

The Limits of Feminism

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

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What is it about feminism that invites so many different opinions on what ‘counts’ and what doesn’t? People from vastly different cultural situations variously categorise feminist practices as extreme, radical, reactionary, unbalanced, co-opted, revolutionary, elite, exclusive, progressive, passé, and hysterical. The desire of both feminists and anti-feminists to control feminism emerges as the limiting of *what feminism is, whom it is for, and where it is going*. The urge to limit feminism seems, in some cases, to overtake the urge to spread the word and celebrate feminism’s successes. And it is not just anti-feminists who attempt to limit feminism – even feminists spend an inordinate amount of time defining certain practices out of the feminist spectrum. In this thesis, I document and analyse the way we limit feminism – its participants, meaning, practices, language, history, and future. I explore the reasons why we need to contain feminism in this way, looking in particular at those who have an investment in keeping feminism comfortably small. I invite back into the realm of feminism a wide range of activities and theories we generally invalidate as feminism, including the words of several ‘unofficial’ feminists I interviewed for this project. In essence, this project goes towards the rethinking of the term ‘feminism’ by examining the widely differing and often contradictory definitions of ‘what counts.’

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