

Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions Study Guide

Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

(c)2017 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.

Contents

Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Summary.....	3
Introduction and opening remarks.....	5
Suggestions 1-3.....	7
Suggestions 4-6.....	9
Suggestions 7-9.....	11
Suggestions 10-12.....	13
Suggestions 13-15.....	15
Important People.....	17
Objects/Places.....	20
Themes.....	23
Styles.....	28
Quotes.....	31
Topics for Discussion.....	34

Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, 2017.

In this non-fiction work, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie frames her thoughts on feminism and raising children in the form of a letter to one of her friends named Ijeawele. The author includes an "Introduction" addressed to the book's readers, contextualizing the letter and its publication. As she writes in her introduction, Adichie's friend Ijeawele, shortly after giving birth to a baby girl, had asked the author how to raise her baby girl a feminist. At the time, the author decided to write Ijeawele a letter, which she hoped would be both "honest" and "practical" (4). The author mentions that since she has now had a baby girl too, she appreciates how much easier it is to "dispense advice" (4) about raising a child than it is to actually raise one. Nonetheless, the author concludes her remarks in her introduction with the recognition that it is "morally urgent" (4) to have these conversations.

Thus, the author closes her introduction and begins her letter addressed to Ijeawele. She congratulates Ijeawele on the birth of her daughter, Chizalum, and introduces Ijeawele (as well as her general readership) to her Feminist Toolkit. Inside there are two conceptual tools. The first is the premise or belief that: "I matter equally. Full stop" (6). The second tool is a test asking whether you can "get the same results" (6) in any given scenario if you switch the genders. If you cannot, the disparity is a form of gender-based discrimination or bias.

The author then begins a list of her fifteen suggestions, each of which is accompanied by commentary ranging from one page to seven pages long. In the first suggestion, the author reminds Ijeawele that while motherhood is important, she must also be a "full person" (7) and not feel pressured to quit her job. In the author's second suggestion, she points out that women have been socially conditioned to see themselves as the primary providers of childcare. The author instead recommends that mothers and fathers share childcare and household responsibilities equally. In the third suggestion, the author rejects the language and concept of "gender roles" (14) and tells Ijeawele to make her own choices without considering certain activities "for boys" and others "for girls."

The author's fourth suggestion describes an ideological phenomenon she calls "Feminism Lite." In her fifth suggestion, the author tells Ijeawele to teach her daughter to love reading. In the author's sixth suggestion, she hopes that Ijeawele will learn to question language and to reject any language that refers to women only in terms of their relationship to men.

For her seventh point, the author suggests that marriage not be discussed as an "achievement" (30), a signal that is sent more to girls than to boys and that encourages girls to see themselves as wives rather than people. The author's eighth suggestion

encourages Chizalum to reject the expectation that girls have to be “likeable” or “nice.” Instead, the author encourages Chizalum to see herself as “honest,” “kind” and “brave” (38). In the author’s ninth suggestion, she encourages Ijeawe to give her daughter a sense of her identity, and especially her Igbo, Nigerian and African roots.

In her eclectic tenth suggestion, which is focused on questions of appearance and body image, the author implores Ijeawe to let her daughter make her own decisions about her appearance and, whenever possible, separate her daughter’s appearance from any talk of her morality. In her eleventh suggestion, she also encourages Ijeawe to separate biological facts from social norms, which she says can and sometimes should change over time. In the author’s twelfth suggestion, she encourages Ijeawe to talk openly about sex and sexuality with her daughter. In the author’s thirteenth suggestion, she also tells Ijeawe to talk openly with her daughter about love and romance, and to explain that healthy relationships are about equality and choice for both individuals.

The author’s fourteenth suggestion points out that women are neither worse nor better than men, nor are women necessarily feminists while men are not. In the author’s final, fifteenth suggestion, she tells Ijeawe to teach her daughter about difference and to make difference a normal part of her life. The author then wishes that Chizalum grow up happy and healthy. Finally, she asks jokingly whether Ijeawe has a headache after her answer and tells her next time not to ask the question at all if she does not want a lengthy answer.

Introduction and opening remarks

Summary

The author prefaces her letter to Ijeawele with a section entitled “Introduction.” In the Introduction, the author contextualizes the letter that follows, explaining to her readers that a couple of years before this book’s publication, a close friend named Ijeawele asked her for advice on “how to raise her baby girl a feminist” (3). Although the author recalls that Ijeawele’s request felt “too huge a task” (3), she resolved to write her friend a letter, which she hoped would be both “honest” (4) and “practical” (4) in imparting her advice. The author calls the resulting letter a “map” (4) for her “own feminist thinking” (4), which here she turned into the book readers see before them.

The author, who is now the mother of a baby girl too, recognizes that the reality of raising a child is “enormously complex” (4). However, she concludes that, “it is morally urgent to have honest conversations about raising children differently” (4). Both Ijeawele and the author promise to “try” to follow the suggestions outlined in the letter-turned-book.

The next section begins with the address: “Dear Ijeawele,” (5). The author congratulates Ijeawele on the birth of her child, who is named Chizalum and who the author describes “already looks curious about the world” (5). Turning to the question of feminism, the author notes her belief that feminism is “always contextual” (6) and introduces her two primary “Feminism Tools” (6).

The first tool is a premise—a “solid unbending belief” (6)—which she describes as follows: “I matter equally. Full stop” (6). The second tool is a test asking whether you can switch the genders in any scenario or situation, and still “get the same results” (6). If you cannot, the disparity is a form of gender-based discrimination or bias.

Before presenting her suggestions, the author reminds her reader, Ijeawele, that she must “always trust [her] instincts above all else” (7) and that she must simply “try” (7).

Analysis

Rather than launch directly into the letter to Ijeawele, the author uses the introduction section to engage with her new readers who are not Ijeawele, and to frame the letter for them. Thus, the reader learns that Ijeawele is a real friend of the author’s, and that this letter sprang into being amongst a particular set of circumstances, in response to a particular question from a particular friend of hers. Thus, from the outset, the author particularizes this work of non-fiction in ways that will ultimately connect to her final, fifteenth suggest cautioning against “universalizing” any standard or experience in one’s own life. As it is, the introduction actually helps the reader understand that this letter, like Adichie says of feminism itself, is contextual.



The introduction's prefatory comments and the form of the letter also contribute to the work's overall feeling of intimacy and, as the author reiterates, its honesty. By putting her thoughts on feminism in the form of a personal letter addressed to her friend, the author allows herself to adopt a more colloquial, personal tone than she may otherwise have felt able to use in a more impersonal essay that is not addressed to a particular person. The author also seems to believe that the form of the letter allows her greater "honesty." For instance she describes the letter as as both "honest" and "practical." The author implies that some things can be articulated more honestly and truthfully in the personal form of a letter. It is clear that the author believes that raising a child as a feminist is one of those things that can best be said in a letter, though she does not specifically outline why that may be.

Several of the author's remarks before she describes the first suggestion indicate that the form of the letter is honest because it emphasizes both the contextual nature of feminism as well as the ever-changing, provisional nature of giving parenting advice. Multiple times the author emphasizes that the most important dimension to raising their daughters as feminists is that both she and Ijeawele "try." The repeated references to parenting as an act of "trying" rather than as an act of "accomplishment" is mirrored in the form of the letter itself. The letter does not in itself "accomplish" its suggestions. Rather, it floats them as "suggestions" for Ijeawele to consider and to adopt if she wishes. In a sense, the letter's only "accomplishment" is its status as a record of the author's (and perhaps Ijeawele's) commitment to raise their daughters feminist—their commitment, in other words, to "try."

The author's notion of a "Feminist Toolkit" is also a central and important metaphor in her opening remarks to Ijeawele. First of all, the image of a "toolkit" for feminism is suggestive in itself. It suggests that being a feminist is a matter of having and applying the proper tools—not of occupying an elite position or possessing an unstudied, intuitive brilliance. By giving Ijeawele and her book readers the same tools that the author keeps in her "toolkit," she is inviting them to participate along with her. As for the tools themselves, the author keeps her description succinct since the belief in one's own, equal self-worth and the ability to determine which situations are influenced by gender are, to her, fairly basic tenets.

