard each other as group enemies rather than individual peers.⁴¹ In brief, no educational environment can thrive if students are taught to homogenize or hate the members of any identity group—be it “Muslim students,” “trans students,” “cis male students,” “white students,” or what have you.

A second drawback to an exercise like the “privilege walk” that attempts to teach intersectionality is the risk that a particular interpretation of your identity becomes all-significant—to be a person of color *is* to be marginalized, and nothing more. What takes center stage here is an attachment to identity framed as *injury*—as painful deviation from the norm.⁴² As Wendy Brown explains, “in its emergence as a protest against marginalization or subordination, politicized identity thus becomes attached to its own exclusion. . . . [It] makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics; it can hold out no future—for itself or others—that triumphs over this pain.”⁴³ In other words, though there’s

certainly a place for it, preoccupation with a wounded notion of identity can also preclude more positive ways of understanding it.

A third and final drawback to the privilege walk exercise is that it risks treating identities as if they are just as fixed in space as the geographic arrangement of the students. On this model, an individual is pinned down, “boxed into its site on the culture map. Gridlock.”⁴⁴ Obsessed as it is with fixing one’s place in the privilege–oppression matrix, the privilege walk risks blocking the potential for more fluid forms of identification.⁴⁵ What do I foreclose about who I am or could be when I proclaim I *am* “heterosexual,” “cisgender,” “white”? Are we all reducible to the locations on the matrix that we declare? Are the labels we proclaim merely descriptive? Or, in repeatedly proclaiming them, do we risk prescribing a model for how we *must* live and identify? As Anthony Appiah warns:

What demanding respect for people *as Blacks* or *as gays* requires is that there be some scripts that go with being an African-American or having same-sex desires. There will be proper ways of being black and gay: there will be expectations to be met; demands will be made. It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will want to ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another.⁴⁶

With such scripts in place, we risk becoming attached to a pre-defined understanding of what our identities are and forever must be.

Intersectional theory doesn’t force us into oppositional, wounded, or fixed identities—and perhaps the privilege walk can be taught in ways that don’t promote these identities. But like everything else, intersectional theory—and certain pedagogical tools—can be misapplied.

4. Conclusion

Intersectional feminism is a valuable way to understand oppressive power structures and overlapping axes of identity. It also improves upon past versions of feminism that were insufficiently attentive to the differences among women, as well as the many manifestations of gender discrimination and oppression. But although intersectionality provides a powerful diagnostic tool, it mustn't be used to cement an oppositional, melancholic, or rigid understanding of identity. We must remain committed to a vision of the future that welcomes pleasurable, emancipatory, and fluid ways of inhabiting identity.⁴⁷

Notes

¹ Kliff, Sarah. "Only 18 percent of Americans consider themselves feminists." *Vox*, April 8, 2015. <https://www.vox.com/2015/4/8/8372417/feminist-gender-equality-poll>

² According to a 2016 Washington Post survey, approximately 16 percent of women under thirty-five and one third of women over thirty-five think American feminism is "outdated." Cai, Weiyi and Scott Clement. "What Americans think about feminism today." *The Washington Post*, January 27, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/feminism-project/poll/?noredirect=on>

³ I also leave unaddressed non-Western critiques of the way some Western feminists have approached these topics. See, for instance: Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984); Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Gary

Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 280–287; Narayan, Uma.

Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁴ Mathis-Lilley, Ben. “Trump Was Recorded in 2005 Bragging About Grabbing Women “by the Pussy.” *Slate*, October 7, 2016. [http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slat-](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slat-est/2016/10/07/donald_trump_2005_tape_i_grab_women_by_the_pussy.html)

[est/2016/10/07/donald_trump_2005_tape_i_grab_women_by_the_pussy.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slat-est/2016/10/07/donald_trump_2005_tape_i_grab_women_by_the_pussy.html)

⁵ Mathis-Lilley, “Trump.”

⁶ On her “consent-objectification account,” Patricia Marino defines wrongful instrumental use as follows: “A uses B as a genuine tool of A’s purposes, really as a thing, when A fails to consider B’s decisions, when A coerces B, or deceives B or simply forces B to do what A wants.” For Marino, objectification itself is not wrong, but only *non-consensual* objectification. Patricia Marino. “The Ethics of Sexual Objectification: Autonomy and Consent” *Inquiry* 51, no. 4 (July 2008), 351.

