



Everywoman: One Woman's Truth About Speaking the Truth

Jess Phillips

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'Joyfully candid and very funny.' *Guardian*

'Jess Phillips knows the truth . . . and here she shows how scary and sad as well as joyful and liberating the answers can be.' *Damian Barr*

'*Everywoman* has all the laughs [of Lena Dunham and Caitlin Moran] with a backbone of real glinting anger . . . there were so many funny and wise things on each page that whittling them down into a review seemed impossible.' *Julie Birchill, Spectator*

'As fresh as mountain air amid the Westminster tumbleweed.' *Metro*

'Arresting.' *Observer*

If you're thinking, 'Jess, who?' then I'm glad that there was something about 'Everywoman' and 'truth' that caught your eye.

Or you might already know me as that gobby MP who has a tendency to shout about the stuff I care about. Because I'm a woman with a cause, I have been called a feminazi witch, a murderer and threatened with rape. The internet attracts a classy crowd.

So, speaking the truth isn't always easy but I believe it's worth it. And I want you to believe it too. The truth can be empowering, the truth can lead to greater equality, and the world would be incredibly boring if we let all of those people who allegedly know everything, say everything.

By demanding to be heard, by dealing with our imposter syndrome, by being cheerleaders, doers not sayers, creating our own networks and by daring to believe that we can make a difference, we can.

We're women and we're kick-ass. And that's the truth.

Everywoman: One Woman's Truth About Speaking the Truth Details

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From Reader Review Everywoman: One Woman's Truth About Speaking the Truth for online ebook

Lucy Banks says

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley, in exchange for an honest review.

Frank, open account about how women are treated in society - and what to do about it!

I've always been quite fond of Jess Phillips. She speaks her mind (sometimes a little too much), but at heart, she seems to care about what she does, and genuinely wants to make a difference. Yes, she wears her heart on her sleeve, in a working environment which doesn't really accept that sort of thing, and I respect her for it. Politics really should be done differently, and generally speaking, I like those who challenge the status quo.

Sorry, I went off at a tangent there. Back to the book!

This is a plain-talking, no-nonsense account of Jess Phillips' life, how she got into politics, and her opinions on certain key issues, such as abuse against women. I LOVE the strength of her voice throughout - it really does make you think *no, we shouldn't put up with this nonsense*, and that's great.

At times, it is something of a depressing read, not least because you feel she's beating her head against a brick wall. The section on trolling was particularly upsetting - nobody should have to endure that level of abuse online. I felt so unbelievably sorry for her, and well done to her for keeping going, even when people in their thousands are acting with such cruelty.

She's probably not everyone's cup of tea. However, regardless of your political leaning, I think you might get something out of this; particularly if you're a keen believer in equality. She certainly doesn't just slam the Tories, I didn't read this as a Tory-hating book at all, more a book about inspiring change and making a difference in the world.

Sarah says

One of those books which made me want to rush out and tell everyone to read it on finishing. Jess recounts how she became an MP, but this isn't just a memoir. It's about something much bigger - how female MPs and women in politics are perceived and treated, society's attitudes towards women who are subjected to domestic abuse (she worked at Women's Aid in Birmingham for a number of years before being elected), and so much more besides. If any of this sounds vaguely intriguing to you then I really recommend checking this out.

Robin Hall says

Jess Phillips isn't the best writer in the world, and not everyone will agree with her politics. But she speaks

from the heart, and what she has to say is important. Her book is easy to read, her points easy to understand and the impact of what she fights for could be significant. She is a feminist who can articulate how equality should be a positive thing for men as well as women, someone who fights for families who refuses to value anyone by the number of children they have and a real humanitarian. She manages to convey her passion without being shouty. I'm sure the book will annoy some, especially the noisy legion of women-haters who hurl abuse at her on the internet, and some of her parliamentary colleagues. (Favourite line: if you've ever thought you're not up to being an MP you obviously haven't looked hard at some of the people who are currently doing it.) I hope she persuades more 'ordinary people' to get involved in politics; regardless of allegiance or opinion, we need more of us to step up, challenge the elite and become part of the establishment. A recommended read.

Laura says

Fresh, frank and unpretentious. Jess Phillips' book is an education about the workings of the political system in Westminster and an inspirational rallying call to women everywhere. I didn't think I agreed with her on lots of issues, and I still don't agree with her on some, but she's won me over in a big way. Know a woman, young or otherwise, who needs a confidence or self-belief boost? Buy them this.

Emmy Gregory says

Jess Phillips and I probably agree on about 95% of the issues. It certainly raises my estimation of her when the worst people on the internet despise her as much as they do. The book is interesting, readable, sometimes funny, and usually pretty well informed.

