



We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement

Andi Zeisler

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From Reader Review We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement for online ebook

Arielle Walker says

Quick and readable, if a little preaching to the choir. Definitely covers a lot of where I've been uncomfortable with the use of the word "feminist".

I will have a decent, in-depth review of this at some point, I promise!

Cat (cat-thecatlady) says

this book was a breeze of fresh air with all its humour and all sides of the issue analysis. the structure was messy af and it made me get lost often but overall, I think it is a very interesting and even informative read for anyone interested in the way a lot of aspects of capitalism and our modern society deal with feminist.

Sarah says

A book on the commodification of feminism. Feminism has become more popular recently, and corporations have jumped at the opportunity to use feminist identity as a tool to sell products. Beauty products advertise their products as "empowering", brands on facebook align themselves with feminism, celebrities wear "Feminist" t-shirts.

A few days ago McDonald's turned its logo upside down "in honor of" International Women's Day (or alternatively, McDonalds used IWD to get free press)

For Chanel's 2014 runway show, Karl Lagerfeld staged a "feminist rally". Models held signs like "History is Her Story", "We Can Match the Machos" and "Boys Should Get Pregnant Too?" (cringe) as they walked down the runway. He later said about the protest: "I like the idea of feminism being something light-hearted, not a truck driver for the feminist movement."

Even googling that last runway show, I found another "feminist fashion show" for this year.. which had nothing to do with feminism beyond an artistic director saying the brand "empowers" women. (how?)

"Within a very short span of time, feminism has come to occupy perhaps its most complex role ever in American, if not global, culture. It's a place where most of the problems that have necessitated feminist movements to begin with are still very much in place, but at the same time there's a mainstream, celebrity, consumer embrace of feminism that positions it as a cool, fun, accessible identity that anyone can adopt. I've seen this called "pop feminism," "feel-good feminism," and "white feminism." I call it marketplace feminism. It's decontextualized. It's depoliticized. And it's probably feminism's most popular iteration ever."

Another example of how social justice language has been co-opted by corporations is the word “empowerment”, which Zeisler explains:

“The phenomenon of empowerment as a social-change framework for feminism” arose through activism in Southeast Asia and Latin America, where activists had become frustrated with paternalistic, charity-focused efforts like those of the United Nations.”

Now, “empowerment” means.. next to nothing. If a woman feels “powerful” what she is doing is empowering her. Putting on makeup can be empowering, posing nude can be empowering, etc. Generally, it refers to the personal choices of women who are privileged and were to free to choose something.

“Empowerment” has been removed from ideas of community or change, it’s about doing things you enjoy and having consumer choices.

“Marketplace feminism is in many ways about just branding feminism as an identity that everyone can and should consume. That’s not a bad thing in theory, but in practice it tends to involve highlighting only the most appealing features of a multifaceted set of movements. It kicks the least sensational, and most complex issues under a rug and assures them that we’ll go back to them once everybody’s on board. And it ends up pandering to the people who might get on board rather than addressing the many unfinished projects still remaining.””

This isn’t new, either:

“In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, smoking was considered such an unseemly activity for women that they were often explicitly prohibited from doing so in public. So it made sense that the American Tobacco Company saw capturing this emerging market as akin to “opening a gold mine right in our front yard.”³ ATC deftly exploited the first wave of feminism when it hired Edward Bernays (now considered the “father of public relations”) to craft campaigns that would get more women smoking, and buying, cigarettes. Bernays initially appealed to women’s vanity by proposing cigarettes as slimming aids—“Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet,” urged print advertisements—but his hunch was that appealing to their growing sense of autonomy might be the real mover of product. In 1929, Bernays and ATC orchestrated a walk for equality down New York’s Fifth Avenue, hiring female participants to hold aloft Lucky Strikes as “torches of freedom,” while encouraging bystanders to “Fight another sex taboo!” by joining them in inhaling the heady smoke of gender equality. In an early example of contrived media virility, the photos of the march caused a national sensation and, as expected, nudged the percentage of female cigarette buyers up by more than half, from 5 percent in 1923 to 12 percent post-march.”

