The Gender Line
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Our first child, Aaron, loves books and likes to draw, cook, and play any game involving a ball.

Our second child, Dylan, is also a sports fanatic. When Dylan entered toddlerhood we stationed two Little Tykes basketball goals at opposite ends of the living room so that we could play “full court.” People meeting our second child are often surprised to find out that Dylan is a girl.

Names have a gender.

When Dylan wears her brother’s hand-me-down overalls, strangers are uncomfortable with the gender bending. There seem to be expectations of fair advertising with respect to one of society’s most visible means of classification.

Clothes have a gender.

Among the gifts Dylan received for her second birthday are mini-cooking utensils, a vacuum cleaner that lights up as it sweeps the floor, and a Cabbage Patch doll that came with an adoption certificate identifying her as Belinda Doreen. No one outside the family gave her cars or trucks or tools.

Toys have a gender.

One night Aaron and Dylan were helping prepare dinner. Dylan had taken over Aaron’s old job of setting the table, while Aaron had graduated to substantive food preparation and was pouring milk. Dylan carefully put two spoons at one place. The next place setting was a neatly positioned fork and knife. I complimented her on the third effort: “That’s right, sweetie. One knife, one fork, and one spoon for each person.”

“Good girl!” I added. It’s a phrase that trips pretty easily off the tongue. But it’s one that I never seem to use when she’s fielding grounders or shooting hoops.

Parents reinforce gender daily. Unthinkingly. Unnecessarily. Even when they know better.
We still live in a world in which the sexes are sharply segregated: early in life, in names, clothing, and possessions; later, in occupations, civic associations, social groupings, and domestic roles. This gender separation is so pervasive it is almost invisible. Gender is constructed in everyday social routines. Traditional gender practices are embedded in social institutions, where they guide what we think proper about the relationship of sex and gender.

People generally believe that men and women are fundamentally different in interests, inclinations, and abilities. We accept that boys excel at math, girls at verbal skills, that women exhibit nurturing behaviors while men are less capable in that realm. The images and messages sent through the cultural portrayal of gender end up limiting the visions and options of boys and girls.

The first aim of this book is to expose the ways gendered behaviors are carefully cultivated. Chapter 2 traces the pink and blue tracking that begins in infancy. Beginning with the first few moments and months of life, countless social practices reinforce gender differences and keep the sexes separate: toys, sports, songs, books, advertisements, fashions, schooling, and peer and parental habits, expectations, and pressures. Different gendering of the sexes occurs within the spheres of home and school, media, church, and work. It takes place in everyday language. Girls and boys grow up to be women and men who live in different cultures of gender.

One persistent theme resonates throughout these spheres of socialization. Masculinity is tied to the strict separation of the genders and the avoidance of characteristics and behaviors perceived as feminine. Boys are trained to distance themselves from girls and not to identify with women: “In the hierarchical and rigorously competitive society of other boys, one categorical imperative outranks all others: don’t be a girl.”

The social segregation of the sexes is often justified by the idea that inherent biological differences create the different cultural worlds that men and women inhabit. Chapter 2 reviews the empirical evidence regarding the biological basis of sex differences. Cumulatively, the physical, neurophysiological, and psychological evidence, as well as measures of academic performance and achievement, shows few purely biological sex differences. Given these findings, the question is how to explain the popular perceptions of extensive differences between the sexes?

Differences in mental abilities and emotional responses of men and women are far more intriguing than similarities. People are more interested in reading about differences. *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* is
a best-seller; it has a great deal more pizzazz than would a book about gen-
der similarities, entitled perhaps *Men and Women Are from Earth*. An em-
phasis on the politics of difference rather than sameness encourages atten-
tion to differences. Differences are emphasized in many ways, from research
biases to media reporting to popular interpretations of scientific research.

Media reports on gender highlight differences, putting the spotlight on
ones that are found. For political reasons, researchers too may be more in-
terested in exploring gender differences than similarities, if only because re-
search results showing differences command publication opportunities.
This information is then received by the public in accordance with preex-
isting stereotypes about sex role differences. Finally, in popular opinion,
tendencies and probabilities may be remembered simply as differences,
with the visible correlations between gender and behavior converted into
“obvious” causal relations. Politicized research and reporting thus combine
with resilient stereotypes and social practices to create cultural feedback
loops that replay conventional images of gender.

