FEMINISTS *CAN* WEAR PINK

BY

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I'm writing this piece exactly one year on from the original publication. If possible, I love feminism even more now than I did when this book was published. If I haven't made that clear enough, let me take this moment to declare it to the world.

I love feminists with a passion that I can only equate to ten-year-old Scarlett's love for Gareth Gates and sticker albums. I have a burning, mind-boggling, life-altering crush on the entire feminist community, but I'm also a little scared of them. I'm scared of them in the way you're scared of a teacher, or a heating bill, or the coolest person in your school. I live in constant fear of taking one wrong step and falling out of favour with this community of superheroes who I am proud to call my friends.

In 2018, when we first put this feminist anthology out into the world, I was terrified. I was a twenty-three-year-old, pink-haired young woman; did I *really* think I was going to be taken seriously as the curator of a book about *anything*, let alone a book about one of the most complex and written about topics in human history?

I had spent five years reading every feminist book I could get my hands on, joining every feminist group I could find and founding my own feminist collective, but it still didn't feel like enough. As the countdown to publication day ticked away, a powerful sense of imposter syndrome wormed its way into my every thought. I was convinced that our book would not

be accepted by the only group of people in the world I truly crave respect from. I had nightmares about my favourite feminist activists tweeting that our pink, sparkly essays were 'too frivolous', 'too positive', 'entirely missing the point'.

The third of October 2018 arrived and I was flung into a whirlwind of media and interviews. The idea behind this book was to provide a launchpad for young women to kick off their feminist journey. Our press around its release was focused on reaching teenage girls who might never have read about feminism before.

I THINK OF *FEMINISTS DON'T WEAR PINK & OTHER LIES* AS **A CUTE LITTLE TROJAN HORSE, AN ARTFULLY PACKAGED TOOL OF THE RESISTANCE** DESIGNED TO LURE IN ALL THE WOMEN WHO MIGHT NEVER EVEN HAVE THOUGHT FEMINISM WAS 'FOR THEM'.

We wanted to do something different to tell people that this book existed, to make a statement about how accessible feminism should be. We decided to launch a magical pop-up shop in the mothership of London high-street fashion: Topshop Oxford Circus. On the night of 3 October our amazing (entirely female) team spent the whole night assembling a treasure trove of pink, feminist joy in the basement of the shop.

It's hard to express how excited we all were. As a young girl I spent the majority of my free time meandering through the aisles of this store, searching desperately for a dress or a skirt that might transform me from a teenage girl into the woman I was hoping to become. This shop was where I, like so many girls in this country, grew up. It was where I tried to figure out how to express myself, a place of idols, dreams and visions of adulthood. As our pop-up shop popped up, I squealed with joy at the very idea of a girl in search of a handbag stumbling across a book about feminism and finding herself part of something so exciting, so empowering. The statement 'I used to be a feminist but I changed my mind' has been uttered by exactly zero people throughout history, and I just knew that if we could use this shop to get these ideas into the hands of young women, something powerful was bound to take place.

The fourth of October was a manic day of radio and

podcast interviews, ending with a trip into town to officially launch our pop-up. At lunchtime my editor called me, and then called again, and on her third call I finally picked up the phone. In a confused, frazzled voice she told me that the store had been visited by the senior team first thing that morning. And, after countless hours of work to put it up, our pink, perfect, feminist bubble was dismantled in moments.

Suddenly security was involved, and the team was out of the shop. The culmination of months of work had disappeared, as if it had never existed. This book was published by a team of women in their twenties who could not have worked harder. Our work vanished, and we were literally left out in the cold.

I won't go into greater detail than this. Mostly because I still feel a bit scared of being sued.

It's hard to describe how the few days following this incident felt. When you release a book, the world tends to make you feel like a 'big deal' for a moment. I was on TV, on the radio, my face and words printed in the magazines I had grown up obsessing over. Our book was an outcry of feminist rage and positivity and, after a year of build-up, on the day it was released I felt like we could do anything.

But it took only minutes for my pink, feminist bubble to pop. The reality of what we are dealing with, why we actually

need feminism, hit home very, very hard. I crashed down to earth with a body-shaking thud. I arrived at my parents' house in floods of tears, powerlessness seeping through my body. This tiny event felt like a microcosm of everything I had thought we were fighting against. One person can click his fingers and the work and words of women can disappear in moments.

On the day this happened I was told not to say anything about the incident publicly. It was very kind and cautious advice that I swiftly ignored. I tweeted (a lot), and the feminists I had been so terrified to disappoint responded with outcries of resistance.

Topshop responded publicly, too, making a statement about the misunderstanding, and donating £25,000 to our charity partner Girl Up.

This story is a very small one. No one got hurt. In the months following this event, allegations were made about the man who has made so much money from clothing girls; allegations that were not small at all – but also aren't my story to tell. This story is a very small one, but it taught me a very big lesson. The feminist movement has never been bigger or more powerful, but that doesn't mean we don't have enemies. We have real things to fight against, real people and real systems of power that will do everything they can to stop us

from succeeding. We are constantly bracing ourselves against laws, individuals and governments who are using their power to hold women back, and we will not succeed in this fight unless we do it together.

When this book came out I was terrified about what 'other feminists' would think of it; in the end, the only objection to our book came from the patriarchy itself. Criticism and comment within the feminist community can be a wonderful thing. From criticism was born intersectionality, trans inclusive feminism, LGBTQ feminism and global feminism. But criticism within our community can also lead to a fear of speaking up.

If you're reading this in the year this paperback is published, it's 2020. Women have never had more rights, more freedom and more autonomy than they do right now – but we also have a seriously long way to go. Less than 20% of the world's landowners are women; 75% of HIV-infected youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are girls; 50% of all sexual assaults worldwide are against girls of 15 or younger; 1 in 7 girls in developing countries is married before the age of 15 (excluding China); in 15 Global Economies a husband is allowed to ban his wife from working; at least 200 million girls and women worldwide have undergone FGM.

These aren't just numbers. They are the basis for gender

inequality, they are the fire that fuels the fearless activism of millions of women across the globe, they are the reason why feminism will not be 'done' until equality is a reality not just for white Western women but for every woman in every corner of the globe. These 'stats' are violations of fundamental human rights that take place every second of every day. These 'stats' are the core of feminism.

We have so much to fight against, we have so many battles still to win. And the main thing I've learned from working with the 52 incredible women in this book, from the charity and publishing teams who helped bring it to life, from the amazing readers who supported us in droves: if we have any hope of achieving anything, we must do it together.

If you're scared to speak up, please know that there will be people who will stand behind you the second you do so. If you're a man who wants to get involved, please know that we have never needed you more, we will let you in. If you're scared to make a mistake, know that you might still have some learning to do, and that's OK. Learn and develop in public. Make friends, make allies, identify the real enemy, and never let anyone trick you into fighting with someone who's already on your side. Join this resistance.

Since this book first came out I have met hundreds of men and women who all believe one thing: that women deserve the

right to be equal. Each and every one of them is at a different stage of their feminist journey: some have PhDs and years of activism behind them, some just picked up this book because they liked the cover. All are welcome and all are cherished. Whoever you are, whatever stage you're at, you are in this movement. We need you.

Thank you for being here.

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