⁷ The aim of intimate terrorism is control of one’s partner. Johnson, Michael P. “Langhinrichsen-Rolling’s Confirmation of the Feminist Analysis of Intimate Partner Violence: Comment on ‘Controversies Involving Gender and Intimate Partner Violence in the United States.’” *Sex Roles* 62 (2010), 213.

⁸ Catalano, Shannan, Erica Smith, Howard Snyder, and Michael Rand. “Female Victims of Violence.” *Bureau of Justice Statistics Selected Findings* (2009). <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2020>

⁹ Frye, Marilyn. *The Politics of Reality*. (New York: The Crossing Press, 1983), p. 1.

¹⁰ Silvermint, Daniel. “Feminist Perspectives on Sexism and Oppression.” In *Philosophy: Feminism, Macmillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks*, edited By Carol Hay. (Gale: Cengage Learning, 2017), 37–69, p. 63.

¹¹Anderson, Nick and Scott Clement. “1 in 5 Women Say They Were Violated.” *Washington Post*, June 12, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/local/2015/06/12/1-in-5-women-say-they-were-violated>. See also Sinozich, Sofi and Lynn Langton. “Rape and Sexual Assault Victimization among College-Age Females, 1995–2013.” *Bureau of Justice Statistics* (2014). <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsavcaf9513.pdf>

¹²Burgess, Ann Wolbert and Lynda Lytle Holmström. “Rape Trauma Syndrome.” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 131, no. 9 (1974), 981–986.

¹³ I borrow this example from Mari Mikkola. Mikkola, Mari. *The Wrong of Injustice: Dehumanization and its Role in Feminist Philosophy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁴ Feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term *intersectionality*, famously describes the case of five black women employees who lost their jobs in a GM seniority-based layoff. Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989), 141.

¹⁵ Russell, Kathryn. “Feminist Dialectics and Marxist Theory.” *Radical Philosophy Review* 10, no. 1 (2007), 33–54.

¹⁶ Intersex people are born with a sexual anatomy or sex characteristics that don’t align neatly with typical definitions of either male or female embodiment.

¹⁷ Manne, Kate. *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 110.

¹⁸ Manne, *Down Girl*, 49.

¹⁹ See MacNell, Lillian, Adam Driscoll, and Andrea N. Hunt. “What’s in a Name: Exposing Gender Bias in Student Ratings of Teaching.” *Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy* 0 (2015);

Boring, Anne, Kellie Ottoboni, and Philip B. Stark. “Student evaluations of teaching (mostly) do not measure teaching effectiveness.” *ScienceOpen Research* (2016). [https://](https://www.scienceopen.com/document?vid=818d8ec0-5908-47d8-86b4-5dc38f04b23e)

www.scienceopen.com/document?vid=818d8ec0-5908-47d8-86b4-5dc38f04b23e

²⁰ Sprague, Joey and Kelley Massoni, “Student Evaluations and Gendered Expectations: What We Can’t Count Can Hurt Us.” *Sex Roles* 53, nos. 11/12 (2005), 791.

²¹ Sprague and Massoni, “Student Evaluations,” 789.

²² Sprague and Massoni, “Student Evaluations,” 789.

²³ For instance, consider the case of Nichola Thorp—a woman fired from her London employer because she refused to wear heels at least two inches high. Thorp sparked an investigation that revealed similar experiences by hundreds of women whose employers required them to “‘dye their hair blonde,’ ‘wear revealing outfits’ or ‘constantly reapply makeup.’” Bilefsky, Dan. “Sent Home for Not Wearing Heels, She Ignited a British Rebellion.” *New York Times*, January 25, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/world/europe/high-heels-british-inquiry-dress-codes-women.html>.

²⁴ Moradi, Bonnie, Danielle Dirks, and Alicia V. Matteson. “Roles of Sexual Objectification Experiences and Internalization of Standards of Beauty in Eating Disorder Symptomatology: A Test and Extension of Objectification Theory.” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52, no. 3 (2005), 420–428.

