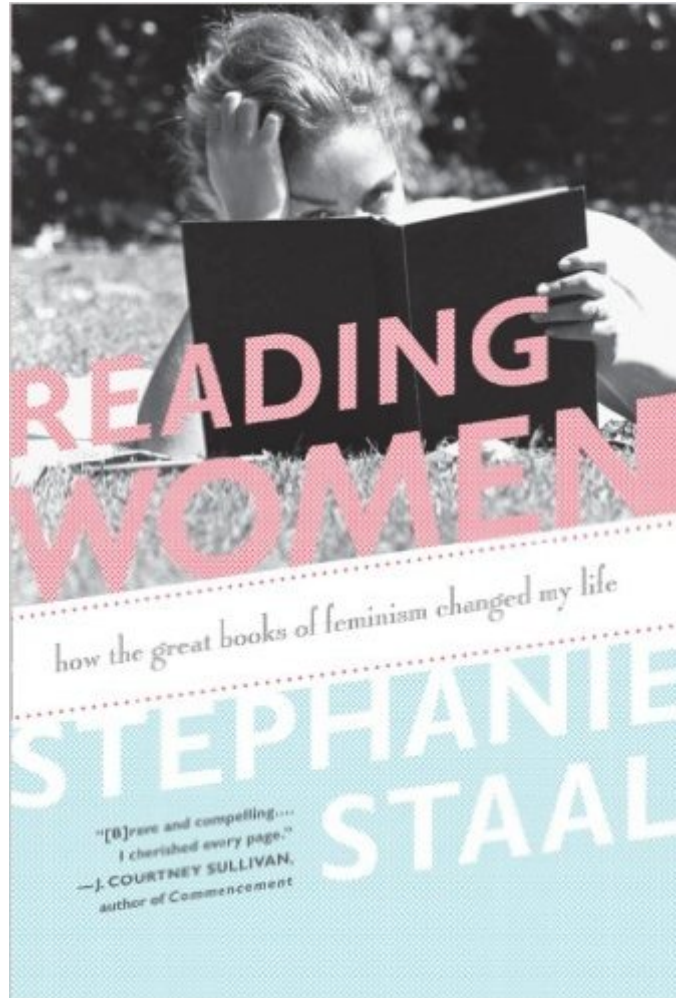


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Reading Women: How The Great Books Of Feminism Changed My Life



Synopsis

When Stephanie Staal first read *The Feminine Mystique* in college, she found it “a mildly interesting relic from another era.” But more than a decade later, as a married stay-at-home mom in the suburbs, Staal rediscovered Betty Friedan’s classic work—and was surprised how much she identified with the laments and misgivings of 1950s housewives. She set out on a quest: to reenroll at Barnard and re-read the great books she had first encountered as an undergrad. From the banishment of Eve to Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, Staal explores the significance of each of these classic tales by and of women, highlighting the relevance these ideas still have today. This process leads Staal to find the self she thought she had lost—curious and ambitious, zany and critical—and inspires new understandings of her relationships with her husband, her mother, and her daughter.

Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: PublicAffairs; 1 Original edition (February 22, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1586488724

ISBN-13: 978-1586488727

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.6 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (20 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,147,161 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #208 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Feminist #843 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Parenting > Parenting Girls #850 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Women’s Studies > Women Writers

Customer Reviews

When author Stephanie Staal first read books by feminists Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Simone De Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, she was a nineteen-year-old student taking Feminism 101 at Barnard College in NYC. At that time, she was poised on the threshold of what appeared to be a limitless future. A decade later, as a wife and mother who had traded in stability for the flexibility of free-lance and moved from Manhattan to Annapolis, Maryland, the life she had envisioned had seemingly shrunk, while she felt like a shadow of that former self. Deciding to pursue the feminist classics seemed like a way to rediscover herself, so she signed on to sit in on Fem Lit classes at the

university; and thus began her journey into understanding her relationships and herself, while revisiting the tomes she had once studied. From the perspective of her life in the moment that she began this journey, she viewed the literature and the theories from a different vantage point. She discovered that she could identify with the first-wave feminists, like Mary Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, while coming to odds with former heroines, like Beauvoir; she also learned to make peace with post-feminists like Katie Roiphe. She stated near the end: "Sometimes I grappled with the divisiveness of second-wave feminism and the ambiguity of third-wave feminism, while the postmodern theory I would have analyzed with delight as a college coed was cause for vexation when viewed in the framework of my daily life. Yet even these theoretically dense texts provided important opportunities to question and challenge my own beliefs, my own reactions." As I read this intriguing memoir/journey, I couldn't help but compare this author's experiences to some of mine.

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