



It's the Return of the Battle of the Sexes

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For those of certain age (that is, old enough to have spent any time on a university campus between the early 80s and mid 90s), the controversies of the last few months - the Penny Wong meow-slur, Slutwalk, the Brocial Network, the Pippa Middleton Ass Appreciation Society Facebook page, ADF sex Skyping, Julian Assange's alleged sexual misconduct - are like déjà vu all over again.



The Punch is living house - this is a caption

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Will Pope Francis have the vision to acknowledge this? - this is a caption

Will Pope Francis have the vision to acknowledge this?

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Advocating risk management is not victim blaming" - this is a caption



Some Peter Nicholson genius

Sure we didn't have Skype, Facebook groups or chick-magnet online-whistleblower superstars back in those antediluvian days, but Gen X women sure knew how to put on a feminist protest.

To take just one example, in 1992, when the tits-and-arse tabloid mag People dared put a woman on its cover on all fours wearing what appeared to be a dog collar, a host of women's groups, such as Student Women Against Rampant Media Sexism (SWARMS) and People Initiating Education Campaigns Eliminating Sexism (PIECES), mobilised. A newsagency selling People was smashed up, the Park Street headquarters of Kerry Packer's ACP, which published the mag, were occupied and huge political pressure was brought to bear on Australia's censorship body, the Office of Film and Literature Classification, to crack down hard on porn mags (something it did, hastening the demise of several).

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Back then, when what Helen Garner memorably termed “feminism’s grimmer tribes” still wielded considerable cultural and political influence, every female arts student had a copy of *The Beauty Myth* on her bedside table, all sex was rape, all men were rapists and women wore sensible shoes and expressions of grim determination to marches protesting sexual assault.

Sometime around the mid 90s, men and women — particularly Gen Y ones — put down the cudgels and an era of relative peace and harmony seemed to dawn. Women became more like men (see the *The Laddette* and her more mature, middle-class counterpart *The Ambitious Career Woman*), men became more like women (see *The Meterosexual* and *Work-Life Balanced Dad*) and much of the wind went out of the sails of the feminist movement.

By 2005, journalist Ariel Levy, in her book *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, was lamenting the fact that the friends she used to go on Reclaim the Night marches with were now more interested in pole-dance classes and following the careers of their favourite porn actresses. With greater or lesser degrees of diplomacy, many other Gen X and Boomer feminists have made much the same argument over the last 15 years – their Gen Y daughters are ungrateful little sluts who’ve been sucked in by raunch culture and chosen to chase the personal sexual power derived by being ‘hot’ rather than continue fighting the good fight for women’s rights.

Now, much to the surprise of everyone, the girls gone wild of Gen Y have taken a break from sexting their friends-with-benefits and debating which Sex and the City character they most resemble to march in the streets for, erm, no-one’s exactly sure but it definitely seems to be something that would have once been called “a feminist issue”.

Slutwalk is just the latest indication that the battle of the sexes is heating up again over, well, sex. It appears we may be in the middle of one of those *Zeitgeist* volte-faces that leave everyone disorientated. Most of the controversies mentioned above have centred around issues of consent but it seems almost certain other fronts in the gender war will soon be opening up, in particular a reigniting of the debate over the effects of porn — now far more prevalent and accessible than it was when campus women’s groups were harassing Kerry Packer two decades ago.

So, as a veteran of the last war, my advice for the young men of today is this — if you’re dating an arts student, be prepared for her to announce she’s decided to become a radical lesbian-feminist separatist at least once before she graduates.