

Book: hard to get: twenty-something women and the paradox of sexual freedom book ...

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Book Review: Hard to Get: Twenty-Something Women and the Paradox of Sexual Freedom

Place: Berkeley, California

Publisher: University of California Press

Publication date: February, 2013

Edition: 1

Price: \$33. 35

ISBN: 978-0-520-95448-9

Introduction

Is it possible for the modern twenty-something woman to have it all; sexual freedom coupled with good relationships and good career? This is the question that author Leslie Ball explores in her book in “Hard to get: Twenty-something women and the paradox of sexual freedom”. In this book, Bell conducts an intimate and powerful examination of the lives of twenty-something women; one of America’s most liberated generation of women. Bell explores the lives of these women who are increasingly finding it hard to wave through complexities brought about by sexual desires and pleasures. The most distinguishing characteristic of this generation of women is sexual freedom but as Bell shows, this sexual freedom has been a kind of a mixed blessing.

The book contains vast information about the subjects of study that the author collects from a wide range of interviews. Bell brilliantly presents her main argument; in spite of having more choices on life than her counterparts from previous generation, twenty-something women are increasingly facing

greater uncertainties about sexuality, desire and relationships. Bell uses interviews and documented information to show that new freedoms such as sexual freedom as well as ambiguous messages that characterize these women's early adulthood combine with inadequate training on how to acquire their life's desires to bring about a paradox of sexual freedom that is accompanied by unsatisfying sex as well as unsatisfying relations.

Evaluation

Bell's arguments and assertions are groundbreaking and it would perhaps be wise to look at her credentials and authority to determine if she has credibility to make such arguments on one of the most definitive generations of women in America. A little research from online databases and sites reveals that she is renowned sociologist and psychotherapist who specializes in women's sexuality and development. She holds a doctorate of philosophy and a master degree in social work which she acquired from the University of California and the Smith College School for Social Work respectively (Bell, 2014). Currently, she has a private psychotherapy practice in Berkley California. These credentials although not extensive are enough to provide credibility to her work (Bell, 2014).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book are the extensive interviews that the author conducts. Bell interviews various women from various cultural backgrounds. The author makes an effort to even include "traditionally unconventional" women; those who not consider themselves as heterosexual. The sample comprised of 20 women, all college educated and from Northern California (Bell, 2013). Each of the women was interviewed for

a total of three times and in these interviews, Bell gets them to answer queries about their feelings towards good sex, relationships careers, and so on. The extrapolation of information collected from such a small sample into the general population of twenty-something women is something that is quite risky and that might attract a lot of criticism, but Bell does not address this issue in any way. From this, some might argue that all that the argument presented in the book does is to put forth a promising hypothesis that would require more extensive research to compulsively proof that it is applies to all twenty-something college-educated women in the United States of America. Using the splitting psychoanalytic theory, Bell explores how the women of catalogued their life options and uses this to show that as a form of a coping mechanism, the women formulate what she refers to as “ strategies of desire” (Bell, 2013). She comes up with three categories of the modern twenty-something woman. The first two are the “ relational” and the “ sexual” woman who according to Bell represent defensive strategies. The third category is referred to as the “ desiring woman” who according to Bell is the woman to who finds a tolerable balance between sexual feelings and other types of relationship intimacy.

Perhaps an even simplistic implication of Bell’s interview with the 20 women is that these women in often feel guilty about prioritizing relationships when they are in their twenties. Most of them feel that their ancestors, especially those who were actively involved in the feminist movements worked so hard so that the modern day woman would have an irradiated path of career or professional freedom. By putting relationships at the same level or even

ahead of their professions and careers, some feel that they may simply be throwing away what their feminist ancestors had worked so hard to achieve.

Conclusion

Overall, “ Hard to get: Twenty-something women and the paradox of sexual freedom” is a brilliantly articulated book that sheds insight into the professional and sex lives of one the most definitive generations of the current American society; twenty-something college educated women. Using the information acquired from a sample of women of this liberated generation, Bell makes solid arguments and backs them up with various examples. The author uses simple, clear language, gets straight to the point and there are very few moments of ambiguity and redundancy. Personally, it is one the best non-fiction book that I have read, and I have to admit that Bell’s assertions have given me a brand new perspective on the modern day twenty-something American woman.

References

Bell, L. C. (2013). *Hard to get: Twenty-something women and the paradox of sexual freedom*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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