On labelling media “feminist”:

“Arguments over whether a movie is “feminist” or “not feminist”—especially when that movie never intended to claim either¹—suggest that feminism is not a set of values, ethics, and politics, but merely an assessment of whether or not a product is worthy of consumption.”

Buzzfeed feminism:

“Listicle feminism isn’t all pointless fluff; an important part of social change is shifting public perceptions with images, language, and a general subtext of This is no big deal, you guys. Representations of divorce,

interracial relationships, homosexuality, and transgender identity are some of the formerly taboo subjects that have been normalized in large part because of pop culture and media representations. (Remember how weird it was when we had to pretend that Ellen DeGeneres just hadn't found the right guy?) But there's a fine line between transforming the controversial into the mundane and simply refashioning it into a hollow trend, and celebrity feminism is too often falling ass-first on the wrong side of it."

There's quite a bit in this book about fashion and feminism:?"

The 1990s term "lipstick feminist" always seemed like it was deployed with a barb of disbelief—as though anyone who truly embraced typically feminine trappings was a sham. And it's notable that the handful of fashion designers whose clothes inspire the descriptor "feminist"—including Miuccia Prada, Rei Kawakubo, and Maria Cornejo—are also described as "intellectual," which from what I can tell is a word people use for either very dark or very light-colored clothes that are quirkily draped or full of angles and deliberately show a minimum of skin."

On "branding" Social Justice:

"Until fairly recently, the idea of branding social movements probably would have seemed hideously cynical. Sure, political and social struggles including civil rights and gay pride had their attendant stories, images, and vocabularies, but they weren't considered products; that would suggest a motive that was purely mercenary, rather than about humanity and justice. But the language of branding is no longer native to companies: building your personal brand, branding yourself to appeal to employers and romantic partners, and "leveraging" your brand through social media are actual things people discuss constantly with a straight face. And with everything from Barack Obama's presidential campaign to one-for-one TOMS shoes to #BlackLivesMatter, social movements as branded entities have begun to seem far less cynical than they once might have."

I just read an article about a survey on "Femvertising":

Female empowerment imagery more effective than sex appeal in ads, says Facebook

I highly recommend this book!

Ellie says

We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl®, the Buying and Selling of a Political MovementW is a fascinating study by Andi Zeisler (founding editor of Bitch Media) of how feminism has been transformed from a political movement to a "brand." Embraced by celebrities and utilized by companies looking to expand markets, feminism has become a word equivalent to "choice." Anything can be feminist—from underwear to dance moves.

Zeisler examines the contrasts between reality and sound bites. The music and movie industry have proclaimed themselves feminists, filled with strong women and featured roles. However, the reality remains that women make up a very small percentage of power players, including writers and directors. The men who invest in movie making are unwilling to give power even to women who have enjoyed great success in their first indie films. Beyoncé notwithstanding, the power in the music industry remains for the most part in the hands of (white) men.

Along with companies such as Dove embracing a new image, one which supposedly celebrates different body types, is the fact that these companies are looking for a way to sell their product.

Zeisler was a believer in the power of pop culture to transform society. Now, she's not so sure. What happens when white, powerful women (such as Sheryl Sandberg) write books ignoring class and race structures that tell women all they need to do is assert themselves, that any problems they face can be overcome by personal willpower. Wealthy, powerful women get together at expensive conferences and congratulate themselves on their success while working class women struggle to get child care and equal pay. Women are congratulating themselves on what kinds of clothes they choose while Planned Parenthood's very survival is threatened.

Feminism has moved then from being a political movement, fighting for systemic changes to a consumer object, the ability of an individual to enjoy choices that are often dictated in ways she does not recognize (or attempt to analyze) by market pressures.

