

FEMINISM

FROM

A to Z

BY

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VOTES FOR WOMEN

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WHY TEENS NEED FEMINISM

Adolescence is scary. Especially if you're a girl. Once you hit the age of 13, your sunny disposition gets gobbled up by the Surly Attitude Monster. And then, the Hormonal Beast gets in on the action. Now it's all over. You become a partying, drug-using, emotionally unpredictable, and sexually ravenous . . . well, Hormonal Beast with a Surly Attitude.

Right?

Obviously this is an exaggerated stereotype. And in many ways, it's not even true. That's the good news. The teen years can be a bumpy emotional ride, for sure. However, most teen girls have good relationships with their parents, and many are confident and successful academically. Increasingly, teen girls are choosing to delay sexual activity—and when they do become sexually active, they are highly likely to practice safer sex. For many girls, navigating the teen years isn't at all like a horror story.

That's part of the story. Now, let's look at the flip side:

- 81% of 10-year-olds are afraid of being fat.
- 59% of teenagers drink alcohol, and report drinking to avoid problems and relieve stress.
- Nearly half of all new cases of STIs (sexually transmitted infections) each year occur among 15- to 24-year-olds.

- The U.S. has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the developed world. Each year, almost 615,000 American women aged 15 to 19 become pregnant.
- 33% of adolescents in the U.S. are victim to sexual, physical, verbal, or emotional dating abuse.
- Teenage girls are three times more likely than boys to experience depression.

That's the bad news. For a teenage girl, the journey through adolescence has its share of hazards—serious ones. Yet, none of these hazards exist in a vacuum. In fact, in my opinion, all of them share one common denominator:

SEXISM.

That's right. Sexism.

Now, it's overly simplistic to boil issues like drug use, sexuality, body image, and depression down to a single factor. However, imagine for just a moment: What would happen if girls grew up in a world without sexism?

Would girls be so afraid of being fat?

Would some of girls' stresses and problems disappear, reducing the need to drink alcohol?

Would the rate of STIs (and teen pregnancy, for that matter) drop?

Would girls be as likely to be victims of abuse?

Would the risk for depression be so high for girls?

See where I'm going with this?

Unfortunately, sexism is alive and well. Girls and women have come a long way over the years, but we still get treated differently from boys and men. And, even though we have more educational

and career opportunities than ever before, we still face gaps in pay, employment, and achievement. Moreover, sexism interacts with other forms of oppression, such as racism, homophobia, and class inequities. These intersections create even more complications for girls making their way through the teenage years.

That's where feminism comes to the rescue.

Think of feminism as a diverse set of tools in a very large toolbox. Some tools allow us to zoom in on sexism and see it clearly. Sometimes sexism shows up in really subtle ways that are hard to see. When that happens, we need a new lens—and that's a good thing to have in our toolbox. Some tools can help us in the immediate moment, when sexism gets in our face and rears its ugly head. Some of these tools, used collectively over time, can help us to eliminate sexism and other “isms” in our broader society.

So many girls and women don't have easy access to the tools of feminism. In fact, if we learn about feminism at all, it probably won't be until after we finish high school. And that is a shame. Imagine how different life would be if, at the age of 13 and suddenly faced with casual sexism for the first time, you had a strong grasp of feminist principles and a hefty feminist toolbox at your fingertips?

Let's be more specific. Here are some situations where feminism can be really helpful:

- If you've ever felt “fat.”
- If you've ever been pressured to do something you didn't want to do, or that went against your values.
- If you've ever been afraid to speak up.
- If you've ever been bullied—or been a bully.
- If your confidence has ever felt shaky.
- If you've ever felt unwelcome because of who you are.

Feminism can help you navigate all of these scenarios—and then some. That's why I wrote this book. Because I believe that feminism will change your life.

FEMINISM FROM A to Z

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X is for **XL**. **Y** is for **YIN-YANG**. **Z** is for **ZERO**.

Dive into *Feminism From A to Z* for an accessible primer on history, current events, and essential issues through the lens of feminist theory and perspective. Not only will you learn something about yourself, your community, your people, and your world, you will discover kick-ass call-to-action suggestions and resources to take your feminism to a higher level!

A book for all teens—no matter what gender you are—about feminism: what it is, what it means, and how to do it . . . from A to Z.

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Magination Press

Published by the American Psychological Association
www.apa.org/pubs/magination



ISBN 9781433372111



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