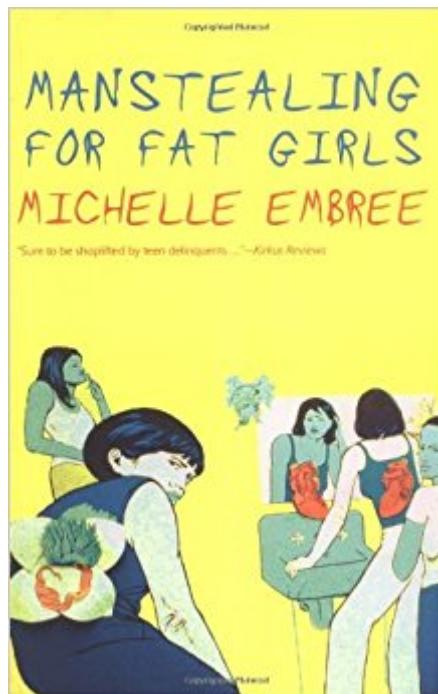


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# Manstealing For Fat Girls



## Synopsis

This off-kilter novel centers on three girls who are definitely not part of the in crowd: one is fat, one is a dyke, and one is missing a breast. Nicknamed "Lezzylard" by her classmates, Angie is seduced by the prettiest girl in school, an anorexic who just wants to make imaginary grocery lists. Inez, the school's pot dealer, can't shoplift because security guards are mesmerized by her single enormous breast. Shelby and Angie can't be together, because then everyone will think Angie is only a dyke because she is too fat to get a guy. *Manstealing for Fat Girls* explodes the locus where patriarchal and class violence intersect, while embracing all that is magical and dangerous about adolescence. Set in a working class suburb of St. Louis in the 1980s, the book is replete with music and pop culture references of the era, but the bullying, lunch table treachery, and desperate desire to fit in ring true for every generation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Angie Neuweather, 16, has it rough: she's fat and sort of slobby; her mom's horrible fiancé has just moved into their low-rent apartment; and she's constantly being tortured at school (the kids call her "Lezzylard"). Spunky girlfriends help Angie weather sophomore year, including Shelby, a spiky-haired, out-of-the-closet lesbian, and Heather, who has just one giant breast. Angie's a little sexually confused herself: she's sort of got a crush on Carrie, an anorexic popular girl, but she also enjoys sexual fantasies that involve penetration by a giant hairy monster. The friendship of two boys—stoner Pike and perky Mantis—motivates her to go on a severe diet,

experiment with drugs and attend her first beer party (her mom's so strict that Angie isn't even allowed to wear concealer over her zits). Eventually, she discovers that she's pretty, and when a rival calls her a "manstealer," she has an epiphany. As if quotidian existence as a misfit isn't hard enough, Embree adds in a gunrunning subplot and some scenes of real violence. Too many characters muddle the slight plot (though many of them are well drawn), but Embree has crafted a very sharp look at adolescent longing and angst. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Grade 9 Up—Angie, 16, wishes she were thin, so she tries to stop eating, which doesn't work. She wishes her mother wouldn't marry sleazy Rudy, but he's just moved in with all his stuff. She wishes the popular kids would leave her alone, but they've called her Lezzylard since seventh grade. Her friend, Shelby, is an out lesbian. Only one of their friend Heather's breasts has developed, and her parents are anxious to have her fixed. When Angie finally tells off perfect, popular Mindy, she is sexually assaulted by Mindy's boyfriend in the girls' room. What follows is a delicious revenge scheme, masterminded by Shelby's older sister, a tornado of rage, snappy comebacks, and hairspray. Every one of Embree's characters is fully realized, complex, and engaging. Angie is disgusted by her body and confused about her sexuality, but never hates herself. She's alternatively wicked and woeful, and her commentary on everything from sex and drugs to glitter mascara is spot on. The novel is perfectly paced, and Angie's thoughtful, gut-tearing, hilarious narrative builds the plot quietly. The author masterfully uses the rednecks, Red Lobsters, Dumpsters, and strip malls of working-class suburbia to create an ugly yet alluring post-punk setting.—Johanna Lewis, New York Public Library Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

I enjoy sitting next to, walking with, and listening to Angie through her day-to-day life. I treasure this story as one of my secret guilty pleasures ;)

Michelle Embree, *Manstealing for Fat Girls* (Soft Skull, 2005) It's been a bit of time since I've read this, because I haven't quite been sure what to say about it. I've read both sides of the argument over this book, and I can see the points both sides are making. The one thing I haven't been able to see is the one aspect of the book about which everyone else sees in it: its sense of humor. Both critics and defenders seemed to find the book uproariously funny. I missed the joke. I'm not even going to try and summarize this incredibly (and needlessly) complex novel beyond the bare bones.