Neoliberalism, the political movement that puts the onus of all achievement on the individual, ignoring the advantages of class, wealth, and gender, has co-opted the feminist movement as well. Why work for reproductive rights if you have access to them already due to your position in society? Why work for equal pay if it's just an individual's strength-or lack of-willpower that determines her place in the world.

The popularization of the feminist label by well-meaning celebrities like Emma Watson ignore deeper, systemic abuses and inequalities. Sound bites, no matter how attractive, will not create equality and neither will the mantra of having choices.

Feminism is not only about individual choice making. It's stigma of being "anti-male" is a distraction from what it is about. It is about redistribution of power, about equal rights for both all. Studies showing that feminism has led to greater unhappiness for women have been proved deeply flawed but continue to be quotes. Is it surprising that the group of people that has power would be unwilling to give any of it up? Isn't it easier to blame the woes of the world on women demanding equality than look at the inequality itself and remedy it?

Making feminism fun seems harmless. But underneath the branding is human suffering. Certainly, in many parts of the world women lack even basic rights and even in the United States women's control over their bodies is constrained and being threatened to being even more closely policed. Women still earn less than their male counterparts and decent, affordable child care for working women (most of whom are working not for "fulfillment" but for survival) is desperately hard to find.

So can pop culture effect systemic changes? Or has the woman's movement been co-opted by capitalism and neo-liberalism to distract people from the systemic changes that are necessary to bring about equality? Can pretty pink and handsome blue toys shape who children believe they are and what they want in life? Are we going forwards or backwards?

Feminism is a political movement, not a pretty toy. It is not about individualism but community and social responsibility. It is not each one for herself but people committed to a common cause: looking at the reality of how power systems are maintained and working to change them.

I want to thank the Goodreads giveaway program, first reads, for giving me this very interesting book and Andi Zeisler for writing it.

Bethany Fair says

Finally! - someone is willing to let the proverbial cat out of the bag by intelligently scrutinizing the consequences and general ickiness of marketplace feminism. In some ways I feel almost creeped out by how accurately Zeisler is able to summarize my own misgivings about the general direction of an "empowerment" feminism that cares more about capitalism, consumerism and neoliberal policies than it does about actually improving the lives of women - but until now, there hasn't been an accessible language to express my own concerns or other feminist leaders willing to say "hey, this is bullshit - let's talk about it, honestly." Not only is Zeisler sharp in her criticism (and hilarious at times), she isn't inclined to just sit back and point fingers. Instead, she offers valuable and thought-provoking propositions for how we might finally move beyond the trap of "feel-good feminism" collectively.

The fact that we find ourselves in a time where young women like myself are asked to justify our decision to vote for Bernie Sanders over Hillary Clinton (because real feminists don't vote for men, ever, apparently) most frequently TO other women who also label themselves feminists (and often, said "feminists" whose only engagement with feminism is watching Amy Schumer or buying a new Taylor Swift album) confirms to me that a paradigm shift is necessary; or, if not a paradigm shift, a way of detaching marketplace feminism from rampant consumerism. Amen, Andi Zeisler,...amen!

Veronica says

I admit I'm biased, but I think this is a great analysis of how feminism has grown into an arm of capitalism, which while it is fun to have feminist stuff to buy, isn't the point of feminism.

Hannah says

I don't know how to rate this because for every statement I agreed with, there was something else I REALLY disagreed with.

The basic premise (I think) is that superficial "marketplace" feminism has become very visible, and we haven't seen corresponding strides toward actual social justice. In my opinion, her delivery and examples don't do her main point justice, and it gets rather messy. But it's hard to write a book like this that isn't self-righteous, and the messiness seems in part due to Zeisler trying to convey the nuances of this issue. The parts where she's criticizing the *system* that makes "marketplace feminism" a thing are a lot stronger than when she's talking about individual celebs and movies, shows, etc. (though that might just be my aversion to pop feminism books talking).