To the extent that they are mistaken or exaggerated, these beliefs about
the biological bases of gender have frightening consequences. History is re-
plete with examples of the use of biological characteristics to classify cer-
tain groups not just as different but as cognitively or socially inferior. Even
to the extent that they are accurate—sex differences may have biological or
cultural bases, and often some of both—the fact of sex differences is rela-
tively uninteresting. The cultural construction—the *significance* that we
give to those differences that do exist—is what, in Martha Minow’s words,
“makes all the difference.”

Law collaborates with other institutions in the creation and mainte-
nance of gender differences, constructing and legitimizing both the separa-
tion of the sexes and the conception of gender in naturalistic terms. In
chapter 3 we see that sex in law is bipolar. Assumptions about the impor-
tance of biological distinctions between males and females have driven
legal theory. The idea of a natural order is embedded in legal analysis, mak-
ning gender differences seem natural and inevitable. Constitutional doc-
trine, for example, perpetuates the idea that gender is a biological phe-
nomenon by looking for “real” or “immutable” differences.

The images of gender contained in Supreme Court and lower federal
court decisions show that “separate but equal” remains very much alive in
constitutional gender cases. The decisions in the Citadel and Virginia Mil-
itary Institute (VMI) cases, which concerned women seeking admission to
the two remaining male-only public military colleges, illustrate the point.
The analysis in this chapter will not concentrate on the schools’ insistent rejection of women, their attempts to rationalize these all-male preserves as providing a “diversity” of educational experiences, or, in Virginia’s case, the proposed construction of a parallel, all-female military academy, woefully underfunded, with an expected enrollment of twenty-five students and no barracks life, uniforms, or military training (which the Supreme Court later called a “pale shadow” of VMI). Instead, the focus will be on what the images of gender tacitly accepted by the lower federal courts and some members of the Supreme Court say about the constitutional construction of gender and the significance of those legal images in the minds, hearts, and behaviors of men and women.

In the VMI litigation, the trial court accepted, and the appellate court approved, the idea that the creation of good “citizen-soldiers” required the exclusion of women. Despite the wealth of empirical evidence to the contrary, the lower courts adopted the school’s position that single-sex education was beneficial for men. Not only was masculinity shaped by the compulsory separation of men from women, but “adversative training”—which subjected freshmen (called “rats”) to rigorous physical exercise, spartan barracks living, a complete lack of privacy, random stresses, unremitting control of daily life, and constant harassment—was deemed essential to character formation. Boys, through this process that induced terror-bonding, endurance of pain, and disconnection from their feelings, would become men and soldiers. The images of gender in the Citadel and VMI litigation are not the anachronisms they seem, but instead represent the conventional constructions of masculinity that are still embodied in our dominant social and legal traditions. Stereotypes about women are becoming more visible to us, but stereotypes about men and implicit discrimination against men, the unthinking acceptance of traditional expectations of males, remain largely imperceptible because we have not been looking for them.

In many other areas, courts have staunchly supported the rigid separation of the sexes. We will look at cases dealing with defiance of dress and grooming codes in schools and employment situations, objections to Ladies’ Night and other practices of gender-based pricing at dry cleaners, gas stations, and hair salons, and challenges to sex-segregated voluntary associations, such as the Jaycees, Rotary, Elks, and Boy Scouts. In controlling cross-dressing, condoning gender separatism, and promoting traditional images of the sexes, courts endorse the gender line and help keep it firmly in place.

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The second objective of this book, an inquiry that begins in chapter 3 and continues in chapter 4, is to explore the ways men are harmed by gender stereotypes. These chapters apply insights from feminist thought to situations in which gender role stereotypes operate to the detriment of men. Chapter 3 looks at two recent, celebrated Supreme Court decisions, the VMI case and another concerning a manufacturer’s “fetal protection policy” that excluded fertile women, but not fertile men, from positions threatening hazardous lead exposure. In each of these cases, the Court disregarded actual physical harms to men and, at a deeper level, reinforced separation from women and cultural expectations that men defy risks and suffer harms in stoic silence.

Chapter 4 considers the ways legal constructs and methods of analysis have helped to shape masculinity. Maleness has been constructed in a number of ways by statutes, judicial decisions, and legal reasoning. One component of male aggression has been legal doctrines that shape concepts of personhood by dictating who society’s criminals and warriors are. The image of masculinity is also formed by legal responses to areas in which men suffer injuries. Laws preventing male plaintiffs from suing for same-sex sexual harassment, as well as analysts’ lack of interest in male rape and spousal battery of men, contribute to a climate in which men are taught to suffer in silence. In the areas of parental leave and child custody, men are socially and legally excluded from caring and nurturing roles.