So why only three stars? Well... I have a deeper unease about this book which I can't put out of my mind. If I start with the Caitlin Moran quote that's prominently displayed, it may become clearer. Caitlin Moran wrote a book entitled "How To Be A Woman" which was also interesting, readable, funny, etc. But it wasn't a book about how to be a woman; it was a book about how to be Caitlin Moran. Huge swathes of women's experiences were not considered in Moran's book, because they weren't important to Moran personally.

The problems with this book, again, start with the title: "Everywoman". I assume that instead of suggesting this is about "every woman" she means "Everywoman" in the sense of being just like you and me, salt of the earth, representative of this here gender that we have. Like Moran's book, Phillips has written a book that is really mostly about herself. It's fine to write a memoir or autobiography. It's more of a problem when you don't seem to know if you're writing a book about yourself or about all women. I do not want any particular woman to set herself up as Everywoman, because firstly it's impossible for one individual to represent the huge diversity that exists within this gender, and secondly every time someone tries it is without fail a white, middle class (which she is, whatever people may say about her accent) professional, able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual woman.

There's nothing wrong with being all of those things of course. But women who fall outside of that group, even by one category, know that we do not and never will be allowed to represent all women.

Perhaps this is particularly frustrating because I'm sure she considers herself an intersectional feminist, and this is the kind of thing one would hope an intersectional feminist would have thought about. In fact, the further someone is from this set of traits, the less interested JP seems in them. She does pay lip service to

PoC sometimes, and she seems to remember that disabled people exist every now and then. LGBTQ people don't get even a token mention until near the end, and let's be honest if she cared that much about us she might have thought twice about all of her cosying up to Julie Burchill, who is an utterly vicious and outspoken transphobe. Even these inclusions feel like maybe they're last minute efforts, chucked in at the suggestion of an editor. She doesn't consider how the combination of more than one kind of marginalisation at once can play into a person's life. This is not me just being picky for pickiness' sake. Phillips cares a great deal about physical and sexual abuse, about the wage gap and career development, about online bullying and so on - but she just doesn't seem to have noticed that all of these issues disproportionately affect women who also belong to other marginalised groups. She writes on and on as though every reader is a cis woman who is frustrated with her husband not doing enough housework and child care, and then towards the end throws in a couple of half hearted sentences about how gay people also exist, and some people aren't of a binary gender. She doesn't mention anyone who is transgender within the binary - Julie Burchill's influence, perhaps?

For me the most blinkered moment in the whole thing was when she asks the reader to think about their dad. When he ate his lunch at work, was he thinking of his children? Of course not! Does the reader hate their dad because he wasn't sufficiently focused on his kids? Of course not! He's your dad! You love him! WHOAH HOLD ON THERE A MINUTE. Has she really not considered that there will be a lot of readers who didn't have a dad in their lives at all, or had a dad who didn't work, or had a dad who cared for them full time, or had two dads, or had a dad who fretted about them all day, or grew up in foster care, or had a dad whom they actually did totally hate? Again this isn't pickiness. You can't write a book that suggests that you represent all of us in our fight against the patriarchy and then actually only speak to the experiences of the ones among us who actually got pretty lucky.

But that is the message throughout the book: Jess Phillips is Just Like Us. I'm wary of people who say that, because the "I'm just like [the collective] you" generally means they are nothing at all like me personally, but at the same time expect that everyone is going to be just like them. I don't particularly care to hear for the 320th time that Jess Phillips thinks I could totally get out there and be an MP, because it's a meaningless statement unless it's addressed to someone the speaker actually knows. Thanks, but I'd actually hate every minute of being an MP, and who gave you the impression that everyone wants your job in the first place?

So what I come away with is this. Jess Phillips is not Everywoman (which is fine) but thinks that she is (which is really not fine at all).

B.E.L.L.A.Mc says

I hated it, and it's left me feeling despair and anger. Despair for those in the UK desperate for a Labour Government led by Jeremy Corbyn, and anger at right wing MP's pretending to be Socialists.

If you're expecting - as I was - a book about women and our fight for our Rights; you'll not find it here. I'm absolutely aghast at what Mrs. Phillips has written. She uses ad hominem, disparaging comments/analogies aimed at Jeremy Corbyn throughout; he's the Leader of the Labour Party she's supposed to be a Member of?! His name crops up on page 7 on Kindle Ed., for the first time, then 16 more times. This is a rant by a right wing Tory supporter dead set on removing the twice elected, Leader of the Labour P. She says she's about equal rights but is AGAINST RE-Selection of MP's; even though the vast majority of LP Members want it.

"I don't wait to be given orders or ask permission to take action. I don't ring **Jeremey Corbyn's office and say, 'Do you mind awfully if I try to change this law?' There will always without fail in every meeting I go to be someone who says, 'Oh, you can't do that' or 'When I tried that it didn't work.' Smile at these people politely and just do whatever you want to do anyway. Be more Big Lil."**

Phillips can't even spell her Leader's name correctly: **Jeremey** It's spelt 'Jeremy'.

