ForeWord Reviews

CULTURE

Big Sister: How Extreme Feminism Has Betrayed the Fight for Sexual Equality
Neil Boyd
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The women's movement, like all waves of social change, left casualties in its wake. Conservatives decry its neglect of the housewife, while pundits trace the realignment of political parties to white males' new insecurities.

The author, a Canadian professor of criminology at Simon Fraser University and author of six previous books, including *The Beast Within: Why Men Are Violent*, generally supports the movement's achievements. He believes, however, that changes wrought by its radical segments threaten key democratic values of free speech, the presumption of innocence, and personal autonomy. These have taken place in four areas where new law has overridden longstanding principles: pornography, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence.

A strange alliance of radical feminists and old-fashioned moralists managed to redefine pornography according to the writings of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, as "the sexually explicit subordination of women." Although most U.S. courts have rejected laws based on this concept, on First Amendment grounds, Canada has absorbed the definition into its criminal code, with unfortunate consequences.

Boyd finds that defining a "hostile environment" as sexual harassment threatens free speech and academic freedom in universities. In one example, complaints were sustained against a graduate assistant for having, on his own desk, a photo of his wife in a bikini. Professors who use terms like "rape" or "bloody" in lectures have also been charged.

The book's section on sexual assault focuses mostly on the recovered memory phenomenon and its shaky basis in fact. Ruined lives and family relationships, rather than healing, claims the author, are the usual result. However, Boyd fails to prove a link between recovered memory therapists and the radical feminist agenda, except possibly a shared suspicion of men.

Solid statistics show men as the perpetrators of most killings on the domestic front—and everywhere else. The author's criticisms here center on laws mandating arrest in domestic violence cases, disregarding the police officer's or the victim's judgment. Such arrests can lead

to more battering by certain men, and they deny women the chance to make decisions about their own lives.

The best revelations come with the author's asides: the observation that most workplace harassment is unpunishable because it is not "sexual"; the irony of consensual lesbian pornography being prosecuted in Canada as "dehumanizing to women"; the debunking of the myth of Super Bowl Sunday being an especially perilous day for women. (In a curious follow-up, one study found an increase in emergency room admissions on Super Bowl Sunday, but only among men, due to injuries from pick-up football games!)

Many people have heard ideological arguments about feminism, backed by conflicting evidence and heavy on emotion. Boyd, making a logical case for his views, offers a refreshingly different take on its pros and cons.