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## A Review of Women Don't Owe You Pretty

Maya Wenzel

Minnesota State University, Mankato, [maya.wenzel@mnsu.edu](mailto:maya.wenzel@mnsu.edu)

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Given, F. (2020). *Women don't owe you pretty*. Andrews McMeel Publishing. 201 pp. \$16.99 hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-5248-5756-1

Maya Wenzel

Florence Given's *Women Don't Owe You Pretty* (2020) introduces readers to feminist conversations by familiarizing readers to "pretty privilege," or the idea that those closest to being white, cisgender, and able-bodied are deemed "pretty" (p. 2). According to Given, "prettiness" grants certain groups of people opportunities and disadvantages others (p. 2). While Given emphasizes the importance of acknowledging "pretty privilege," she also highlights how patriarchy may use the performance of femininity and "prettiness" to subordinate women as an introduction to feminism for readers. Ultimately, Given argues all people, especially women, should be true to themselves because marginalized identities will be "punished either way" due to systems of oppression. For example, while "talking" to her younger self, Given says that no matter what, she cannot win. As a woman, patriarchy will punish her for not performing femininity or put her down because of femininity (p. 10). In this review, I will address how Given introduces readers to feminism, suggestions for moving towards a more intersectional approach to feminism, and how the book fits into feminist classrooms.

Given (2020) argues that women are subject to scrutiny regardless of how they perform femininity. Thus, they should not feel ashamed of being themselves. She uses "pretty" as a starting point and introduces feminism by demonstrating to readers how to disregard likeability, spot an unhealthy relationship, value consent and bodily autonomy, listen to marginalized voices, squash internalized biases, check their privilege, and learn from past mistakes (p. 194). Given argues for all people to be themselves without hiding who they are to appease patriarchal expectations (p. 55). By providing readers a guide to self-improvement, she incorporates elements of feminism in a way that is easy for readers to understand,

giving her audience an introduction to feminism in the process.

Given (2020) introduces readers to feminism through self-betterment, but there is still work to do to engage in intersectional approaches to feminism. Recently, Chidera Eggerue criticized Given, a white woman, for taking credit for particular feminist ideas that should be attributed to Black women, and Eggerue in particular (Young, 2020). While neither of their publishers acknowledge plagiarism, Eggerue's critique is valid as Given makes nods to intersectional feminism without truly delving into the implications of what that would look like for different bodies or acknowledging the contributions of women of color. This critique also underscores the need for feminist scholars to be sure to credit women of color and Black women for the work they have done.

While Given explains introductory feminist concepts to readers—like privilege, consent, and bodily autonomy—well, an intersectional approach to feminism would require a discussion on how race, sexual and romantic identity, dis/ability, gender identity, etc., impacts people's experiences. For example, a deeper analysis of “pretty privilege” would require an examination of how strict, hyperfeminized beauty standards disproportionately affect trans women and women of color. Similarly, women of color and women with disabilities may deal with desexualizing stereotypes that complicate their “pretty privilege.”

In tandem with other texts, educators might consider *Women Don't Owe You Pretty* a resource for students in introductory feminist classes. Given (2020) points out how to identify toxic behaviors in others and oneself and ways to grow as individuals in a profane and unapologetic way. Given's straightforward wording and ability to explain introductory feminist concepts may appeal to emerging feminists in the Zoomer generation. Given also includes a glossary in the back of the book and trigger warnings regarding sexual assault at the beginning of each chapter where applicable. Additionally, Given includes privilege checklists at the end of the book for white privilege, cisgender privilege, male/male passing

privilege, heterosexual privilege, dis/ability privilege, and class privilege (pp. 181-187). Educators could use these checklists as a classroom activity to introduce students to the concept of privilege, the areas where they may experience privilege and/or marginalization, and how their different identities shape how they experience the world. An Introduction to Gender class could benefit from this book's glossary and utilize these checklists for a lesson on privilege, intersectionality, and identity.

#### References

- Young, S. (2020, December 10). Chidera Eggerue accuses Florence Given of “copying” her book: ‘This is exactly how white supremacy works.’ *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/women/chidera-eggerue-florence-given-copy-book-instagram-b1769249.html>