

BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

Crossley, Alison Dahl. *Finding Feminism: Millennials and the Unfinished Gender Revolution*. New York: New York University Press, 2017, 256 pp. (9781479884094)

Upon beginning *Finding Feminism: Millennials and the Unfinished Gender Revolution*, it is easy to wish that Alison Dahl Crossley's research followed the surge of feminist activism stemming from the 2016 US Presidential election. Further engagement with the text, however, reveals that it is a surprisingly prescient exploration of how feminists of the early 2010's sustained feminist community in such a way to maximize on the recent surge of interest in, and support for, gender equality. Her portrait of young feminists at three college campuses in 2011 thus provides useful background and context for understanding the current interest in the "unfinished gender revolution."

In 2011, Crossley interviewed seventy-five undergraduate students at three institutions – the University of California at Santa Barbara, the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities and Smith College. She also surveyed 1,397 students on these campuses and observed feminist student groups. The book presents her conclusions about students' willingness to claim a feminist identity and the ways that students engage in feminist activism. Crossley finds little support for common perceptions about young feminists – namely, that they are unwilling to claim a feminist identity, are unaware of continuing inequalities, and unappreciative or unaware of the contributions of earlier generations of feminists. Instead, her research reveals "how college campuses are generative environments for feminism, and valuable sites for the perpetuation of the movement" (148). While Crossley does find that delineating the line between feminists and non-feminists today is more difficult because of limited consensus about what feminism *is*, these variations in feminist identity and activism were not "necessarily a negative prediction for the future of feminism," but instead reflected a more nuanced and inclusive movement (59). Further, Crossley's comparison of young feminists with feminists of the 1970's demonstrates both areas of continuity and new areas of focus (i.e. transgender rights, intersectionality) and tactics (i.e. online community building) (149-150). The book ultimately concludes that "[i]f we are wondering where young feminists have gone, we will find them only if we employ an expansive and contextually specific approach" (117).

One of the unique contributions of *Finding Feminism* is its articulation of the concept of “waveless feminism.” Waveless feminism is the idea that the feminist movement does not only exist in identifiable “waves,” but instead persists over time – sometimes in surges of activism and sometimes through abeyance structures, wherein feminist communities keep the movement alive during times of reduced support. Instead of employing the wave metaphor, Crossley instead describes feminism as “a river,” in which “there are rapids, sometimes it is very shallow or deep, sometimes there are rocks or other obstacles that divert its course, sometimes it is wide, at other times narrow, sometimes it overflows at the banks, sometimes there is a drought” (20). This analogy is not only poetic, but apt. Her research supports such a view of feminism, showcasing how young feminists on college campuses are engaged in a feminist movement that is dynamic, evolving, and very much alive even though research participants do not identify with a particular “wave” of feminism (109). And indeed, Crossley correctly theorizes that it is this “established sense of solidarity and motivation to create change” that can enable a surge in broader feminist activism when “a specific event causes mass mobilization” (147).

Although the book is an interesting and well-researched exploration of campus feminism overall, I couldn’t help but feel troubled by the use of the generational term “millennial” as a descriptor for the subject of her project. The students Crossley studied were all undergraduate students in 2011, which likely means that most were born in the 1990s. As a result, they represent only the second, younger half of the millennial generation, as commonly defined (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Moreover, they represent the portion of millennials who have not yet married or had children; indeed, Crossley admits that her subjects were overwhelmingly single and childless (42). As Crossley notes, tensions between the incompatibility of the new opportunities for women in the workplace and the continued expectation that women will perform the lion’s share of the unpaid labor at home is one of the main reasons for the “stalled gender revolution” (14-15). Therefore, the inclusion of older millennials who have more direct experience navigating these tensions would have provided a much broader perspective on millennial feminist identities and approaches. While the focus on undergraduate students is not on its own problematic, the title (and sometimes the text) of *Finding Feminism* seems to promise that Crossley’s work is representative of all millennial feminists, which it cannot realistically claim to be. For this reason, I believe the scope of the project is better articulated as an exploration of modern student feminism and feminist identities.

Ultimately, this book delivers on its promises of analyzing the state of the feminist movement on college campuses, illuminating how feminist activism and identity have evolved, and – perhaps most importantly – exploring “how participants in a long-lasting movement find sustenance and support, and how their approaches to feminism alter and guarantee the movement’s forward course” (17). It is this last piece which provides insight not only into the cultural moment within which Crossley conducted her research – but also into the current cultural moment in which feminism and feminist principles have once again captured the attention of the nation.

Wake Forest University School of Law

Meghan Boone

REFERENCES

Howe, N., & Strauss, W. 2000. *Millennials rising: The next great generation*. New York: Vintage Books.

Meghan Boone is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Wake Forest University School of Law in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Her research focuses on issues of gender equality in the law and the legal profession, and her work has appeared in the *Texas Journal for Civil Liberties & Civil Rights*, the *Georgetown Journal of Gender & the Law*, and the *University of Baltimore Law Review*. Her article on millennials’ effect on the legal profession was included in the materials for the 2017 Women in Law and Leadership Symposium held at Miami University.