Vocabulary

dispense, urgent, magnificent, contextual, premise

Suggestions 1-3

Summary

The author makes her first suggestion: “Be a full person” (7). While she acknowledges that “motherhood is a glorious gift” (7), the author reiterates a second time: “Be a full person” (8). She encourages Ijeawele not to quit working, and to reject any arguments that exploit “tradition” as an argument for why women should stay out of the workforce. The author points out that Igbo women have been working as traders and farmers long before British colonialism. The author also asks Ijeawele to understand that as a “full person,” she must “give [herself] room to fail” (10) and not expect herself to “do it all” (10).

The author’s second suggestion calls for parents to share childcare and responsibilities equally. She especially calls attention to what she calls Ijeawele’s “socially conditioned sense of duty” (12) to her child, which expects that Ijeawele be the primary caretaker rather than her husband, Chudi. The author rejects these gender roles, and explains that Ijeawele’s husband should not be praised for “helping” to raise their daughter when he is merely doing his share.

The author’s third suggestion rejects the language and concept of “gender roles” (14) altogether. Instead, she advises Ijeawele to give her daughter the space and flexibility to make her own choices without forcing her to consider what is feminine or masculine. As an example, the author tells Ijeawele that she should give her daughter a helicopter if that’s the toy she wants to play with, give her a doll if that is what Chizalum happens to want, or to give her both and let her choose for herself. The author asks Ijeawele to see her daughter “as an individual” (18) beyond gendered expectations of what a girl should be, and above all, to let her daughter simply “try” (20) new things even if she will not succeed.

Analysis

The author’s first three suggestions distribute her advice among the various members of the nuclear family unit: mother, father, and daughter. At the root of the author’s first three suggestions is her desire to have these people considered as “full people.” Adichie is most explicit about seeing mothers as “full people” because they are among the members of the population most likely to be treated as “partial” people. Women are more likely to be defined solely by their status as a mother than men are to be defined solely by their status as a father; in fact, men are more likely to be defined as the family’s breadwinning parent. In these first three suggestions, Adichie aims to unsettle these “gender roles” by encouraging her readers to think of women as earners and professionals and men as parents too.



It is significant that Adichie begins her letter with suggestions directly applicable to Ijeawele, rather than, as she does for many of the other suggestions, imparting instructions to Ijeawele that are ultimately suggestions for how Chizalum should conduct her life. In other words, Adichie chooses to address Ijeawele's own attitude towards mothering before she approaches the actual question of parenting Chizalum. The author suggests that the proper attitude Ijeawele must take towards motherhood involves embracing imperfection and failure. In moments of failure, Ijeawele can be generous towards herself by reminding herself that she plays a number of roles all at once and by keeping separate her full self from her role as a mother.

At base, the author's critiques of the special praises for men when they help around the house and the "do it all" model of motherhood are also critiques of "gender roles" more generally. However, the author does not even mention the phrase "gender roles" until the beginning of the third suggestion when she tackles the subject head-on. In effect, this delayed invocation of "gender roles" eases the reader into the concept and allows her or him to first see how "gender roles" operate in the context of the home and family. What does it matter, the author seems to suggest, that the reader knows (or has been told that) "gender roles" are limiting? It matters much more that the reader be able to identify the way "gender roles" operate in concrete situations that are likely to arise in their own lives. Thus, the author imagines the specific scenarios of Ijeawele feeling overwhelmed with her mothering responsibilities and Chudi changing a diaper or making dinner.

The third suggestion also makes evident that challenging "gender norms" does not simply involve a recalibration of family and household duties. Challenging "gender norms" involves giving girls (and boys) more choices and freedoms in their lives, from the way they dress to the toys they are given. The reference to children's toys also hints towards how someone like Ijeawele is, as the author says in the second suggestion, "socially conditioned" into her gender.

Vocabulary

pioneering, infidelity, self-fulfillment, colonialism, alien, enterprise, phenomenon, nurture, domain, dual, complicit, arrest, literal, resentment, territory, venture, valiant, bloodless, passive, straitjacket, stifle, unconsciously, chafe, self-reliance, fend

Suggestions 4-6

Summary

The author's fourth suggestion involves a phenomenon she names "Feminism Lite" (20), which is defined as "the idea of conditional female equality" (20). The author provides a number of examples of Feminism Lite at work. These include analogies likening men to the "head" and women to the "neck," which interpret women's indirect, "conditional" power for power itself. Other examples of Feminism Lite include those people who claim that women can make choices and have power if their husbands "allow" it.

The discussion of Feminism Lite triggers the author's reflections on why she is "angrier about sexism" (23) than racism. She writes that in her circle of friends, racial injustice is more easily acknowledged than "gender injustice" (23). As an example, she cites their mutual friend Ikenga, who is "always quick to deny that anything is caused by misogyny" (23) and who would always rather point out the ways in which women are "privileged" (23). The author concludes this fourth suggestion with the observation of a "sad truth" in which powerful women around the world are disliked and "policed" (24).

In her briefer, fifth suggestion, the author tells Ijeawele to teach her daughter to love reading. The author explains that books will help her to "express herself" (25) and to "understand and question the world" (25)—including its gender norms.

The author's sixth suggestion recommends that Ijeawele teach her daughter to question all of language—what words are used to describe particular people, and when gender is being used as a coded language to suggest inferiority. The author suggests that Ijeawele avoid being too "jargon," and that she be very specific when she describes instances of misogyny and patriarchy. The author also suggests that Ijeawele teach her daughter to reject language that reduces women's identity by their relation to men. In other words, the author hopes that Ijeawele and her daughter will demand empathy for women as women in and of themselves, without consideration for their possible roles in relation to men as mothers, wives, daughters, and so forth.

Analysis

The author's fourth suggestion regarding "Feminism Lite" broadens the scope of Adichie's argument in significant ways, putting her in conversation not only with Ijeawele's immediate community but also with the broader debates around powerful women that are happening within American and Nigerian media. Above all, the author identifies a strain of misogyny in American and Nigerian media that is masquerading as women's liberation. This she calls "Feminism Lite," which the author associates with a number of adages trumpeting women's indirect forms of power (they are the "neck" supporting the man's "head"). Like Diet Coke or Pepsi Lite, "Feminism Lite" is a diluted,

weaker form of feminism with all the sugary good stuff stripped out. Whereas true feminists should insist on unconditional, unequivocal equality for women, Feminists Lite agree to place a number of conditions on women's empowerment. By doing so, they in fact undermine true feminist goals.

The moving passage in which the author observes a "sad truth" about the world also articulates the reason why the author believes feminism is needed, why the world has such a long way yet to go towards gender justice, and why she found it such a daunting and immense "task" to answer Ijeawele's question. As the author sees it, the world dislikes and "polices" powerful women. Because feminism often seeks to empower women and because the author wants to give Chizalum more options and power over her own life, this recognition is a bitter one. It suggests that by striving to acquire power for themselves, Chizalum, Ijeawele, and the author all risk social repercussions; they all face the possibility of being "policed" themselves.

The author's sixth suggestion also picks up a thread from the first suggestion, in which the author calls for mothers to be seen and to see themselves as "full people." Here again, the language of fullness and completeness has returned. This time, the author wants all women to see in fuller, more complete terms as people rather than as wives and daughters. Seeing women as "mothers" defines them in terms of their children, while seeing women as "wives" and "daughters" defines them in terms of their relationship to men. While Adichie recognizes that women are daughters and often wives and mothers, these are roles that are subject to gendered expectations and that cannot substitute for a full and individual identity.

Vocabulary

conditional, hollow, appeasing, bankrupt, benevolence, progressive, egregious, atrociously, dismiss, diminish, misogyny, refute, aberration, endeavor, repository, aspire, patriarchy, jargon, prestige, overt, champion, revere, patronizing

Suggestions 7-9

Summary

The author's seventh suggestion explains that marriage should not be considered or discussed as an "achievement" (30). To Ijeawele, the author says that her daughter should no more aspire to marriage than we expect little boys to aspire to marriage. She also briefly detours into a discussion arguing that women should be given the choice to change their names after marriage or not. They should also have the choice between adopting "Mrs." and "Ms.," which the author prefers because it is more in line with the male equivalent, "Mr."