Various legal doctrines thus send distinct messages about what it means to be male. But this cumulative ideology of masculinity—the package of cultural myths and symbols, constructed in part by law, that dictates appropriate male behavior—is underexplored. Some of the damaging stereotypes and harms suffered by men have been invisible to public consciousness because they are particular to men, while the feminist project has so clearly concentrated on women.

The remaining chapters explore the relations between feminism and men. Part of the focus of feminist legal theory needs to shift. The project of cataloging the omission of men from feminist theory should not be seen as an attempt to diminish the centuries of horrors experienced by women. The argument is that a key part of the problem remains to be explored. In what ways have men systematically been harmed by gender stereotypes? How does this harm redound to the disadvantage of women and society generally?

It may seem odd to suggest that feminist theory has overlooked men. In varying ways, liberal feminism, difference theory, dominance theory, and...
postmodern feminism have analyzed, objectified, vilified, and deconstructed men as a population, maleness as a gender and constellation of role expectations and typical behaviors, and men as historical crafters of doctrine, theory, and language. Yet in several important respects, men have been largely omitted from feminism, except for their crucial role as culprits.

Feminist legal theorists have paid mild attention to whether men could embrace feminist objectives—the “Can men be feminists?” question. This issue is treated as a relatively unimportant one, usually relegated to footnotes. Legal literature has given relatively modest and incidental attention to how a wide variety of gender role stereotypes harm men, and how legal constructs perpetuate these stereotypes. The injurious effect gender role stereotypes have on men is typically subsidiary to the main focus of feminist legal literature, documenting patterns of subordination of women.

Theorists in disciplines other than law have demonstrated significantly more interest in constructs of masculinity. Perhaps most importantly, though, men have been omitted as participants in the reconstructive project. This may have been a necessary omission during the formative years of the second wave of feminism, or at least it seemed so at the time, but is it one that has outlived its usefulness? Australian sociologist R. W. Connell frames the dilemma:

> Men who do undertake action in support of feminism are not in for an easy ride. They are likely to be met with antagonism and derision from other men, picturing them as eunuchs, queers or sell-outs to “political correctness.” They will not necessarily get warm support from feminists—some of whom are deeply suspicious of all men, most of whom are wary of men’s power, and all of whom make a primary commitment to solidarity with women.

Chapter 5 unpacks the popular image of feminism: it examines the reasons feminism has acquired such a bad name. In doing so, it looks at those strands of the feminist movement that have alienated potential supporters (racial exclusivity, the failure to include men, a politics of anger, and an uneasy alliance between feminism and lesbianism), questions the necessity of the factionalism within feminism, and points to the need for coalition-building (intergenerational, international, and inter-issue) among feminists.

Intrafeminist controversy has the power to spark useful debate, encourage thoughtful reflection, and mobilize political action. In its recent guises, it has done little of that. The chapter touches on the schisms and personal hostilities of pop culture feminists who adopt splashy labels (such as “gen-
der feminism” and “victim feminism”) and hurl insults at one another. The chapter also reviews the deeper theoretical battles in which feminists have fractured over issues such as pregnancy accommodation, pornography, and abortion. It is important to situate events in their historically appropriate time frame. This requires recognition that the exclusionary rhetoric a few fringe feminist thinkers mouthed several decades ago may be replayed misleadingly as representative of modern feminism.

While chapter 5 will explore the ways some feminists have alienated potential supporters and discouraged adherents, it is intended as a sympathetic critique, since many, if not most, misunderstandings of feminism are caused by its opponents, not its supporters. This chapter considers public opinion surveys about feminism and explores the construction of the popular ideology of feminism. How did we arrive at a place where “feminist” translates into “feminazi” in the popular mind, where the label itself is dangerous, as Marc Lepine proved when he burst into Montreal University’s engineering school in 1989 armed with a semiautomatic rifle and slaughtered fourteen women whom he called “a bunch of feminists”?

Some of the misunderstandings come from an unskilled or unsympathetic treatment of feminist issues by reporters. Most of the attacks on feminism do not originate from objective, unbiased sources, but from people who have deep-seated reasons to try to undermine it. The images and labels attached to feminism are used as forms of denigration by people who have a vested interest in continuing the subjugation of women. The label “feminism” feels accusatory because it is used as an accusation of a panoply of evils. It is a technique of silencing that feminists are likely to understand, whether they accept the label or not. The incessant warring among feminist camps and media glee over these battles accentuate the lack of popular acceptance of feminism. With respect to many specific events and ideas in the feminist story, the cultural reactions to them often define the phenomena in the popular mind. I thus try to separate some of the strands of academic feminism from their popular culture incarnations. The various incarnations of feminism are not fundamentally misguided, but they are plagued by unnecessary factionalism and unwarranted bad publicity.