²⁵ Genderqueer people may identify as genderless, as neither a man nor a woman, as at times a man and at times a woman, or as a combination of a man and a woman. For further discussion see Dembroff, Robin and Daniel Wodak. “He/She/They/Ze.” *Ergo* 5, no. 14 (2018), 371–406.

²⁶ James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., and Anafi, M. *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016, 14–16. <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>

²⁷ James, *The Report*, p. 5.

²⁸ James, *The Report*, p. 15.

²⁹ James, *The Report*, p. 5.

³⁰ James, *The Report*, p. 5.

³¹ Cava, Peter. “Activism, Politics, and Organizing.” In Erickson-Schroth, *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, 574.

³² Gockowski, Anthony. “AU Revamps Vagina Monologues to Avoid ‘Gender Binary.’” *Campus Reform*, October 21, 2016. <https://www.campusreform.org/?ID=8290>. Over two decades later, Ensler herself supports the message, stating “I’ve got no room for a feminism that isn’t intersectional.” Gillespie, Katherine. “Do We Still Need ‘The Vagina Monologues?’” *Vice*, October 2, 2017. https://www.vice.com/en_nz/article/j5gk8p/is-the-vagina-monologues-still-woke

³³ AAU Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct (2015). *Association of American Universities*, September 3, 2015. <https://www.aau.edu/key-issues/aau-climate-survey-sexual-assault-and-sexual-misconduct-2015?id=16525>

³⁴ Krell, Elías Cosenza. “Is Transmisogyny Killing Trans Women of Color?” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (2017), 235.

³⁵ Ross, Angelica. “Call Me Caitlyn. Sincerely, Ms. Ross.” *Huffington Post*, September 4, 2015. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/angelica-ross/i-am-not-cait_b_8039492.html. Cited in Krell, “Transmisogyny,” 238.

³⁶As Aniruddha Dutta aptly notes, “the co-constitution of gender with class and race means that even cisgender maleness is not always a privilege in itself and some cis men might end up having less privilege than elite women, as evident in the persecution and criminalization of Black men and masculinities through the US carceral complex.” Dutta, Aniruddha. “Allegories of Gender: Transgender Autology versus Transracialism.” *Atlantis* 39, no. 2 (2018), 86–98.

³⁷ McCall, Leslie. “The Complexity of Intersectionality.” *Signs* 30, no. 3, 2005, p. 1771.

³⁸ Cho, Sumi, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications and Praxis.” *Signs* 38, no. 4, 2013, p. 787.

³⁹ As leading intersectional theorists Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Leslie McCall explain, “intersectionality is best framed as an . . . an analytic disposition, a way of thinking about and conducting analyses. . . . This framing—conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power—emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is.” Cho, Sumo, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis.” *Signs* 38, no. 4 (2013), 785–810.

⁴⁰ The student piece waffles between condemning white culture and condemning white people themselves, but some lines clearly suggest hatred of white people: “When I think of all the white people I have ever encountered — whether they’ve been professors, peers, lovers, friends, police officers, et cetera—there is perhaps only a dozen I would consider ‘decent.’” I borrow this

example from Lukianoff and Haidt. See Lukianoff, Greg and Jonathan Haidt. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*. New York: Penguin Press 2018, 63–64.

⁴¹ For more on the risks of “us-versus-them” thinking and what they dub ‘common-enemy identity politics,’ see Lukianoff and Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind*.

⁴² Brown, Wendy. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1995.

⁴³ Brown, *States of Injury*, pp. 73–74.

⁴⁴ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 3.

⁴⁵ Notably, this isn’t to endorse a rejection of identity-based politics; self-identities are deeply important to many people. Rather, it is to warn against holding our identities to inflexible scripts.

⁴⁶ Appiah, Anthony. “Race, Culture, and Identity: Misunderstood Connections.” *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (1994), 129.

⁴⁷ Many thanks to Elizabeth Edenberg, Bob Fischer, Rhiannon Graybill, Alison Suen, and Chloë Taylor for their thoughtful feedback on this paper.