In her eighth suggestion, the author asks Ijeawele to teach her daughter to "reject likeability" (36). By "likeability," the author means the "unspoken pressure" (37) that women feel to change themselves in order to please others and be "liked." Rather than teaching Chizalum to be "likeable" or "nice," the author tells Ijeawele to teach her to be "honest," "kind" and "brave" (38). At bottom, Chizalum must learn to think of herself not as an object who can only be liked or disliked by others, but as a "subject who can like and dislike" (39) with her own opinions and by her own standards.

In her ninth suggestion, the author encourages Ijeawele to give her daughter a rich, complicated sense of her identity, especially with regards to her Igbo identity. The author notes that Chizalum will grow up surrounded by "images of white beauty, white ability, and white achievement" (40) and "negative images of blackness and of Africans" (40) in TV shows, pop culture, and books. Thus, Ijeawele must teach her daughter to take pride in her Igbo culture and the history of African people, while at the same time teaching her to question and reject misogynistic Igbo "traditions." As a practical measure, the author tells Ijeawele to give her daughter an inspiring, motivational Igbo nickname like the author's own, which means "Daughter of the Land of Warriors" (42).

Analysis

In the seventh through ninth suggestions, the author pivots from a consideration of Ijeawele's life as a feminist mother to a consideration of the lessons Ijeawele must teach her daughter. Thus, the mother/daughter (or more generally, the elder/younger) relationship involves a complicated process of both emulation and differentiation. For instance, there are certain aspects of the author's and Ijeawele's upbringing that the author hopes Chizalum will adopt. For instance, the author hopes Ijeawele will give her daughter an Igbo nickname like her own. The author, who is married and mentions her preference to go by "Ms.," also hopes Chizalum will go by "Ms." Yet, there are aspects of their upbringing that the author hopes Chizalum will do differently—such as the many, painful years that the author spent trying to get boys to like her without asking herself first if she liked them. This section of the author's letter to Ijeawele lays bare many of the ways in which these suggestions are the product not only of good, feminist choices



that the author has made over her life but also of her reflections on the less progressive choices she has made or felt pressure to make over the course of her life.

Readers may wonder what connection exists between feminism and identity, which the author makes the central subject of her ninth suggestion. In part, the answer goes back to the author's hope that her letter is both "honest" and "practical." Every individual, whether male or female and whether a feminist or a misogynist (or anything in between), inherits and adopts certain social, cultural, and linguistic identities over the course of his or her life. Thus, the author's recognition of Chizalum's identity—as a Nigerian, an Igbo, an African—is partly a "practical," pragmatic attempt to address some of the questions that Chizalum will no doubt ask herself, especially given cultural representations valuing whiteness over blackness. When young girls like Chizalum learn to value and take pride in her African roots, they also learn to value themselves and to see their individual, human dignity. This is an essential part of Adichie's first premise: "I matter equally. Full-stop."

Through her ninth suggestion, the author also preemptively addresses the sometimes totalizing logic of identity. If one is "Igbo," one must abide by "Igbo" traditions. Here, Adichie intervenes, showing that being Igbo does not prohibit one from thinking and speaking critically about certain Igbo traditions. As a budding feminist, Chizalum will must be constantly alert to misogyny and willing to criticize aspects of her faith and identity in ways that may occasionally be uncomfortable. Just as the author argued in her section on "Feminism Lite," gender justice and equality cannot be conditional or compromised.

Vocabulary

preoccupied, shabby, unreasonable, marital, maternal, retrograde, unilateral, smoldering, hostility, milestones, hazy, infuse, psychic, surname, municipal, unspoken, amorphous, entity, consent, resilience, diaspora, dignity, heady

Suggestions 10-12

Summary

The author's tenth suggestion focuses on questions surrounding appearances and body image. The author asks Ijeawele to encourage her daughter to play sports and be active. She also suggests that Ijeawele let her daughter make her own choices about her appearance, such as whether she wants to wear makeup or not. According to the author, Ijeawele must make it especially clear that her daughter should never feel ashamed for liking "traditionally female" (43) activities, such as fashion or makeup, if she happens to like them. The author also recommends that Ijeawele completely delink her daughter's appearance from her morality, such that her daughter understands that wearing a short skirt does not make you immoral.

In the author's eleventh suggestion, she encourages Ijeawele to question "biology" when it is used as a supposedly natural explanation for a social norm. As the author explains, social norms are "created by human beings" (51), and therefore change over time and can be made to change.

The author's twelfth suggestion specifically encourages Ijeawele to talk to her daughter openly and candidly about sex and sexuality. Just as Ijeawele must never link her daughter's appearance to her morality, neither should she "link sexuality and shame"—which, the author points out, occurs in "every culture in the world" (53) especially with regards to forms of women's sexuality.

Analysis

The tenth suggestion marks a shift from a discussion of internal markers of individuality, such as identity and history, to external markers, such as dress and appearance. In other words, the author's suggestions to Ijeawele that she promote her daughter's pride as a Nigerian and African give way to other suggestions on how Ijeawele can encourage her daughter to take pride in her own unique appearance and body. Here, the author's suggestions revolve around encouraging young girls to make deliberate choices for themselves about how they want to dress and act, according to their own standards rather than society's standards. Rather than prescribe particular ways in which young girls should wear their hair or how long they should wear their dresses, the author is more concerned with maximizing the choices each girl has. In fact, the author is saddened by external pressure on girls to dress and act either more "feminine" or more "masculine" than they prefer because she considers these pressures confining and stifling to young children, who should be free to choose as they wish.

In this sense, the author's tenth suggestion is characteristic of the essay's argument style as a whole. In her analysis of a seemingly very specific gender issue—in this case, appearance and body image—the author shows how it is connected to much broader



patterns of policing and limiting young girls. For instance, the author connects shaming women for liking makeup or high heels with the generally low value that society places on “traditionally female” activities. By having made that connection, the author is then able to show how providing girls with greater choices and alternatives in how they dress and style their hair are also ways of rethinking gender roles altogether. The author is showing, in other words, that seemingly small choices and conversations—about, for instance, hair—are linked to larger questions not only of beauty but also of value and worth for women as a whole.

The author’s eleventh suggestion regarding biological versus social explanations is only a few paragraphs long, yet makes a powerful point that connects the tenth through the twelfth suggestions and provides a running theme throughout the work as a whole. In the eleventh suggestion, the author argues that people are not merely biological beings, but also “social beings” as well. The eleventh suggestion thus reveals that the choices, which the author discusses in the tenth suggestion and which range from hairstyle and dress to sexuality, are socially informed—or, to put it in the author’s frequent phrasing, “socially conditioned.” Recognizing these behaviors as social rather than biological has crucial consequences for the essay’s argument and its vision of feminism. According to the author, social norms can be changed; biological facts cannot. Thus, in societies in which contraception is available, the expectation that women remain chaste and virginal until marriage is grounded in social norms rather than any biological justification. This distinction, the author suggests, is freeing since it suggests the possibility of gender justice in the future.

Vocabulary

conform, perceptive, dissatisfaction, admire, blustering, static, empower, indifference, incontrovertibly, lineages, promiscuity, offspring, justification, disingenuous, inherit, dehumanizing, prop, appetite

Suggestions 13-15

Summary

The author's thirteenth suggestion calls for Ijeawele to talk to her daughter about romance and love. Specifically, the author hopes that Ijeawele will teach her daughter that love is not only about giving but also about taking. The author even provides her own definition of love as "being greatly valued by another human being and greatly valuing another human being" (56). According to the author, Ijeawele should also teach her daughter that relationships are about equality and choice, so that any person can propose and any person can pay.

The fourteenth suggestion cautions Ijeawele not to transform oppression into "saintliness" (59). As the author points out, women do not—and should not—need to be "good and saintly" (60) in order to secure their property rights. At root, the author suggests that "women are as men are" (60); they are neither worse nor better than men, nor are they uniformly one thing or the other. To this end, the author points out that "not all women are feminists and not all men are misogynists" (61).

In the author's fifteenth and final suggestion, the author advises Ijeawele to teach her daughter about difference and make difference seem normal to her. The author admits that this is partly a practical suggestion because, as the author sees it, the world itself is made up of differences—between people, their opinions, their worldviews, and so forth. The author wishes that Chizalum be taught to understand and appreciate difference, while also forming, holding and defending her own opinions on those differences.