The third purpose of this book is to suggest that feminist legal theory needs to turn its attention to issues of relational justice: avoiding gender role stereotyping in both directions. The legal academy has not been much interested in theorizing about majority group masculinities. Racial and sexual outsiders were rightly concerned with their exclusion from dialogue,
and with subordination based on ethnicity, skin color, or sexual orientation. Gays and scholars of color raised their voices collectively in queer theory and critical race theory. For feminist scholars, the urgencies lay elsewhere.

Chapter 6 evaluates how the different strands of feminist legal theory have approached men. Equal treatment theorists view men as objects of analysis, secondary to their principal project of attaining equal rights for women. Cultural feminists or difference theorists treat men as “other”: in highlighting differences between men and women, some cultural feminists have celebrated women’s differences to the exclusion of men. Radical feminists or dominance theorists see men as oppressors, literally the bad guys. Postmodern feminist theories have, for the most part, simply omitted men.

In significant part, this inattention to men was understandable, a necessary stage. In the early years, feminist theory may have needed to be exclusionary to carve out its own space. But in law and even in the social sciences, gender colonization persists: just as women’s studies are often divorced from theories about masculinity, legal theory has devoted little attention to the situations of men.

Feminism has cast men principally as malefactors or dupes, and has not explored the manner in which gender role stereotypes harm men or the ways legal decisions perpetuate that stereotyping. Throughout the women’s movement, one side of the picture has remained in the shadows—the ways patriarchy affects men. Feminists want those embracing patriarchy, a significant portion of whom are men, to change. To that end, we need to concentrate on the situations of men.

Maleness is both a privileged and victimized status. Men hold the balance of power in America. Men—particularly white, heterosexual, nondisabled men—generally have superior economic and political standing. Comparing the average wages of all working men and women, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that for every dollar earned by white men, white women earn 75 cents, black women 63 cents, and Latina women 56 cents. Women are generally in the workforce a shorter amount of time and thus accrue lower pension and Social Security benefits. After studying work patterns and wage differentials, Elizabeth Toth concluded that “during a 40-year career, a woman will lose $1 million on gender alone.” In 1995 the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission reported that in Fortune 1500 companies, between 95 and 97 percent of senior managerial positions were held by men. In 1997 women account for only nine of the one hundred U.S. senators, two of the country’s fifty governors, and 12 percent of U.S. con-
gressional representatives, numbers almost double those five years previously. The numbers at the state level are slightly more encouraging, although only 21 percent of state legislators are women.\textsuperscript{10}

As a culture, we have gone from the 1950s single-earner households (kept in place with rigid stereotypes and lots of sexism) to the 1990s with many single-parent households or households in which both parents work outside the home. At the same time, we have bid up the prices of homes, cars, and colleges, and the dual-career household is now entrenched. We cannot and would not want to go back to the nostalgia of the 1950s. We don’t want to socially, and can’t economically. What happens now is that women have the worst of both worlds: full-time jobs both inside and outside the home. To the extent that things get done domestically, stereotypes usually persist, unless they have been renegotiated on the individual level. The default rule in society is that women do the indoor domestic work and child care, while men haul out the garbage, shovel the snow, and take care of cars and yards.

But men have the worst of both worlds as well. The past decade has witnessed some transition away from historical roles of masculinity; yet cultural expectations of men remain tied to traditional definitions. Men are still expected to be the family’s breadwinners and society’s risk-takers. They are still judged according to a set of stereotypically masculine expectations, including rugged individualism, independence, competitiveness, physical prowess, and emotional toughness. Men are trained to be emotionally restricted and reluctant to seek help. Research shows that until about six months of age, baby boys are “more emotionally reactive and expressive” than baby girls, exhibiting more voluble crying and greater anxiety, and shedding more tears.\textsuperscript{11} Parents teach boys to suppress these feelings by explicitly or subtly steering them away from exhibiting vulnerable emotions.