"I don't wait to be given orders or ask permission to take action." Frankly who would hire a nutty loose cannon like Phillips? She's an immature narcissist, and she's a Member of Parliament! Is this the kind of person we want to represent us? Not me, thanks very much. My own MP would never, ever, act so rashly; he's a mature grown-up.

I don't want to get into Party Politics here, but Phillips should seriously consider changing the misleading title. Maybe something like: I Hate Jeremy Corbyn. As for being a Socialist; don't make me laugh. She even hires her own husband for her Office; £40,000pa is the salary as I recall. That's equality eh? She could have given this job that WE ALL PAY FOR, to a woman with kids in a Refuge or to a Homeless woman with kids. The type of women she purports to care about. So angry grrrrrrrr.

James says

This book was not written for me, and I know this because the last line told me I'm kick-ass, as all women are. I can't say I'm a fan of Phillips either, and after reading this I respect her more, but am no more fond of her, finding her hypocritical and self-important, even if the abuse she gets is undeserved.

I imagine people who like Phillips will like this book too, as it largely mirrors her public profile (which to be fair is consistent with her position that she is 'just herself' as an MP) of a down to earth Champion of Women's Rights. I had wondered what her political stance on other issues was, and she rails against those who suggest that being a feminist leads you to be typecast. So she offers barely anything else in her book. Her economic policy is to campaign for equal earnings between men and women and moan that pink razors cost more (as women are incapable of buying the same product cheaper in a different colour, presumably), and the only other politics mentioned is that more support for victims of abuse is needed. She supported Yvette Cooper's leadership bid, but offers no reasons why. One wonders how anyone could see a strident feminist as only championing one cause.

The central message seemed to be that women need more confidence in their abilities, mainly in the world of work but also their capability to have a career and children. This leads to a heartfelt but flawed defence of all-women shortlists. Phillips compares three women elected in this way against three men, and says "look, these women specially selected by me are more qualified than these particular male counterparts". So this not only proves nothing, but would also allow nepotistic employers to choose their mates for the top jobs so long as they can find some examples of employees who were chosen on merit but weren't top performers. I doubt Phillips would think that acceptable as a Labour MP. She also asserts that being the 'best woman for the job' is a nonsensical comment because no-one says that Jessica Ennis won 'girlie gold', a terrible analogy as women's sporting events only exist because the best women cannot compete with the best men.

Phillips herself does seem to be a good MP though, and there to campaign for issues she is passionate about, rather than for consultancy roles with big business. Only time will tell, and she's not as passionately socialist

or pro-worker as she is pro-women, but in the most part she embodies what an MP should be, a citizen who has worked her way up to a place where she can influence laws for the better. She seems genuine in her claims that she is always offering youngsters work experience, though she seems to see it as an entirely positive thing that her mother-in-law helps people she knows, because your career should be about how well-connected you are? Although it is quite vague, you get the impression Phillips supports women in parliament whether she agrees with them or not, in order to correct the gender imbalance, when judging on an argument's merits would be a better option.

There are other inconsistencies. The unacceptable abuse is done by losers from their mother's basements to make the victims feel superior, but women who use the refuge's phone to do a drug deal are people who need help. The only women who treat their relationships as a hobby are vulnerable, unlike the men, who presumably have no context of their own. Despite the caveats given, the tone is very much of women as powerless victims and men as all-powerful. When the vast majority of victims of domestic abuse are women it's a gender issue. When the majority of homicide victims are men, Phillips still focuses on the female victims. Because 99% of abusive fathers get access, the system can't be loaded against them - access could mean in a staffed contact centre, but we won't know as Phillips doesn't bother to present more than one choice fact.

Fortunately Phillips won't care, and nor should anyone else that takes her advice, as she only worries about the impression she makes on people she'd want to date or be friends with. But her logic is lacking (if you think that is sexism at work, work through her logic and try again) and the little things annoy me too, keen to show she was cool when younger and never apologising for 'being who she is', as though modifying your behaviour to your environment is always just being put in your place rather than making life more pleasant. I had my view of Phillips before I picked this up and was prepared to hear her story, but I haven't been converted.