After a few final wishes that Chizalum grow up to be happy, healthy and that her life be "whatever she wants it to be" (63), the author asks if Ijeawele has a headache. Jokingly, she suggests that whatever headache the reader of her letter may have is her fault because she asked the question in the first place.

Analysis

Just as the author interprets beauty, appearance and cultural identity in broad terms, so too does she interpret romance. And just as the author interprets Ijeawele giving her daughter a strong sense of her African and Nigerian roots as a means of teaching her daughter to feel proud and confident in her own skin, the author interprets "love" also as a matter of pride and self-worth. In fact, the definition that the author gives for "love" has almost nothing to do with the saccharine, hackneyed love stories featured in Hollywood romances. Instead, the author's definition revolves around the word "value" and the concept of "greatly valuing" oneself and others.

Altogether, the author's notions of love and romance reflect a sense of balance—between giving and taking, between sacrificing and exploiting, between one's individual self and a relationship with another. In other words, the author is capturing the tricky

balance between individual growth and fulfillment, and fulfillment that comes from a stable, healthy, balanced partnership between two people who “greatly value” one another. In this sense, the author’s image of a loving relationship reflects reciprocity as well as balance. In this sense, the author’s representations of strong marriages bring the text full-circle, back to the author’s early rejection of “gender roles.” When “gender roles” are tossed by the wayside, the author shows how both partners are suddenly freed to adopt whatever role suits their individual personality and income level. For instance, the author suggests that the partner that can pay more should pay more, regardless of gender. Meanwhile, the author also suggests that both partners should feel equally able to propose if they want to get married. Relationships, as the author portrays them, still have power dynamics and inequalities on certain aspects, such as money. However, the author shows how that power flows more equitably between partners when they eschew any predetermined, inscribed role. These are the healthy, strong—and perhaps, it should be added, feminist—romantic relationships that Ijeawele should seek to promote for her daughter.

In the author’s next suggestion, her fourteenth, she cautions Ijeawele not to transform oppression into “saintliness” by making women out to be angels, saints, and paragons of goodness. This in particular is a continuation of her first suggestion that women are full people who “matter equally.” Thus, as full people, women come in all varieties, ranging from good, evil, and every shade in between. In connection with the thirteenth suggestion, the fourteenth about “saintliness” also suggests that there are things to appreciate and to love—that is, to “greatly value”—about women beyond their ostensible “saint-like” goodness, which is in itself an impossible standard to uphold and more of a mirage than reality.

Readers may find the author’s final, fifteenth point about difference unexpected since the author does not overtly tie her discussion about normalizing difference to her prior points about feminism. In some sense, though, the essay has been slowly building up to this point throughout. In prior suggestions, the author has pointed out some of the biological differences that exist between the sexes; she has also noted other points of difference, such as skin color or nationality. However, the author has repeatedly rejected any notion that these differences are attached to real differences in value or worth. Stemming from the author’s initial feminist premise that “I matter equally. Full-stop,” the author’s fifteenth suggestion implies that while “I” may differ in some ways than my peers—or that they may worship, dress, speak and behave differently than me—“I” and they both “matter equally.” In the end, the author suggests that feminism is a means of respecting and demanding respect for each individual’s worth as a human being—not according to the particular conditions of their gender.

Vocabulary

component, invariably, flippant, lamentation, adherent, vile, prerequisite, discourse, evade, discredit, patriarchy, universalize, humility, sentiment, devolve

Important People

The Author (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an award-winning novelist and speaker. She splits her time between Nigeria, where she was born, and the United States. Her earliest works are novels that explore different aspects of Nigerian history, such as *Purple Hibiscus*, which focuses on the story of young girl's growing up in 1990s Nigeria, and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which is set during the time of the Biafran War in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Her most recent works have crossed between Nigeria and the United States, as does her 2013 novel, *Americanah*. Adichie's recent non-fiction work has picked up on and develops themes of gender injustice and feminism, which are present in her fiction as well. *Dear Ijeawele* is a continuation of these same themes, which she has also outlined in a popular TedxTalk, which was sampled by Beyoncé: "We Should All Be Feminists."

In *Dear Ijeawele*, Adichie positions herself as a letter-writer, writing down the advice she wants to give to a friend asking how to raise her daughter a feminist. Although the author has become a recognized public figure within the feminist movement, Adichie is careful not to portray herself as an expert. Humbled and overwhelmed the magnitude of the question before her (how to raise a feminist), Adichie recognizes that "I had spoken publicly about feminism and perhaps that made [Ijeawele] feel I was an expert on the subject" (3). While recognizing the effect and authority that her public position grants her, the author does not make any claims to being an expert herself. Over the course of the book, therefore, Adichie offers suggestions while emphasizing that Ijeawele will have to follow her own instincts and establish her own priorities as a parent and feminist.

Throughout her writing, Adichie's tone is varyingly angry, satirical, humorous, sad, uncompromising, joyous, and often optimistic. In keeping with the theme of the text, which anticipates a happy, healthy life for the newborn Chizalum, Adichie is herself similarly optimistic for the future. Although she is clear that the continued disregard for gender injustice upsets her, Adichie never abandons her belief in the possibility of progress and change in the future. Stemming from her belief that women and men "matter equally," Adichie rejects any language or idea from the "Feminists Lite," who suggest we must compromise on women's equality. Adichie suggests that we must continue to strive, with candor and without compromise, for full gender equality because it is both possible and necessary.

Ijeawele Eze

Ijeawele is the woman and new mother interested in raising her daughter a feminist and to whom Adichie addresses her letter. Ijeawele's personality and perspective are not explored in much depth within the work, but there are glimpses of her life as it relates to

the author's project. For instance, it is mentioned that Ijeawele is 28 years old and holds a master's degree (35). It is known that she is married, and the author has a number of thoughts on what a feminist, married, co-parenting life should look like. The author frequently and strategically mentions personal details from Ijeawele's life, such as the fact that she and her now-husband Chudi did not wait for marriage to have sex, in order to argue that Ijeawele be compassionate, understanding, and consistent in the standards she applies to her daughter.

Chudi Udegbunam

Chudi is Ijeawele's husband. The author does not address Chudi directly, though she frequently alludes to him and to his feminist obligations and responsibilities as a co-parent and husband. In the same way that Ijeawele comes to stand in for progressive mothers seeking better lives for their daughters, Chudi is often made to stand in for husbands in general. The author disapproves of Chudi's "blustering" (48) male friends, whom she sees as chauvinistic and retrograde. But in general, the author not only approves of but considers Chudi's involvement as a parent essential to raising a feminist daughter.

Chizalum Adaora

Although Ijeawele's and Chudi's daughter has no voice or presence of her own in this text, the author opens her letter with the image of the week-old baby girl, Chizalum. She is described as looking "already...curious about the world" (3). In this sense, Chizalum functions as the locus upon which the author and Ijeawele focus their hopes and dreams of a feminist future. She is the catalyst and spark for Ijeawele's and the author's conversation around feminist child-raising.

Marlene Sanders

In her impassioned plea that Ijeawele continue working after the birth of her daughter, the author references this female journalist, who was the first woman to report from Vietnam during the American war with Vietnam. The author, who notes that Sanders was also the mother of a son, cites Sanders's advice to a younger journalist that she "never apologize for working" and that she love what she does.

Hillary Rodham Clinton

The author references Hillary Rodham Clinton and her relationship with Bill Clinton in the context of her discussion of the politics around whether women should keep their names or adopt their husband's name after marriage. Hillary, the author notes, was forced by "political pressure" (32) to adopt Clinton and drop Rodham from her professional name in order to fit a particular gender norm. In addition, the author uses a comparison of Bill Clinton's and Hillary Clinton's twitter descriptions—Hillary's

emphasizes her role as “Wife” first, while Bill’s begins with “Founder”—to point out the ways in which society expects to see women in maternal roles, according to their relationship to men.

Theresa May

The author invokes another powerful female politician, Theresa May, who is the leader of the United Kingdom’s Conservative Party and who in 2016 assumed the office of Prime Minister. She cites a description of May’s husband, Phillip May, whom an unidentified “progressive British newspaper” (21) describes as a man who stepped back and “allowed” his wife to shine. The author points out that this language would not be applied to Theresa May in the reverse direction.