A more scattered thought-dump: Personally I'm less concerned with celebs making money off of being feminists in general than I am with celebs making money off of being "feminists" that are racist, transphobic, and wh*rephobic. Zeisler seems to lump these two together, since both can be classified as watered-down feminism. I just don't consider them the same thing, while she literally says, "I've seen it called 'white feminism,'" I call it marketplace feminism." Like... black women coined the term white feminism so it's not your place to be renaming and redefining it, right? And I have to roll my eyes hearing about Beyonce making

feminism her "personal brand" and Black Lives Matter being called a "branded entity" but mostly *crickets* regarding white male celebs like Matt McGorry who are deemed heroes for the supporting those things.

~Geektastic~ says

4/27/2016

(I received an ARC of this title from the publisher via Netgalley, in exchange for an honest review. It is due to be published in wide release May 3, 2016)

The title *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement* sounds like a pretty straightforward condemnation of the sea change that has taken place in American culture regarding feminism. But as with all political movements, nothing is ever simple.

Feminism has become a buzzword. It garners clicks for celebrity interviews and can sell anything from building blocks to underwear. How has a word so long associated in the mainstream consciousness with angry, unattractive malcontents become a marketer's dream? This is the convoluted journey Andi Zeisler tackles in *We Were Feminists Once*. There are many paths to trace in the search for the shifting meaning of a political movement, but one thing is for sure: they almost always lead to money.

Zeisler, former riot grrrl and one of the founders of Bitch magazine, turns a harsh lens on the many industries that have coopted a political movement about equality in order to strip it for parts and make a profit: the fashion industry, Hollywood, the Internet and social media, even food and soap brands. When once it was a real challenge to find almost any female role models in the realm of popular culture, it's now all too easy to choose among Strong Female Characters in various bland, marketable flavors. Food companies that once appealed "family values" now peddle female empowerment in a jar. Celebrities who have distanced themselves from feminism and its "anti-men" clichés now clamor to endorse it and adopt it into their personal brand. The pendulum swings from one extreme to the other; the middle ground passed through only to get from point A to point B.

We are seeing a rise in *interest* in gender parity and diversity in film, television, advertising, politics, and other public arenas, but are we seeing any genuine gains in this inclusion? With marketing smoke and mirrors it is really hard to say. If you go to Buzzfeed and type "feminist" into the search box, it will return with dozens of lists and articles with titles like "40 Things Only Internet Feminists Will Understand" and "15 Reasons Taylor Swift is Secretly a Feminist." But, you may ask, isn't this visibility a good thing? This is where it gets the most complicated, as the answer is both yes and no. The increasing visibility of feminism makes it feel open to more people and a wider discourse, but at what cost? Usually, as Zeisler makes increasingly clear, the cost is substance and legitimate political engagement.

Feminism is not the only buzzword that is rapidly losing meaning as its use increases. Another casualty Zeisler chalks up to the linguistics of marketing is the word "empower." Once a signifier of self-sufficiency in the underserved and underprivileged, it can now be tacked on to anything woman-related. Have you ever been empowered by lipstick or deodorant? Well, now you can be. In 2003, *The Onion* announced "Women Now Empowered by Everything a Woman Does," and the marketing chant of empowerment continues to ring in our ears more than a decade later. As Zeisler points out, "[advertisers] use the term as an all-purpose adjective, Mad Libs-style; pop it anywhere in that sentence, it'll make sense." And the overuse of the word isn't the most troubling aspect of its saturation; rather, the gendered way it allows people to talk about

women and power without using the actual word power is the really frightening bit.

The market's embrace of feminism is riddled with cynical strategy. One of many of Zeisler's examples: in order to be seen as a company that cares about women's issues, CoverGirl cosmetics donates (loudly and visibly) to breast cancer research, while making no effort to ensure their products are free from known carcinogens. This is where the façade breaks down and feminism becomes just another tool. Are there companies that legitimately care about women's issues? Sure, but the sheer volume of the market drowns them all together into white noise and leaves us to dig for the truth among the competing and contradictory sounds.