Perhaps most important, masculinity continues to be constructed in opposition to femininity: “A man should avoid the stigma of anything feminine, especially emotions that make him appear vulnerable.”\textsuperscript{12} What it means to be male is created by the distancing of boys from female things. This was, and still is, one of patriarchy’s chief methods of reproduction. Most religions have a masculinized idea of males (but not females) as stewards, icons, and leaders. Male cultural archetypes of the 1950s, like John Wayne and Gary Cooper, did not mix with women, and the influence of their images persists today. This vision was promoted by psychoanalytic theory, which tied male identity formation to separation from domineering mothers. Sex-segregated institutions historically were used to keep fe-
males out of influential inner circles—and to shape the consciousness of developing males. In many arenas, boys were, and still are, encouraged to engage in activities that are defined, at least in part, by the absence of women: the Boy Scouts, organized sports, fraternities, the military.

In some ways, male power is diminishing and being challenged. Despite the concentrations of women in lower-wage clerical and service jobs and underrepresentations of women in managerial, professional, and technical occupations, women constitute 46 percent of the workforce. In the two decades between 1970 and 1990, the percentage of female physicians doubled from 8 to 17; during roughly the same period, the proportion of female lawyers and judges more than tripled, from 6 percent to 23 percent. In cities with populations over 30,000 the percentage of women mayors increased from 5 (35 mayors) in 1975 to 18 (177 mayors) in 1995. Among dual-earner couples, 48 percent of women provide half or more of the family’s income. “[M]ore women than men have been enrolled in college every year since 1979, with commensurate growth in their economic clout.” Society is beginning to take notice of men’s health and social disadvantages. Men’s life expectancy (72 years, compared to 78.8 for women), suicide rates (four times those of women), as well as consumption of alcohol and cigarettes are telling of the relative life stresses. A homicide victim is 400 percent more likely to be male.

Power dynamics within relationships are changing in more ways than simply an increase in female breadwinners. The women’s movement represents a systematic challenge to entrenched male political, social, and economic domination. Some men have become increasingly resentful of and threatened by women’s political empowerment. Betty Friedan speaks of the “‘angry white male’ backlash,” significant among college-educated white men, who “have been the real targets of job downsizing. Their frustration is building—and talk-radio hosts, the religious right and the new leaders in Congress are manipulating that economic insecurity into rage against women and minorities. Increased violence against women, the political war on welfare mothers and children, and the new attack on affirmative action may be symptoms of that rage.”

The crisis of male identity stems not only from men’s loss of privileged status, but also from mixed social messages about what it means to be a good man. “Guys are in trouble these days,” Garrison Keillor writes in The Book of Guys. “Years ago, manhood was an opportunity for achievement and now it’s just a problem to overcome.”
role as father will be limited to that of “sperm donor.” Feminism demonstrated that many of the traditional images of masculinity, images on which most men were raised, were flawed. But the new images include warring expectations of “an almost feminine softness and . . . a traditionally masculine toughness.”

Not surprisingly, men are confused. What are they supposed to do and how can they possibly do it? Hold doors for women? Work seventy-hour weeks and still be available for child care? Be emotionally open and communicate their inner feelings, risking subtle forms of public censure for doing so? Psychologists Ronald Levant and William Pollack explain the turbulence: “These new pressures—to commit to relationships, to communicate one’s innermost feelings, to nurture children, to share in housework, to integrate sexuality with love, and to curb aggression and violence—have shaken traditional masculinity ideology.” These conflicting role demands will continue as long as social segregation of the sexes and traditional constructs of masculinity influence the emotional training of men.

Chapters 7 and 8 discuss ways of reconstructing images of gender, in theory and in practice. On the theoretical level, we need to turn feminist attention to the situations of men and masculinity. I argue that feminism is ready to take the next step and concentrate on the ways social institutions, including law, can reshape traditional masculinity, invite men into the discourse, and include men as political allies.

Some feminists may resist integration: Do we really need men to validate feminist theory? Must we do everything—the housework, the child care, and now their political theorizing—for them? Or consider the much simpler claim, made by Christine Littleton, that feminism is about women: “I am not making a claim that it is ‘wrong’ to try to help anyone (although, if we are going to spend our energy helping men, it might make sense to help nonprivileged men before privileged ones). The claim is merely that, even though many feminists do sincerely care about men, caring about men is not what feminism is about.”

Even those writing to urge feminists toward inclusivity imply that feminism is exclusive to women. Naomi Wolf, for example, writes, “On one level all women should be able to own the word ‘feminism’ as describing a theory of self-worth, and the worth of other women. On this level saying, ‘I am a feminist,’ should be like saying, ‘I am a human being.’”