Ikenga

The author cites Ikenga, a mutual friend of hers and Ijeawele’s, as evidence of the widespread, normalized resistance that feminism faces. Ikenga refuses to listen or engage with any allegation of misogyny. He prefers to believe, instead, that women are the more “privileged” (23) gender because he believes they exercise indirect powers of persuasion and influence over their husbands. The author sees this as an example of misogyny itself.

Ugomba

In contrast, the author cites Ijeawele’s brother, Ugomba, as an example of the fact that men can be not only feminist allies but feminists themselves. In particular, the author praises Ugomba as a man who, unlike some of Chudi’s friends, is not full of “bluster” (48).

Florynce Kennedy

In her proposed “village of aunties,” the author mentions her admiration for Florynce Kennedy. Kennedy was a prominent American lawyer, feminist and civil rights advocate who was famous for frequently dressing in a cowboy hat and pink sunglasses. She acted occasionally as well, including once alongside Morgan Freeman.

Objects/Places

The United States

The author, who splits her time between the United States and Nigeria, makes a number of references to American politics and culture. A clear example of this hybrid focus is clear in the author's memory of going to a "U.S. mall with a seven-year-old Nigerian girl and her mother" (17). While some strains of feminist discourse have historically taken their Anglo-American context for granted, the author's references to the United States are always explicit and deliberate; they are never assumed. Often the United States is referenced in relation to consumerism, as in the example of toys at a U.S. mall or in a later example to standards of beauty upheld by white American pop culture (40).

Nigeria

The author, who was born in Nigeria and who is addressing a letter to another Nigerian, makes a considerable number of references to Nigeria, Nigerian identity, customs, food, and family structure. Thus, the author puts herself in conversation with social media debates happening within Nigeria regarding women's responsibilities in the home, television commercials in Lagos, advertisements for "lady mechanics" in Lagos newspapers, and Nigerian school curriculum. The author makes these references to both United States and Nigerian culture organically within the text, forcing all her readers to confront, as she suggests in her fifteenth suggestions, difference.

Igboland

The author makes several references to "Igboland," a cultural and linguistic name typically referring to southeastern Nigeria where the Igbo people have their origins. The author hopes that Chizalum's daughter will learn both to value her Igbo roots and to question some of the Igbo "traditions" that are used to marginalize women. References to Igboland also remind the reader of the multiplicity of identities and histories each individual carries with them; Chizalum has been born into a family that is both Nigerian and Igbo.

Africa

At the same time that the author emphasizes subnational, cultural and linguistic identities, such as Igbo or Yoruba, the author also hopes Chizalum will learn and appreciate the history of the African continent and people. This is part of a more general project of teaching Chizalum self-worth by teaching her about the "beauty and resilience of Africans and of black people" (40).

Feminism Lite

In her fourth suggestion, the author introduces a concept she calls “Feminism Lite.” Like Coke or Pepsi Lite, “Feminism Lite” is feminism without all the good stuff—which is to say, without all the desire for comprehensive, full gender equality and its rigorous critique of misogyny and gender injustice. The author suggests that Feminism Lite is not bounded by any particular geographical border, and can be found worldwide. For instance, she references the “Nigerian chapter of the Society of Feminism Lite” (22).

Books

The author’s fifth suggestion focuses entirely on encouraging Chizalum to read and to love books. By “books,” the author does not mean textbooks, but rather autobiographies, histories, memoirs, and fiction that is not assigned for class. The author also mentions parenting books as a resource for Ijeawele. Throughout the letter-turned-book, the author focuses on the ways in which books can be sources of inspiration and imagination. However, she also expresses certain reservations towards books when they are used as forms of control, such as textbooks, and when they threaten to override one’s particular, contextual instincts, such as overly regimental parenting guides.

Village of Aunties

The author suggests that Ijeawele should surround her daughter with a so-called “village of aunties” (47) that can provide role models of strong, powerful women for her daughter to emulate. The reference is an acknowledgment and ode to the common refrain that it takes a village to raise a child. Here, the author suggests that it takes a village with a particular set of gender characteristics to raise a feminist. The “aunties” can range from respected family members to inspirational public figures.

Village of Uncles

The author also suggests that Ijeawele should surround her daughter with a “village of uncles” (47) who can provide Chizalum with alternatives to the roles we assign to both genders. The author believes that finding uncles who are suited to become a part of the “village” is a more difficult task than finding aunties.

Feminist Toolkit

The author’s feminist toolkit includes two main tools, which she outlines in the opening remarks of the author’s letter to Ijeawele. The first is the belief that “I matter equally. Full stop.” The second is a kind of test that any feminist can apply to a situation or discourse: “Can you reverse X and get the same results?” The feminist toolkit is an

example of the author's interest in making feminism accessible to the everywoman and everyman. Anyone can learn and use these tools in their daily life. It is also an example of the author's hope for change in the future. When it comes to gender, the author believes the world is broken and requires hard work and a toolkit to fix it.

Palm Oil

Palm oil is a cooking oil derived from palm trees, and used throughout the world, including Nigeria. In her final, significant suggestion regarding difference, the author imagines a potential conversation between the Chizalum and her mother Ijeawe. In the conversation, Ijeawe informs Chizalum that while she may like palm oil, others do not. When the imaginary Chizalum asks "Why?," the imaginary Ijeawe responds that people are simply different. Only one kind of cooking oil among many, palm oil is a symbol of global cultural difference that, though important, should not ultimately be considered a monumental barrier to intercultural communication and conversation.

Themes

Literary, Political and Professional Foremothers

Throughout this text, the author frequently invokes the names of powerful women who either she admires or whose life stories teach valuable lessons about the ways in which powerful women are viewed and received by society. The author draws from a diverse array of political figure across the aisle, from the leader of the United Kingdom's Conservative Party leader, Theresa May, to Hillary Rodham Clinton, a high-profile Democrat in the United States. The author does not give much attention to either woman's political message or stance on policy issues. However, both women's reception in the public eye, as married women and mothers in positions of power, concerns and incenses the author. The author notes that society expected both May and Rodham Clinton, as it does all women, to take a back seat to their husbands. Their refusal to do so, the author notes, is met with subtle scorn and overt discrimination alike. As the examples of May and Rodham Clinton suggest, society has sought to control and contain women seeking power.

As a partial remedy to rampant gender injustice, the author suggests that Chizalum surround herself with a so-called "village of aunties." If patriarchal structures of power around the world have sought to diffuse women's power and isolate women from one another, the author's suggestion provides something of an antidote by suggesting that women join together and forge communitarian, village-like support networks offering support, guidance, and above all, a sense of history. It is striking that some of the author's examples of "aunties" whom Chizalum could include in her "village" have died. She references both Dora Akunyili, the former Director General of Nigeria's National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control who died in 2014, and Florynce Kennedy, an American civil rights advocate and activist who died in 2000. The suggestion, then, is that forming and formulating a "village of aunties" is also a way of tracing and articulating a past for oneself. In this sense, reading and studying the words of these powerful role models, the author suggests, is a way for Chizalum to see into the past, appreciate the work of her forebears, and forge an identity for herself that will empower and embolden her on the work she has left to do.

The author's repeated references to these powerful women serve two other, related purposes. First, these women provide examples of women who were "full" humans and who pursued their professional careers and intellectual passions while juggling their positions as daughters, friends, mothers and wives. In keeping with her belief that the debate around women "doing it all...assumes that caregiving and domestic work are singularly female domains" (10), the author does not emphasize or glorify these role model as women who "did it all." Rather, the author simply assumes—and lets the reader take for granted the fact—that the "aunties" in the "village" are "full" people.

The second purpose of the "village of aunties" relates to its potential to cultivate racial identity and pride. It is striking that, for the most part, the author peoples her village with

African women and African American. Whether white American women such as Hillary Clinton or Theresa May belong in the “village,” the author does not explicitly state. However, it is clear that the “village of aunties” is one that transcends any particular geographical area. Chizalum’s legacy is as broad or as narrow as she wishes it to be.

Redefining Love As A State Of Value and Self-Worth

The author’s definition of love provides key insight into her fundamental, first premise that women and men “matter equally.” In particular, the author’s belief in that premise causes her to redefine “love” in ways that suggest that full, unconditional gender equality will force us to rethink all of our most basic categories of thought. The author primarily tackles questions of love and courtship in her thirteenth suggestion on romance. In this section, she even offers her own definition of love, which resonates throughout the letter in significant ways. As the author defines it, love is a state of being “greatly valued by another human being and greatly valuing another human being” (56). In this sense, the author disconnects “love” from whatever material or legal connotations it may have. Love cannot be proven with material gifts nor can it be guaranteed with legal documents.

