

Readers' Advisory for Feminist Memoirs

Speed Dating Through the Genres
RA in a Day

Hosted by BCLA Readers' Advisory Interest Group
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What is a Feminist Memoir?

- There is no official definition but it differs from a traditional memoir written by a woman (i.e. it's not just any personal, non-fiction, female narrative)
- It intersects the personal/private experience with feminist discourse
- It uses the personal narrative as an entry point to discuss women's rights and issues
- "Feminist" is a loosely used term to encapsulate the discussion surrounding relevant women's rights and issues, some texts may be openly categorized as feminist, others may have underlying themes
- These texts should be differentiated from more scholarly and theoretical feminist works since they have an almost conversational, everyday appeal

Why is it Relevant?

- With popularity from works by notable public figures such as Tina Fey, Lena Dunham, Malala Yousafzai, and so forth, there is a public desire and interest to read these narratives and enter the discussion
- It's important to know how to get patrons who like the "popular" memoirs and introduce them to other narratives (i.e. maybe introduce them to an author who doesn't have a television show)

What are Feminist Memoirs About?

- The writing typically focuses on gender inequalities and challenges women face, but can also celebrate womanhood
- Topics have a wide range from sex and sexuality, education rights, dating and relationships, motherhood or choosing not to have children, reproductive rights, gender violence and rape, women in the workplace, aging, body image and beauty standards, mental health issues, gender roles, female friendships, etc.

Who is Writing These Memoirs?

- All sorts of women: established writers (from various genres/disciplines), social activists, comedians, business women, journalists/columnists, basically any woman with a story to share

Don't Forget! Intersectional Feminist Voices

- Feminism is for everyone, not just limited to a specific type of individual or region, we cannot limit the discussion and exclude diverse voices from our recommendations
- Be cognizant of intersectional feminist voices from women of colour, of various sexual orientations, of all socioeconomic backgrounds, of diverse religious backgrounds, of different abilities, and so forth

How to Spot a Feminist Memoir

- It can take various forms: a collection of personal essays, a traditional biography, or graphic novel
- The titles encapsulate female agency and/or will explicitly focus on the "female" aspect of the narrative
- Some covers feature the author's portrait front and centre, others rely on text heavy covers (but not the same "pretty" text heavy covers found on chick lit)

Popular Titles

- *#Girlboss* by Sophia Amoruso
- *Not that Kind of Girl: A Young Woman Tells You What She's Learned* by Lena Dunham
- *Bossypants* by Tina Fey
- *Why Not Me?* by Mindy Kaling
- *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison* by Piper Kerman
- *How To Be a Woman* by Caitlin Moran
- *Yes Please* by Amy Poehler
- *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* by Sheryl Sandberg
- *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and was Shot by the Taliban* by Malala Yousafzai

Other Notable Works

- *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali
- *I Am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced* by Nujood Ali
- *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel (Graphic Novel)
- *Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own* by Kate Bolick
- *Lakota Woman* by Mary Crow Dog
- *Selfish, Shallow, and Self-Absorbed: 16 Writers on the Decision Not to Have Kids* edited by Meghan Daum
- *An Autobiography: Angela Davis* by Angela Davis
- *Desert Flower: The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad* by Waris Dirie
- *Screw Everyone: Sleeping My Way to Monogamy* by Ophira Eisenberg
- *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution* by Mona Eltahawy
- *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler
- *Bad Feminist* by Roxane Gay
- *Girl in a Band: A Memoir* by Kim Gordon
- *Never Have I Ever: My Life (So Far) Without a Date* by Katie Heaney
- *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston
- *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* by bell hooks
- *Trans: A Memoir* by Juliet Jacques
- *Girl, Interrupted* by Susanna Kaysen
- *The Road to Somewhere Better* by Lillian Lincoln Lambert
- *Listen to the Squawking Chicken: When Mother Knows Best, What's a Daughter To Do? A Memoir (Sort Of)* by Elaine Lui
- *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* by Janet Mock
- *The Diaries of Anaïs Nin* by Anaïs Nin
- *The Only Woman in the Room: Why Science is Still a Boys' Club* by Eileen Pollack
- *Tomboy* by Liz Prince (Graphic Novel)
- *Embroideries* by Marjane Satrapi (Graphic Novel)
- *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* by Julia Serano
- *Men Explain Things To Me* by Rebecca Solnit
- *Unfinished Business: Women Men Work Family* by Anne-Marie Slaughter
- *Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel* by Anya Ulinich (Graphic Novel)

Resources

- **Bibliocommons Lists**
- **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* TedxEuston Talk:** http://youtu.be/hg3umXU_qWc
- **Goodreads "Feminism" Tag:** <https://www.goodreads.com/list/tag/feminism>
- **Goodreads "Memoirs by Women" List:** http://www.goodreads.com/list/show/184.Memoirs_by_Women
- **Hello Giggles Article "All the best, most kick-ass female memoirs you need to read" by Brittany Allen:** <http://hellogiggles.com/love-kick-ass-female-memoirs/>
- **Wikipedia Feminist Literature List:** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_feminist_literature