The capitalist marketplace adoption of feminism and the systematic devaluation of it as a movement are both tied to a very particular permutation of commercial feminist values: the idea of "choice feminism" (also known as white feminism). The market is all about choice (or at least the illusion of it) and feminism, in its mainstream-embraced version, has followed suit. It seems that every choice, Zeisler highlights, can be considered feminist if made by a (self-proclaimed) feminist. There is no wrong way to be a feminist! You want to be a stay at home mom? Feminist! You want to work? Feminist! You don't have an option because you're poor? Uh...feminist? Choice is a privilege that comes from having options—a privilege bought by feminist organizing and activism—that now negates that activity by reframing it as choice. Choice feminism mirrors capitalism in a disturbing way: trickle down theory fails in both arenas, and yet we keep treating it like it works.

To say there is only one way to be a feminist is categorically wrong. But to say that there is no wrong way to be a feminist is equally misleading. As Zeisler notes "[m]arketplace feminism is seductive. But marketplace feminism is not equality." And ours is not the first generation to "market" feminism with an eye to the mainstream. Near the end of the book, she breaks it down with harsh truth:

"The feminist movements we're all most familiar with are ones that were able to be easily understood by outsiders with a minimum of difficulty. Optics mattered: First-wave feminists didn't want the presence of women of color to put the kibosh on getting suffrage; second-wave feminists didn't want lesbian and transgender women "tainting" the movement with fringe identities. Both movements were selling a branded image to wary buyers."

This buyer's-market sensibility creates an environment of exclusion that has continued to plague feminism from its beginnings to the present day. People of color and LGBTQ individuals still find themselves often on the outside of mainstream feminism, despite the attempts made to bring intersectional feminism forward, and marketplace feminism entrenches the problem further by forever appealing to a mass audience of mostly white buyers with disposable income. In other words, using feminism as a commodity makes it more palatable for the masses but ineffective for those who need it most.

So should we throw away our "This Is What a Feminist Looks Like" t-shirts? Despite her unflinching dissection of the problems inherent in using feminism as a marketing tool, Zeisler is not immune to the charms of seeing feminism portrayed positively in the media; representation matters, after all. Hers is not an all or nothing argument, but rather a call to do what good consumers and activists should always do: look for the truth behind the ad copy and don't buy everything the media tries to sell you. If "[f]eminism these days really does look brighter and funnier, cooler and easier than ever before" you must also remember that

“[T]he problem is—the problem has always been—that feminism is not fun. It’s not supposed to be fun. It’s complex and hard and it pisses people off. It’s serious because it is about people demanding that their humanity be recognized as valuable. The root issues feminism confronts—wage inequality, gendered divisions of labor, institutional racism and sexism, structural violence and, of course, bodily autonomy—are deeply unsexy.”

What comes after our current climate of marketplace feminism? “Postfeminism” as a concept came to the fore in the 80s, to suggest that feminism was over and we had “won,” since we had a few token females in the major fields and more empowerment than we knew. If we can’t actually be post-feminist—and we certainly can’t anytime soon—Zeisler hopes we can instead embrace post-marketplace feminism. To sum up, she gives us this:

“I want idealism to be more than a passing fad. I want feminism to be meaningful long after no one is singing about it, or name-checking it on red carpets, or printing it on granny panties.... A post-marketplace-feminism world may not be as headline worthy, but it will be a world that benefits more than a commercially empowered few.”

I've always considered myself fairly knowledgeable about feminism and how easily the media warps women's issues for it's own purposes, but We Were Feminists Once uncovered facets of the current state of things that I have been blind to and articulated sentiments I have not been able to put my finger on. I'll be the first to admit that I'm a sucker for all that clickbait about feminist comebacks and however many times feminists did something on Tumblr. These things don't necessarily need to go away—most are simply for laughs and internet solidarity. But while we're laughing and patting celebrities on the back for making feminist statements, we also need to be legitimately engaging with equality (and the lack thereof) in the real world.

We were feminists once. So let's be feminists again.