Instead, the author’s definition expands these understandings of love to mean valuing any “human being” (56). In this sense, to “love” someone is to show them respect and consideration as a person of great value, of great worth. The author thus implies that it is just as important that Chizalum learn to “love” herself—which is to say, “greatly value” herself—as that she learn to find great value in others. In this sense, the author’s thirteenth suggestion on romance ties back to the first feminist tool in the author’s feminist toolkit: the belief that “I matter equally” (2). In order to believe that “I matter,” the author suggests it is necessary to “greatly value” and “love” the “I” that matters. Love involves both love for another and self-love.

In essence, the author’s definition recalibrates the meaning of love, shifting our understanding of the term from a model in which women assign value to others over themselves to a model in which women begin with this fundamental belief that “I matter” in a relationship. In fact, many of the author’s suggestions to Ijeawele stem from this redefinition of love. The author’s recommendation that Chizalum be given the choice between “Ms.” and “Mrs.,” the choice to keep her name, the option to propose, the opportunity to continue developing professionally, all tie back to a vision of love in which both partners greatly value the other’s development, growth, and autonomy as an individual.

De-linking Gender From Value and Judgment

Throughout the course of the essay, the author frequently cautions Ijeawele not to “link” certain kinds of values or moral judgments with the facts of biology. For instance, the author tells Ijeawele to “never, ever link Chizalum’s appearance with morality” (44) and to redefine what it means to keep one’s hair “neat” so as “not to link hair with pain” (44).

Elsewhere, the author points out that societies and cultures around the world “attach” (53) shame to female sexuality. The author is insistent on this point. For example, she admonishes Ijeawele never to “link sexuality and shame” (53) and advises her to teach Chizalum to “reject the linking of shame and female biology” (54).

Why does the author seem so fixated on pointing out these linkages? In the case of female sexuality and shame, the author points out that this linkage is really about control of women’s bodies, not about sexuality itself. In fact, whenever the author points out a “link” that adherents of Feminism Lite or outright misogynists like to make, she is also pointing out the ways in which society exercises and maintains control and power over women. Invariably, the linkages that Adichie points out are ones applying certain values and assigning worth to women’s appearances, bodies, and very beings. For instance, the above mentioned “link between sexuality and shame” designates women who are virgins as morally superior to women who are not.

The author identifies these linkages for her readers in order to encourage them to see them as forms of gender injustice, and to therefore reject them. These linkages operate as a system, in which gender is used to uphold entire value systems. This “linking” of biology with social value and worth goes against the grain of the first tool in the author’s Feminist Toolkit. How can women “matter equally. Full stop” (2) when time and again, society suggests that women matter only conditionally—so long as their worth is “linked” to certain social expectations of chastity, purity, beauty, physical appearance, and so on? Moreover, these standards violate the author’s second tool in her Toolkit. These standards are more powerfully and explicitly applied to men, who are relatively more free to express their sexuality and show their bodies without fear of it reflecting on their morality.

Standardized Feminism Versus Different Feminisms

You will notice that the final, fifteenth suggestion that the author offers in her “Feminist Manifesto” revolves around an involved, impassioned discussion of difference--and not, at least explicitly, feminism. In fact, the author does not use the word “feminism” until the very last word of the last sentence of her letter. However, through the form of the letter and through the author’s emphasis on her experiences in both Nigerian and American society, the author makes implicit connections between the author’s thoughts on “difference” and her thoughts on “feminism.”

Just as the author does not explicitly define “feminism” for her readers, nor does she explicitly define “difference.” However, she does list several arenas in which difference crops up and which give the reader an impression of the kinds of “differences” Adichie is discussing. These range from the existential to the mundane, and include religion, science, places of worship, cooking oil, sexuality, family structure, “experiences” (62), and something called “standards” (62). These last two are particularly important for their connections to feminism and to the notion of feminism being presented in this self-proclaimed “Manifesto.”



Regarding the first point on different "experiences," this "Manifesto" draws heavily upon the author's personal experiences. Partly, this is the result of it being staged as a private letter. A private letter provides the author with a platform for discussing her private life in relation to very public issues of gender equality and justice. Thus, the author cites her own experiences in malls, conversations with friends and family, and memories from her years as a student. When the author draws from the media and news cycle, she does so by making explicit connections between herself and her subject matter. The personal is never far from mind in this text.

And yet, the author is careful not to extrapolate from her experience by turning them into "standards" that Ijeawele must follow. Instead, she presents her advice, honed over years of experience in the world, as a series of "suggestions." She also acknowledges that Ijeawele may choose to make different parenting decisions that, in a particular context, may be more suited than the author's own advice. In other words, the author's "Feminist Manifesto" and vision of feminism is predicated on the belief that raising a feminist will look different in different contexts. Feminism is, as she says, "contextual" (3). There is, quite literally, no such thing as standardized feminism. The expectation that there be something like "standardized" feminism plays into Feminism Lite's belief that women must be measured, not in terms of their essential human worth, but against a set of external, often seemingly impossible, standards. Thus, the fifteenth suggestion underscores perhaps the fact that feminism is multiple, diverse, and adaptable to a variety of contexts--perhaps the most important thing to understand about feminism.

De-naturalizing Motherhood

Since the author is writing in response to a question from a young, new mother, motherhood is obviously central to the author's feminist "map" (4). In keeping with the author's resistance to stereotyping and essentialism, the author's portrayal of motherhood is a rich, complicated, and full one. The author begins by acknowledging that motherhood is a "glorious gift" (7), but that it is also a long and sometimes lonely journey. As Ijeawele embarks on this journey, the author encourages her to seek out help and to be gentle with herself; she is not "Superwoman" (9) and does not need to be. Here, "Superwoman" is arguably the first of many "gender roles" that the author will reject over the course of the book. As an archetype, it is limiting to women's "full" personhood. Moreover, the author suggests that expecting mothers to be "Superwomen" and to "do it all" all the time is not only psychologically damaging, but also unfairly burdens women, who are expected to "do it all" while their husbands are not.

In this sense, the author rejects the social isolation that being "Superwoman" imposes on mothers. "Superwoman" does it all by herself; she runs the household, cares for elderly parents, and raises children by herself. The author points out that this is a gender role that fails the second test of her feminist toolkit. While wives are simply expected to pick up the household labor, husbands who raise children and do the housework are praised for "helping." The author suggests that this is a problem not simply because it unfairly burdens women, but because it also denies Chudi, Ijeawele's

husband and Chizalum's father, a chance to adopt these roles as father and husband that may not otherwise be hoisted upon him and which he may actually relish.

For a truly feminist division of household labor, the author insists that must share equally in these household responsibilities. In essence, the author is re-coupling motherhood with fatherhood, denaturalizing our assumptions about both roles as well as the division of labor within any given household. By seeing mothers as women, with professional lives and personal lives beyond their role as a mother, the author denaturalizes society's expectation that women will condition themselves to become mothers first and foremost. She is also calling for a greater support system for women that does more than simply "support" the woman. The author's extensive, deeply personal letter to Ijeawele, a letter which does not reduce Ijeawele's identity only to that of "mother," can be seen as a first step in this direction.

Styles

Structure

Broadly speaking, “Dear Ijeawele” is structured as a letter from the author to her close friend. The first part prefaces the letter, putting it into context for the reader and explaining its most recent transformation into book form. The first part of the letter, before the author begins her 15 suggestions, also provides two conceptual tools that frame the book’s observations of misogyny and patriarchy at work in the world. In terms of structure, they invite the reader to participate in the author’s project, as well as giving the reader a broader conceptual frame for reading this letter.

Generally, the first two suggestions refer to equitable, feminist family structures that can support Chizalum as she grows up, which suggests that a supportive community is the foundation and bedrock of any feminist undertaking. For the author, in a feminist family, the mother would feel no pressure to quit her job or give up her professional life by becoming a stay-at-home “traditional” mother. In two-parent households, fathers would be expected to contribute equally and fully to the work of running a household and raising a child. Using these two suggestions of the real, deep impact that naturalized “gender roles” can have on the family, the third suggestion expands beyond this, to reject the question of “gender roles” altogether.

