ForeWord Reviews

YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

A Little F'd Up: Why Feminism Is Not a Dirty Word
Julie Zeilinger
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It seems that every few years, feminism gets a new literary paint job. We're now in the era of "third wave" feminism, with a strong focus on criticism of gender stereotypes and media portrayals of women. In academic circles, this wave involves elements like postcolonial theory, ecofeminism, transgender politics, and queer theory.

Although discussions centering around those themes are useful to pursue, first-time author Julie Zeilinger prefers a different route: focusing on the essentials of female empowerment and appealing to the young women who will form a crucial "fourth wave" before long.

She talks to these teenagers like she's one of them because she is. She begins her witty book with: "So. I'm a teenager and I wrote a book. And not just any book. A book about feminism. What kind of obviously pretentious and generally ridiculous teen does that?" The answer: a very talented one.

Zeilinger's wry, conversational style works exceedingly well at making her opinions and research accessible to a wide audience, particularly young adults. She titles a chapter on feminist pioneers "The Badasses Who Came Before Us" and breaks down complicated milestones like the Equal Pay Act and *Roe v. Wade*. She's not afraid to throw swear words around, but she also elevates her writing with complex insight.

Particularly significant, she argues for new language around the word feminist, noting that although it's not a dirty word (as denoted in her book's subtitle), the term has taken on negative connotations that are difficult to avoid. She manages to describe the difficulties of language without becoming ensnared herself, proving to readers that words have power, which turns out to be her larger point.

Often, she's like an adult Alice, giving a tour of Wonderland to younger girls, with the promise that they'll inherit all they see as long as they don't drink from the poisoned bottle of misogyny. As a tour guide, Zeilinger brings a great deal of experience to the task. Currently a student at Barnard College, her blog for teenage feminists, FBomb, is regularly read by

hundreds of thousands of people worldwide, and this work should garner an even broader audience.

Irreverent, fresh, charming, and hugely important, Zeilinger's exploration of feminism should be required reading for every teenage girl—and passed around by adult women, too.?

Elizabeth Millard