Feminists have raised a number of arguments against being more inclusive of men. The powerful rhetoric of the feminist movement was often inseparable from anger, much of it targeted at men. Some concede that men
may be oppressed too, but point out that the oppression is of their making, and thus, for these writers, male oppression can be readily dismissed. For others, the resource issue is most important: with limited time and personal resources, feminism should focus on the most egregious wrongs, and those, they argue, are harms to women.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, feminism needs to find a new rhetoric, explore new subjects, and begin a new dialogue that affirmatively includes men. It is not simply that feminist discourse can be powerful without being a conversation of exclusion, but that for feminist objectives to become widely accepted, they must become more all-encompassing. I argue that it is not only possible for men to become feminists, but imperative that they do. Social movements do not work if they are wedded to theoretical frameworks that omit necessary people or issues. It is difficult to imagine the triumph of a theory that neglects half of the human race.

Laws and legal theory need to remove barriers for men and encourage possibilities. The feminist practices that enabled people to reflect on the situations of women should also make possible compassionate yet critical assessments of the situations of men. These include recognizing men’s experiences, acknowledging intersectional oppressions (the confluences of masculinities, race, and sexual orientation), minimizing the significance of the biological construct, and encouraging the crossing of traditional gender lines.

This book is about legal ideology, but it is not a conventional jurisprudence or legal philosophy book, because the conversation it contemplates can neither begin nor end with law. While laws send messages—statutes and decisions are powerful symbols of appropriate social relations—many of the most important messages about gender are already in place by the time issues arise in legal cases. Those messages are sent at a much earlier point in time through social relations, families, schools, churches, and the media. Professor Mark Fajer succinctly explains why the social learning must begin early: “To be blunt, we can hardly expect that boys who learn that their peers who cry or play with dolls are sissies and faggots will grow into men interested in displaying sensitivity or in taking on child-care responsibilities.” The final chapter thus suggests ways men and women can reconstruct a social world in which traditional gender roles diminish in importance.

Transformations in gender roles will not occur in any given generation. Changes in people’s roles and expectations come only slowly and over time. So the possibilities offered in chapter 8 are not a panacea; they are some
suggested theoretical and practical approaches to the problem. In the hopes of making available the analytical tools to draw men to feminism, chapter 8 considers empirical research regarding the development of sympathetic feminist consciousness. It also offers thoughts on ways to remake legal images of masculinity, and urges movement away from legal strategies that are captive to a zero-sum game.

Reconstructing gender requires addressing consciously and collectively the social processes we engage in, and critically evaluating assumptions we accept, when we create gender differences. To that end, I offer some suggestions on ways we can make gendering visible: in spheres ranging from consumer product differentiation to language and child-rearing practices. Chapter 8 also anticipates possible hazards of dismantling the gender line: the specters of, on the one hand, gender identity disorder, and, on the other, a unisex universe.

If we are to move beyond gender wars, it is absolutely crucial to recognize that the oppressions of men and women are intertwined: men are excluded from nurturing and caregiving roles, while the responsibility for child and family care is a significant factor in the oppression of women; conventional concepts of masculinity promote aggressive, individualistic behaviors, which translate into disrespect for and violence against women. Feminism has been a viable theory of liberation for women; why not feminism for men?

This book is intended for people who have at least some interest in gender issues. In part, this is an appeal to feminist women that there is a huge group of natural—and, I make the stronger argument, necessary—allies. As well, it is an invitation to men, whether self-describing as feminists or not, to explore the ways gender stereotypes have defined and, in many ways, trapped or cabined them. By demonstrating some of the ways conventional gender roles harm men, I hope to encourage men to care about, and to work toward, the dismantling of patriarchy. The book also broaches a dialogue about the label “feminism” itself. So, nestled in the book is a hope that nonfeminists who have the intellectual curiosity to explore their positions will do so.

This book advocates radical feminism for the sensible middle. The radical prescription urges that we move away from traditional gender roles: in domestic tasks, occupations, social roles, and perhaps even in the clothing and paraphernalia of life. The conservatism in the proposal is a call for reason, civility, action, and unification. It may seem harsh to criticize feminist
theory for succeeding, for doing what it set out to do: to thoroughly document the persistence of patriarchy across time and cultures. But the nature of my critique is different. I argue that feminism has stalled in an important way by not reaching far enough. The hope is to advance the cause of feminism by pointing out the more universal harms of gender role stereotyping of men. This book was largely impelled by the lessons of feminist theory itself—not to allow issues to remain silenced and to “question everything.”24