A coherent community is an integral fabric, woven together by projects: not a quilt of multi-colored patches, but a rich and moving tapestry of diverse intertwining threads.

Introduction, p. 18

There is a popular view, perhaps even a dominant view, that young women no longer identify as feminist and this is the reason that the feminist movement has lost momentum and is no longer viable. In extreme cases it is argued that gains won by earlier feminists are being lost. There are two concepts here that I’d like to begin to address. The first is that young women do not identify as feminist and the second that the movement is less viable or has lost momentum. Both of these assertions are so limited in their understanding of the reality that they are false. Both rely on a view that social movements are finite moments in history, separated in time and space as isolated entities. Both views are boosted by a dominant ideology that downplays any social change that might challenge it.

It is easy to accept the view that today’s young women are not identifying as feminists. The media loves to promote it and we are constantly bombarded by information that challenges the aims and objectives of feminism; images of women objectified as sexual objects or victims of violence. And for those women, like me, who were activists in the ‘second wave’ it can be galling to watch young women lapping up the gains we fought for while refusing to identify with our struggles to win them, and refusing to take the struggles forward. We fought for women to have equal access to wealth, jobs, goods and services and the gains we won in all these areas are abundant. Many of us gave many years of our lives so future generations of women would not have to experience the oppression and lack of entitlement that we had experienced.

This view is based on a false assumption that ‘second wave feminism’ was a mass movement that involved the majority of women in the developed capitalist countries. This was never the case. Those of us who were active in the movement were a tiny minority of women and were treated like a lunatic fringe by the majority. Men in general knew instinctively that we were out to challenge their entitlement to dominance in all things. Their responses were crass: we had no motivation except that we hated them; were jealous of them; mostly
because we were a bunch of unattractive freaks who couldn't get a man. What is less understandable perhaps is that many women adopted that idea too. It was more frequent to have women say, often with smug pursed lips: 'Oh I'm happy with the way things are', than to have women say: 'Oh yes I agree with your aims'.

But while that was the case, even when the movement was most visibly active, women were taking on the gains. For example in Australia one of our early gains was to have a state pension for single mothers. Almost instantly statistics revealed that what was happening was that women were quick to accept the gain. More women were keeping children born outside of relationships rather than giving them up for adoption, and large numbers of women took their children and left unsatisfactory relationships because there was at least minimal financial support available.

On another level women were gaining access to areas that were previously unknown and many of those women were oppositional to the aims and objectives of feminism, yet that didn't stop them utilizing the gains. Two well-known examples of this were Maggie Thatcher, the British Prime Minister and Ita Buttrose, a magazine editor in Australia. Interestingly, while the very existence of the first woman Prime Minister of the UK was clearly a feminist gain, it's occupant was antagonistic to the feminist movement, but most of her opponents, including active feminists, not only denied her status as a role model for the movement, but many denied her womanhood – 'oh but Thatcher's not really a woman'. Buttrose is now celebrated as a feminist icon, but at the time was seen as a woman who had become prominent as a defender of the status quo. Nevertheless she herself set precedents for women in the Australian newspaper industry, had a strong sense of herself as a career woman and a sense that women wanted more than housekeeping, child rearing, cooking and beauty tips.

From my standpoint there are at least as many, and possibly more young women who identify as feminists than there ever were and this has been consistent through the decades of the eighties, nineties and naughties. What is also true is that there are many more young men who identify as feminist and support the movement. For some reason we expect that because nearly all young women in the developed capitalist world have benefitted from the gains of feminism, they should identify with the movement. Yet there never seems to have been a parallel between numbers of women who utilize gains with those who identify. Although I would argue that the proportion of women who identify has been growing consistently.

What we were was loud and our activism was highly visible. The attitudes we wanted to change were so deeply embedded in our consciousness that it