4/16/2016

This book is EXCELLENT. It's thought provoking, informative, occasionally snarky, and full of things you NEED to hear. I have written (thus far) more than 1400 words about it, and I feel like I only scratched the surface. However, as this isn't due to be published until May, I'm holding back on sharing the review just yet. It might not even be a review, more like a dissertation...

Full review TK

Thomas says

4.5 stars

A stellar book about feminism and how capitalism has weakened its overall political power. Feminism has

gained more popularity as a buzzword than ever before: clothing lines plaster the phrase all over their t-shirts and underwear, celebrities tweet about it all the time, and companies are quick to use phrases like "empowerment" to sell their products. But how much of this feel-good feminism actually contributes to advancing gender equality? Does buying Dove's "real beauty" body lotion really combat the wage gap, sexual harassment in the workplace, or the erasure of LGBTQ women and women of color in the mainstream feminist movement? In *We Were Feminists Once*, Andi Zeisler delves into these difficult and nuanced issues with a steady-handed conviction and intelligence. This passage from the end of the book articulates Zeisler's main thesis, about how feminism is about so much more than jumping on-board with a trend or wearing a certain phrase on your clothes:

"The problem is - the problem has always been - that feminism is not fun. It's not supposed to be fun. It's complex and hard and it pisses people off. It's serious because it is about people demanding that their humanity be recognized as valuable. The root issues that feminism confronts - wage inequality, gendered divisions of labor, institutional racism and sexism, structural violence and, of course, bodily autonomy - are deeply unsexy. That's a hard sell for fast-moving content streams that depend on online clicks and consumer appeals that exist to serve a bottom line. Even more difficult is that feminism is fundamentally about resetting the balance of power, and it makes people who hold that power uncomfortable because that's what it has to do in order to work. So when we hear from those people - and, oh, do we hear from them - that feminism should modulate its voices, ask nicely for the rights it seeks, and keep anger and stridency out of the picture, let's remember that large-scale social change doesn't result from polite requests and sweet-talking appeasements. But make no mistake, that's what marketplace feminism is: A way to promise potential detractors that feminism can exist in fundamentally unequal spaces without posing any foundational changes to them."

Out of her Zeisler's many amazing arguments, I really appreciated her approach to deconstructing choice feminism. Many people think that feminism is just about choices, that so long as a woman chooses to do something, that that choice is inherently empowering and/or feminist. But, as Zeisler contends, this is simply untrue, because individual choices always occur within a greater context. Yes, an individual woman may certainly feel confident when she puts on makeup, and that's great - but that ignores the systemic sexism that forces women to care about their appearances at all, lest they fail a job interview because they did not apply mascara or put on eye-shadow. And sure, a few (predominantly white) women may feel empowered by sex work, and their experiences are valid. But only recognizing those accounts of sex work ignores that most prostitutes do not have a choice about whether they should sell themselves (i.e., the majority have no other financial options), that trans women and women of color are often brutalized and killed in the sex work profession, and that the patriarchy socializes boys to view women as objects to be bought for sexual conquest, instead of human beings to be respected. A passage from *We Were Feminists Once* that addresses the problematic nature of choice feminism:

"Sociopaths aside, most of us regularly express a sense of ethics and values in our choices, and know that many of them have the potential to make the world better or make it worse. As an ideology, feminism too holds that some things - say, social and political equality and physical autonomy - are better than other things, like inequality, domestic and sexual violence, and subservience based on gender. It makes no sense to argue that all choices are equally good so long as individual women choose them. And it's equally illogical to put a neoliberal frame around that argument and suggest that a woman's choices affect that woman and only that woman. It looks like we may have empowered ourselves into a corner."

Overall, I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in feminism, capitalism, or making the world a better place. Zeisler includes a ton of pop culture references and analysis, in which she integrates her knowledge about economics and gender theory. While her writing style felt a bit repetitive at times, *We Were*

Feminists Once is still highly readable and will capture the attention of anyone even remotely interested in these issues. This book has inspired me to work harder to ensure that my feminism makes a difference, and I hope it does the same for you.