The story involves Angie, who's sixteen, fat, and bi-curious. Her mother is dating a jerk, her best friend is both out of the closet and flamboyant, and the only guy she knows who treats her like a human being is so odd that, until we get some third-party confirmation, the reader may be left wondering if he's actually a figment of Angie's imagination. Angie is obsessed to the point of madness with dieting, which never works, but the attention that a classmate slowly starts paying her leads her to the first tentative steps towards believing that she's pretty the way she is. And that's when things start getting weird. The central premise there is the book's strong point, to me at least--it's a book that does promote the idea that there's more to attractiveness than the physical, which is an especially important lesson in today's society (though like most other books that have that message, it never seems to take into account the idea that some guys really do actually find fat chicks hot; it takes the same tack of "well, I like you no matter what you look like" that everyone else does, which is highly annoying). Its problem is that while that does seem to be the main thrust of the book, it's sometimes hard to tell, because it gets buried under the weight of its own subplots, seemingly extraneous (if well-drawn) characters, and attempts at--veracity?--that just come off silly. (Maybe that's the humor I missed?) In any case, as I said at the beginning of this, I can see both sides of the debate. Yes, high school kids actually do these things. (Well, most of them.) And this is nothing new; high school kids did these things when I was in high school, and that's long enough ago that what we did is probably considered very old hat by today's standards. So to contend that high school students should be sheltered from it is purest stupidity. But on the other side of the coin, I do think the book tries too hard and reaches too far into the absurd in its quest to either identify with its target audience or make them laugh (your call). But it's readable enough that the all-out absurdity in the final third of the novel acquires a certain weird charm. Or it may annoy you to death. Depends. Like everything else about this book. \*\*\*

In a time of sugary sweet coming of age stories like Juno and Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist, it was a wonder to read something so simultaneously harsh and heart felt as MSFFG. I am an objective reader, and I couldn't put this book down for one second. literally read it cover to cover in one sitting. The setting of 80s suburban wasteland, the infusion of grime-core punk music and the undercutting of the John Hughes genre makes this a teenage adventure I can actually relate to my own life. And it is so funny. A wonderful book I would recommend to any and every one.

As this book's editor, I'm hardly objective. That said, I'm also a reader and my opinion of the review below is that MsFrisby missed the point. Manstealing for Fat Girls has sex, drinking and drugs in it.

So do most kids lives these days. Whether they do or don't engage in any of the above, they know kids who do. The book shows how a real, literary heroine navigates these dangers as well as unnamable ones--patriarchy, homophobia and a class system that also negates her worth as a human being. The "lessons" for young readers--and there are many--involve watching a young woman figure out that she's ultimately stronger than all of the above. Also that she will continue to have to fight these battles her whole life. That is the reality MsFrisby and those who visit her library also deal with, and naming these things, through literature, ultimately makes all of us stronger (and saner). I've spoken to countless librarians about this book who are jumping up and down excited about it because its books like these that make kids want to read. MsFrisby, I agree with you that the examples above are disturbing (though some are a bit misquoted). That's why the author put them in the book. That's the function of literature: to show a mirror to the world and then to show us the alternatives. As for my take on this book, I adore it. Its smart and political, but mostly its really, really funny.

I read it until I passed out and then woke up a few hours later wanting to do nothing but finish it. It spoke so much to body image issues all young women face, and to the difficulties of teenage sexuality. I have it on good authority that this book wasn't written for young adults, but was marketed that way because it's about young adults. I say, forget the label. Its visceral critique of gender relations and class issues are more than adult enough for any non-teenage reader. It has its flaws, but it'll punch you in the gut. I recommend it highly.

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