Mimi says

In this quirky book Jess Phillips writes from her position as Labour MP for Birmingham Yardley producing something that lies between a memoir and a rallying cry for women. Phillips writes in a direct, conversational style, which is often refreshing, but the episodic structure means the finished work is frustratingly fragmentary. I found the most rewarding sections those where she comments on her time in Westminster, attitudes to women's issues in her party and her work in Women's Aid. Some of her comments about the culture of the contemporary Labour Party reminded me of the old SWP position that women's issues were a bourgeois distraction, a stance which seems to be gaining currency yet again, or perhaps never fully went away. I did find myself puzzling over the identity of her intended reader: the tone and content's too general for women who follow politics yet a little specialised for those who normally wouldn't. However, I found Phillips's brand of practical feminist advice appealing: it represents the resurgence of an everyday, activist feminism. A kind that's been overshadowed by the rise of gender studies with its increasingly inaccessible, abstract theoretical forms. Phillips's discussion of the scale of domestic violence in the U.K., alone, should be enough to demonstrate that many, many women still need a lot more than abstract theorizing will ever deliver. So, overall a fairly decent, if uneven, fast read and one I'd probably think of passing on to younger women who are just starting to take an interest in feminism, politics and their own futures.

Clarissa says

Jess Phillip's writes refreshingly frankly displaying her trademark honesty on all truths presented.

'Everywoman:...' is an easily accessible, no frills, no feminist/political academic jargon publication which allows us, the general public, to get on board and see politics transparently - which it bloody well should be. Jess doesn't pussyfoot around serious issues but hits them head on and presents them as they are backed up with the facts. It's not all doom and gloom, there are plenty of witty anecdotes that personally made me laugh.

I attended one of Caitlin Moran's Live tour dates on June 28th where no other than Jess herself was discussing Moran's new publication and various taboo issues with brilliant clarity and once again that trademark honesty.

Robin Temmink says

It's magnificent! It's an introduction to the life of Jess, a self help book for (aspiring) activists/campaigners/politicians and an analysis of sexism in politics written from the front. All in one! I only paused to let particularly poignant point sink in.

Johanne says

If I am ever harassed, marginalised, silenced, bullied or abused I want Jess Phillips in my corner. Reading this book filled my heart with joy and sadness in equal measure. Jess is a powerful, feisty, opinionated Brummie and I wish there were more voices like hers in both society and Parliament. She has issues she cares passionately about and isn't afraid to say it like it is. The parts of the book which deal with her work with and campaigning for women who have suffered violence and domestic abuse broke my heart. Her determination not to be silenced when giving these women a voice is truly inspirational.

Don't get the idea that this is a dry, weighty, preachy tome, it is nothing of the sort. It is full of warmth and humour, filled with the loud and proud Brummie voice that Jess is so well known for. I had the privilege to hear her speak last year in Birmingham and she was such a wonderful speaker, full of wit and anecdote. How I wish every one could have an MP like Jess. How I wish we all had a cheerleader, a friend like Jess.

Am I inspired by her? Hell yes! I won't be standing for elected office but I will stop publicly doubting myself and try to silence the voice of imposter syndrome. If Jess can be strong and big herself up then so can I. So can we all.

Sam Herbert says

Jess Phillips is a Labour MP for Birmingham Yardley and she is a feminist anti-violence campaigner. She is what you call a shouty feminist: she is completely unapologetic, genuinely passionate about what she

believes in and isn't afraid to speak out about it. Jess also isn't from a privileged background, as some other MP's, but absolutely deserving of her place in parliament. This book is all about the truth on certain subjects: violence against women, sisterhood, politics, equality and trolling. She writes with total honesty, even when the subject is not nice to write about. The chapter on violence was extremely knowledgeable but uncomfortable to read at times. Jess explains why women stay with violent partners so clearly it was astounding. Also the chapter about sisterhood affected me most profoundly; women are so unbelievably amazing and the relationships we have with each other and the things we do for one another, is unlike anything our male counterparts encounter. But this book is not about hating men - it's really focused on equality. The underlying ccentre of this book is the motto, "If I can do it, you can do it, too." Jess writes with such humour, and she comes across as so endearingly lovely and, most of all, incredibly intelligent. I kind of aspire to be like her, and I kind of want her to become prime minister. I'm not really into politics but Everywoman is a revelation. I thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed it.

Katey Lovell says

I loved this book. Jess Phillips discusses serious issues in her trademark honest, no-nonsense way and the result is a collection of themed articles addressing feminism, politics and British society.

Everywoman is not a light read, but it is an important one. It is both rage-inducing and raucous, and Jess comes across as a woman with society's best interests at heart - and exactly the sort of person I want representing me.

An empowering read.

Georgia O'Brien says

I don't always agree with Jess Phillip's politics, but Everywoman is a revelation. I am feminist/political book junkie and Everywoman rises above a crowded field because it is totally unpretentious. If you're looking for a manifesto, this isn't it. But what you will find is a book that is honest even when honesty is ugly. Funny, smart and inspiring.

Claire Nundy says

Jess Phillips is what a lot of people would call a shouty feminist. In this book she speaks the truth even when the truth is difficult or unpleasant. What's the opposite of pretentious? Down to earth? That's exactly what this book is. Everyone who thinks politicians are all pretentious elitists needs to read this book. She's unapologetic and confident throughout. Her underlying message all the way through is that if she can do it, then so can you.