Vanessa (splitreads) says

This book has made me look at myself and the ways in which I have taken part in marketplace feminism, choice feminism, and "empowerment"/girl power all without any real systemic change coming from my decisions. A great book explaining these terms and how feminism shouldn't be about making us feel better (or about having fun).

Jessica says

"Marketplace feminism is in many ways about just branding feminism as an identity that everyone can and should consume. That's not a bad thing in theory, but in practice it tends to involve highlighting only the most appealing features of a multifaceted set of movements. It kicks the least sensational, and most complex issues under a rug and assures them that we'll go back to them once everybody's on board. And it ends up pandering to the people who *might* get on board rather than addressing the many unfinished projects still remaining."

This could be my new favorite book on feminism. It lays out some of the concerns Zeisler has regarding the movement's rise in profile over the last few years, what you might call the advent of Beyoncé feminism. It's really just a reminder that the work's not done just because we've converted Taylor Swift. Feminism's kind of become packaged as this neat, tidy little thing that talks about squads and body shaming and reclaiming your sexuality...but isn't really paying attention to reproductive rights and rape culture and workplace concerns. It's a thoughtful, easy-to-read book that made me want to stand up and proclaim "YAAASSS" more than anything else ever has before.

Cait • A Page with a View says

This book is everything I've been *trying* to word in essays for years. I've read many other similar books, but this is the only one that covered everything important (and in a way that isn't self-righteous or angry or anything annoying). I'm so happy I found this.

Thank you SO much to the publisher for sending me an ARC!

P. says

This was so hard for me to make myself read and also just to read. It's a collection of mini-essays on different sections of pop culture and how Zeisler sees them co-opting feminism, I think? So when it was due back at the library I didn't really try to finish it. Each chapter reads like a thinkpiece gone on way too long.

Zeisler picks one seemingly random example to dissect for each subject but often argues both sides or argues contradicting points without acknowledging that it's happening so I don't know if it was a deliberate thing or not. She says that there is a pluralism of ways to be feminist but is scornful of a lot of different manifestations, maybe the last chapter pulls it all together or synthesizes what she thinks feminism should be? A lot of it read, to me, like unhelpful snark. Although I have the feeling that IRL if we met we might have a good conversation and agree on things, the book was a bit of a mess.

Dawn says

Well, I was expecting more of a fluff piece but this book is actually really insightful.

She writes about the marketing of feminism to sell a wide variety of products that make us feel better about ourselves but which also seem to make us still feel like we're not good enough. Like Spanx, powerful support for powerful women. But we still need to smooth out those lumps and lift that ass. Or Dove, real women with real bodies. But hey, you need this skin cream to fix those blemishes.

And do we really need granny panties with feminist written on the ass?? Since when are wearing granny panties a feminist statement?

She also had this section where she asks why everything has to be pink and I really agree. It bugs me to no end that my steel toe work boots are pink. I seriously considered getting a pair that didn't fit as well just to get away from that. Nor do I need pink safety vests or pink tools or pink rain gear or pink pens, though I will cop to having a pink hard hat. Honestly, I don't really love pink that much. A shirt and some earrings.....but my entire work life?? No thanks.

I like what she says about how we need to think of feminism as a social movement to make all women's lives better. It should not be about the individual, what you buy, whether you wax, if the shows you watch say something bad about you, if abortion is good or bad. It should be about all women having rights over their own bodies, about having social programs that help, about how anyone should have all the opportunities they deserve and no one should be marginalized. It's a good message.

Courtney McCarroll says

I got about 2/3 of the way into this before I had to put it down. I think Zeisler does a fine job of discussing marketplace feminism and how capitalist forces co-opt the movement, but at the end of the day, this just reads like a white feminist writing about white feminism. It's basic and doesn't even really attempt to do the heavy lifting it needs to do to tell the whole story.