The fourth suggestion, which identifies and critiques a phenomenon known as “Feminism Lite,” seems to deviate from the letter’s hitherto close focus on raising Chizalum a feminist. However, the fourth suggestion is one of the important ideological cores of this book. Through her analysis of “Feminism Lite,” the author encourages Ijeawele not to settle for conditional, partial rights for women. True feminism, the author suggests, is a broad, total, unconditional, uncompromising vision that women “matter equally.” She will return multiple times to the idea of “Feminism Lite” throughout the book.

This fourth suggestion to “beware the danger of... Feminism Lite” (20) inaugurates a new discussion of all the ways in which society considers women’s worth and equality as conditions of either their physical appearance or their relation to men (via their status as wives and mothers). The author points out that women are often only valued if they meet certain conditions—if they are “likeable,” married to men, mothers who prioritize motherhood over their professional lives, or if they meet certain white, western standards of beauty. The identification of “Feminism Lite” also leads the author into a more critical interrogation of language itself, which is often code for continued male superiority. For instance, the author in the sixth suggestion tells Ijeawele to reject “chivalry,” which suggests that women need to be “‘championed’” and “‘revered’ because they are women” (30). Instead, Adichie criticizes chivalry for its “patronizing undertone” (29) and unmask its premise as one of “female weakness” (30).

The 14th and 15th suggestions shift again, from a critique of gender injustice to more general suggestions about how to view the world and one's place in it. The 14th suggestion cautions Ijeawele and her daughter not to associate feminism with "saintliness" (59) and to be aware that both female misogynists and male feminists exist. In other words, the author encourages her readers to view feminism as a multifaceted movement of people, who like all people exhibit a range of behaviors and who are as deeply flawed as any other group of people. The 15th suggestion elaborates on this notion of difference within the feminist movement to note that the world itself is a place of irreducible difference. People are different from one another, and will always be different from one another. Ijeawele, Chizalum, the author and the reader must all learn not only to see difference as normal but to articulate themselves within it. Over the course of the book, the author builds gradually to this conclusion, suggesting that being a feminist is a comprehensive worldview and way of being in the world that encompasses more than a critical eye to gender injustice.

Perspective

The author speaks and expresses her opinions from the first person. She does not give much autobiographical information, although it is clear that she is close and intimate with Ijeawele, the letter's recipient. They share a similar group of friends; the author knows Ijeawele's husband; she even knows their sexual history as a couple. In comparison, the author gives relatively few details from her own personal life. In her "Introduction," the author mentions only that she is "now...too, the mother of a delightful baby girl" (4). The author implies, therefore, that she was not a mother at the time she wrote this letter. Instead, she writes the letter from her own still childless perspective.

Aside from this early acknowledgment in the "Introduction," the author makes no further, significant references to her own status as a wife, mother, or daughter. This is important as it serves her argument that we still need to learn to see women as humans, rather than in terms of their relation to men. Thus, the perspective from which she writes is, of course, from that of a woman. She mentions her own liking for "traditionally female" (43) activities like fashion and makeup. However, the perspective that gets emphasized in the introduction and throughout the text is that of a professional writer, public figure within the feminist movement, and crucially, as a Nigerian living part-time in the United States. Her perspective is thus a full and complete one, individual to herself and her experiences.

Since the letter makes so many references to both Nigeria and the United States, is published in the United States and addressed to a Nigerian woman, it is worth considering the particular geographical perspective that the text offers, which adopts a transnational - rather than national - lens. The author, who resides in both the United States and Nigeria, positions herself between two geographical poles (Nigeria and the United States). As such, her feminism and this essay are both inflected by her experiences in both locations. However, the author makes repeated references to shared experiences of gender injustice throughout the world's societies and cultures, which together suggest that her observations can be generalized and applied globally.

Tone

One of the central tensions at play in this work is the tension between its title (“Dear Ijeawele”) and its subtitle: “A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions.” Between the title and subtitle, there are three dominant modes of speaking, with their related tones. First, the author is speaking in the form of a letter, with a personal, warm tone to her friend Ijeawele. The flashes of humor and nostalgic moments of memories from their grade school experiences together are instances of the intimacy of the work’s form as a letter. These moments are often clustered around the beginning and end of the book, in which the author shares her reactions to Chizalum’s birth and to her friend’s question (she cried).

Second, this letter is also framed as a “Feminist Manifesto.” The description of this letter as a “Manifesto” suggests that it will make certain declarative statements. Like the best-known manifesto, Karl Marx and Freidrich Engels’ “Manifesto of the Community Party,” which intended to publish their views and “meet the nursery tale of the spectre of Communism” head-on, manifestos generally diagnose a condition in the world, and prescribe the antidote. They set themselves in opposition to a state in the world, as in fact Adichie does in her own “Feminist Manifesto” when she points out a “sad truth” that the world is uncomfortable with powerful women. In the moments when the author becomes sad or angry, she draws upon a tradition of writing manifestos that agitates for change, identifies problems and declares solutions.

Third, Adichie’s “Manifesto” exists in “fifteen suggestions.” Because the author is combining both the spirit of criticism and agitation with the personal, intimate tone of a letter to a friend, the author ultimately speaks in the language of suggestion and recommendation, rather than mandate. She prefaces the work with the fact that her advice should only be taken as advice, and formally acknowledges her words as “suggestions” in the header before each new section. However, for the sake of expediency or perhaps to create a more forceful effect, the author commonly uses the imperative: “Teach Chizalum to...,” “Do not...,” “Never...,” and even “Never, ever...” The result is a tone that is equal parts suggestive and imperative, intimate and authoritative, critical and supportive, warm and direct.

Quotes

In response to my friend's request, I decided to write her a letter, which I hoped would be honest and practical, while also serving as a map of sorts for my own feminist thinking. This book is a version of that letter, with some details changed."

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Introduction)

Importance: In this passage, the author offers an explanation for the form of this work, answering for the reader why her commentary on feminism takes shape in the form of a letter. Here, she emphasizes that the letter would be both "honest" and "practical" for Ijeawele, and implicitly, now for her new readers.

Dear Ijeawele, What joy. And what lovely names: Chizalum Adaora. She is so beautiful. Only a week old and she already looks curious about the world. What a magnificent thing you have done, bringing a human being into the world. 'Congratulations' feels too slight."

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Beginning of letter)

Importance: This opening to her letter frames the work as a letter in response to her friend Ijeawele and the birth of her daughter. It also hints at the high stakes of the following 15 suggestions: the hope and future of this newborn girl, born into a world still rife with misogyny and patriarchy.

I have some suggestions for how to raise Chizalum. But remember that you might do all the things I suggest, and she will still turn out to be different from what you had hoped, because sometimes life just does its thing. What matters is that you try. And always trust your instincts above all else, because you will be guided by your love for your child."

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Beginning of letter)

Importance: By describing her letter in terms of suggestions that will always be second to Ijeawele's own instincts as a parent, Chizalum disavows a position of authority and expertise over her subject matter.

But I recently came to the realization that I am angrier about sexism than I am about racism. Because in my anger about sexism, I often feel lonely. Because I love, and live among, many people who easily acknowledge race injustice but not gender injustice."

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Fourth Suggestion)

Importance: This passage, in which the author identifies her anger over gender injustice, suggests that anger can be a powerful motivator for expressing opinions and making change.

But here is a sad truth: Our world is full of men and women who do not like powerful women. We have been so conditioned to think of power as male that a powerful woman is an aberration. And so she is policed. We ask of powerful women: Is she humble? Does she smile? Is she grateful enough? Does she have a domestic side? Questions

we do not ask of powerful men, which shows that our discomfort is not with power itself, but with women. We judge powerful women more harshly than we judge powerful men. And Feminism Lite enables this.”

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Fourth Suggestion)

Importance: The author identifies what she considers the root problem with Feminism Lite. Both sexism and Feminism Lite are fundamentally averse to seeing women in positions of power, and for the author, feminism is about empowering women.

Teach her to reject likeability. Her job is not to make herself likeable, her job is to be her full self, a self that is honest and aware of the equal humanity of other people.”

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Eighth Suggestion)

Importance: In this quote, the author extends the logic of her previous suggestion that women must be regarded and regard themselves as full people. In order to be a “full self,” Chizalum must recognize her responsibilities to herself before she worries about being “liked.”

I cannot overstate the power of alternatives. She can counter ideas about static ‘gender roles’ if she has been empowered by her familiarity with alternatives. If she knows an uncle who cooks well—and does so with indifference—then she can smile and brush off the foolishness of somebody who claims that ‘women must do the cooking.’”

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Tenth Suggestion)

Importance: Here, the author emphasizes that feminism is not only about rejecting those things that disempower and disenfranchise women. It is also about embracing the “alternatives” that will empower both men and women to make choices for themselves independent of their biological gender.

It’s not enough to say you want to raise a daughter who can tell you anything; you have to give her the language to talk to you. And I mean this in a literal way. What should she call it? What word should she use?”

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Twelfth Suggestion)

Importance: The author repeatedly presses Ijeawele to be specific in the lessons she gives her daughter about misogyny, sexism, and feminism. Here, she tells Ijeawele to have a conversation about - and to be specific in the language - she and her daughter use to refer to sexual organs.

To make sure she doesn’t inherit shame from you, you have to free yourself of your own inherited shame. And I know how terrible difficult that is. In every culture in the world, female sexuality is about shame.”

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Twelfth Suggestion)

Importance: Here, the author criticizes the worldwide linking of female sexuality and shame. She also alludes to the fact that teaching her daughter to become a feminist is



also a learning experience for the mother, who must also “free” herself of her “own inherited shame.”

In teaching her about oppression, be careful not to turn the oppressed into saints. Saintliness is not a prerequisite for dignity. People who are unkind and dishonest are still human, and still deserve dignity. Property rights for rural Nigerian women, for example, is a major feminist issue, and the women do not need to be good and angelic to be allowed their property rights.”

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Fourteenth Suggestion)

Importance: This passage calls attention to the discourse of “saintliness” that uses moral and sentimental arguments to justify women’s social, political, and economic disenfranchisement. If feminism is about viewing women as full people, then it is more about ensuring women’s “property rights” than praising their moral virtues.

Teach her about difference. Make difference ordinary. Make difference normal. Teach her not to attach value to difference. And the reason for this is not to be fair or to be nice, but merely to be human and practical. Because difference is the reality of our world. And by teaching her about difference, you are equipping her to survive in a diverse world.”

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Fifteenth Suggestion)

Importance: In this passage, the author suggests that being a feminist involves understanding “difference,” whether related to culture, language, diet, class, skin color, religion, and so forth. This suggestion is partly an ideological decision on the author’s part and partly a strategy for survival in the world, which the author says is defined by “difference.”

Teach her never to universalize her own standards or experiences. Teach her that her standards are for her alone, and not for other people. This is the only necessary form of humility: the realization that difference is normal.”

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Fifteenth Suggestion)

Importance: The author recommends that Chizalum learn to see her life and her standards in the context of many lives and standards. This lesson applies to feminism, which many have sought to universalize but which exists in many forms the world over.

Do you have a headache after reading all this? Sorry. Next time don’t ask me how to raise your daughter feminist. With love, oyi gi, Chimamanda”

-- Chimamanda Adichie (Fifteenth Suggestion)

Importance: The author closes her letter with the joking recognition that her answer has been much longer and more complicated than Ijeawele expected. She signs off in both English and Igbo.



Topics for Discussion

Why is this written as a letter? What do you think the author is able to say in a letter that she could not in an essay? What topics would you want to discuss in a letter but maybe not in an essay?

This question draws the students' attention to the epistolary form of the text, which gives Adichie's message a more personal, intimate feel. Here, the student are prompted to empathize with the author, who chooses the letter form because it gives her a way of tackling a highly important issue in her life in a sensitive and nuanced way.

Who would go in your village of aunties and uncles? Would you find it harder to populate your village with either aunties or uncles? What kinds of qualities or attributes would you look for in an “auntie” or “uncle” for your village?

This question asks readers to actively engage the reading by imagining the qualities they think would make people supportive, liberating influences on their lives.

In her fourth suggestion, the author notes that she is “angrier about sexism than...about racism” (23). Why does she feel this way? What is your reaction to this statement? And what is the value of anger here?

This question invites students to engage with one of the author's points that they may not initially understand or with which they may not agree. This question directs the student to consider the author's particular context, since she states that she feels this way because of the social circles in which she finds herself. This question also asks students to think about the effect and importance of expressing not only criticism but specifically “anger” about a particular issue or cause.

When the author observes that, “the knowledge of cooking does not come pre-installed in a vagina” (15), what does she mean by “pre-installed”? How does this moment in the text work with the author’s later recommendation to Ijeawele that she be precise about the language she uses with her daughter?

This quote is a specific, attention-grabbing example of the link that is often assumed between biology and gender roles, which the author argues are social norms. Here, the author deconstructs the social norm that women “naturally” do the cooking within a relationship or household. By transforming cooking into a specific form of “knowledge,” the author points out that cooking is a skill set that can be both taught and learned. By pointing out that this skill set is not “installed in a vagina,” the author satirizes and rejects social norms based off the biological fact of having been born with a vagina.

At the end of her eighth suggestion, the author asks Ijeawele to teach her daughter “she is not merely an object to be liked or disliked, she is also a subject who can like or dislike” (38-9). Here, what do you think is the difference between being an “object” and a “subject”? Why do you think the author sees “liking” and “disliking” as a form of power? In your own life, can you think of any moments when you have moved from being an “object that is liked” to a “subject who likes” (or dislikes)?

This is a good simple example for students to explore the more complicated terrain of being either a “subject” versus an “object.” Just as they operate in a sentence, the subject is the agent or “doer” of a certain action. Here, the subject “likes.” However, an object is the passive recipient of an action that someone else is doing. The transformation from being “object” to “subject” is one in which the person gains power and decision-making control over a situation.



Does the author explicitly define feminism in her “Introduction”? Are there other moments in the text when she offers a unified vision of feminism? What seems to be the author’s definition of “feminism”?

This question asks the reader to think critically about what the author has said and not said about “feminism,” and to get the reader thinking about some of the reasons why the author does not offer an upfront, explicit definition of “feminism” in her proclaimed “Feminist Manifesto.” That said, readers can look towards page six when the author declares that feminism is “contextual” and on page 20 when she mentions feminists in terms of their belief in the “full equality of men and women” (20).

At the beginning of the author’s fourth suggestion, how does the author define “Feminism Lite” and what are the problems she sees with it? For example, in the last sentence of the fourth suggestion, why does the author suggest that “Feminism Lite” is enabling and what does it enable? More generally, what is its relationship to feminism?

The first question asks readers to generalize from the examples the author gives of “Feminist Lite” thinking, and to think critically about some of its postures and consequences. The last question may be tricky for some students/readers, who may be tempted to identify a relationship between feminism and “Feminism Lite.” The reality, as the author suggests, is that “Feminism Lite” is not feminism at all since “feminine” is like pregnancy and you “either are or you are not” (20).

At the end of her tenth suggestion, the author describes how a girl can “counter ideas about static ‘gender roles’ if she has been empowered by her familiarity with alternatives” (48). Why are alternatives important? What alternatives to your expected “gender roles” have you been given in your life—and what alternatives do you wish you had been given?

This question asks readers to think critically about the steps they can take towards reducing and eliminating gender injustice by amplifying the number of choices available



to boys and girls as they grow up. This question also asks them to reflect on the reading by connecting it to their own lives.

Why does the author tell Ijeawele “not to turn the oppressed into saints” (59)? To which “oppressed” is the author referring, and what do you think is the danger of being perceived as a “saint”?

This question invites readers to think critically about what it really means to see women with the same degree of fullness that we see men. If we are to see women as “full people,” they cannot be uniformly described according to one spectrum of human behavior—even as saints.

In what ways do you see the author’s 15th suggestion about normalizing difference as related to the author’s 14 earlier suggestions? Why does she put this suggestion last? How might “difference” be important to you as a feminist?

This question provokes the reader into thinking about the deeper meaning of its 15th suggestion as well as the larger structure of the work, which rejects any claim to a universal, one-size-fits-all answer in favor of 15 suggestions that the author describes as secondary to Ijeawele’s own instincts.