IT TAKES ANALYSIS AND SOCIAL CONTEXT


Why aren’t more women in political office in the United States? One factor, according to political scientists Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox in It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don’t Run for Office, is a difference in political ambition between women and men. The authors acknowledge that structural and social factors play a role in women’s underrepresentation, but complete the picture by examining possible gender differences in political ambition.

Lawless and Fox reported on responses of 3,765 individuals to survey questions about political and other life experiences and political ambitions. Many other studies of gender differences in the political arena have looked at individuals who are already candidates or in elective office. However, the authors of It Takes a Candidate take a different approach by examining individuals who are in professional roles that often precede legislative and congressional candidacies: law, business, education, and political activism. The authors examine gender differences in political ambition and possible correlates of those differences. Overall, the authors found that differences in political ambition were related to women’s family roles, their lesser likelihood of encountering encouragement from family or political parties to run for elective office, and feelings of being less qualified to run for office.

The researchers provided careful and thorough examination of the relevant factors via regression analyses that systematically controlled other variables to provide answers to specific questions. In examining the relationship between sex and considering a run for public office, for example, the researchers controlled for a number of baseline variables, such as education and political knowledge, as well as indicators of politicized upbringing. In each section of the book, the researchers carefully picked apart the various factors related to the question of interest. One of the best chapters in this regard is titled “Gender, Party, and Political Recruitment.” This chapter examines the role of political attitudes, partisanship, and party recruitment (as controlled for by campaign experience, political meeting attendance, and service on a board for an organization). In addition, particularly in the chapters related to family responsibilities and self-perceived qualifications, the authors do a good job of covering the relevant psychological research and theory.

The quantitative approach to the issues is supplemented by commentary taken from 200 interviews with randomly selected respondents. The comments serve to supplement and enrich the perspective provided by the numerical data. However, the book occasionally gets bogged down by repetitions of the same idea from different respondents.

The book provides an important part of the picture of women’s underrepresentation in elective office. However, the book falls short in several areas. First, the authors’ approach contains a class bias. The analysis seems entirely confined to upper-middle-class professionals. The groups from which political activists were chosen, for example, do not seem to include unions, and unions are a platform from which working-class persons might ultimately seek elective office. The rationale for examining selected groups involves professions that currently form the most identifiable pipeline to political office. However, if the goal is to make those elected to office more representative of those they serve, examining only upper-middle-class respondents seems a poor choice. Along the same line, among the prime qualifications the authors consider for elective office are professional success and amount of formal education. These are similarly class-biased considerations. Why, for example, might not a person with 20 years of active participation in a trade union be as qualified as an attorney who is successful in the courtroom? The findings in It Takes a Candidate may tell us something about factors related to the likelihood of upper-middle-class women running for political office, but they do not help us understand how to make the ranks of elected officials more representative overall. Of course, the same factors may affect working-class and upper-middle-class women, yet the paths to and dynamics of achieving elective office among the groups are likely to be quite different. This book does little to illuminate the broader picture of women’s political ambitions and achievements.

Another area of concern is that the authors do not sufficiently place their findings in the larger societal context, nor do they sufficiently evaluate the possible limitations of their findings. Although the goal of the book was to consider political ambition in its own right as a complement to structural and social factors, the authors make abundantly clear that these matters are not truly separate. In fact, the cultural and structural factors that directly limit the numbers of women in elective office in the United States presumably also strongly influence women’s psychological makeup and thus their ambition for elective office. Thus, the approach of Lawless and Fox risks making a circular argument.

Further, Lawless and Fox make little attempt to evaluate the importance of ambition relative to other factors that might limit women’s representation in elective office. For example, even if political ambition were somehow equalized in the pipeline professions, women’s underrepresentation in those fields would still create unequal numbers in elective office. Further, factors such as financial inequality might still provide different barriers to ambitious women and men in the relevant fields.

Obviously, evaluating all of the factors—cultural, structural, and psychological—that might influence women’s representation in elective office is a major undertaking. However, Lawless and Fox should have done substantially more in discussing the relationship...
of their findings to the larger political and social context. In the final chapter, Gender and the Future of Electoral Politics, Lawless and Fox name traditional family role orientations, a masculinized ethos, and gendered psyche as critical factors in ambition; however, they do little to really outline how these factors might interact with each other. Greater depth of evaluation and a more coherent conceptual framework is needed in this portion of the book.

In summary, It Takes a Candidate adds a psychological dimension to our current knowledge of the factors that affect the likelihood of women’s service in elective office. This book will be of interest and useful to psychologists concerned with women’s professional development and motivations.

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HOW TO WALK THE TIGHTROPE OF “NICE AND ABLE”: OVERCOMING WORKPLACE CHALLENGES FOR FEMALE BOSSES


Female managers face special concerns: What works well for men may not always work for women. Authors Caitlin Friedman and Kimberly Yorio address this issue by offering female leaders concrete advice for handling common workplace problems. They provide practical solutions on topics such as pay levels and alternate reward systems for employees, proper dress code, and even ways to accommodate employees’ individual work styles.

Although The Girl’s Guide to Being a Boss is designed to appeal to a wide audience, it incorporates major research findings from the psychology of gender into its overall message. In contrast to some recent books for female managers that advise women to focus on behaving competitively rather than trying to be perceived as nice (e.g., Nice Girls Don’t Get the Corner Office, Frankel, 2004), Friedman and Yorio present a subtler message that is consistent with a large body of social science research. This research suggests that successful women face a powerful catch-22: when they behave aggressively in the workplace, they may be acknowledged as competent, but are often disliked interpersonally (Rudman, 1998). This interpersonal backlash can result in negative repercussions for women’s careers (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tankins, 2004).

Given this body of research, the authors’ most novel and significant contribution is their analysis of female managers’ needs to maintain a professional distance while still being liked by their employees. The authors reference data suggesting that new female bosses’ most common mistakes involve their decisions about whether to develop friendships with their employees. The authors indicate that balancing competing demands to act as both a friend and an authority figure to subordinates is a very real concern for women managers. An overemphasis on being friendly with employees can lead to weak managerial decisions that may have an impact on the productivity of the entire team. At the same time, the authors acknowledge that behaving in a warm, likeable way is a key aspect of female prescriptive gender stereotypes, which mandate that women behave communally (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). The important point the authors make is that women leaders have to work especially hard to strike a balance between being friendly and being authoritative. Friedman and Yorio use case studies and survey data to provide suggestions for ways women can be perceived as both nice and able.

Another strength of this book was that the authors explicitly acknowledge that women still face gender discrimination in the workplace and that female bosses should therefore make a special effort to mentor their female employees. They reference successful women such as Madeleine Albright and Gail Evans to make the point that, for women to get ahead as a group, they must be willing to help other women beneath them. This may seem like an obvious point to feminist psychologists; however, many modern management advice books that deal with gender issues ignore these important points. The authors also present some of their own survey data suggesting that 75% of female employees report that female bosses are tougher on women than their male counterparts in the workplace. We would like to see these data validated by a more scientific study, yet nevertheless, they suggest a complex relationship between female bosses and their female subordinates, which should be further examined by psychologists interested in workplace gender issues.

The Girl’s Guide to Being a Boss also emphasizes that female managers are at a major disadvantage because they are often seen as more emotional than their male counterparts. The authors cite anecdotal and survey data suggesting that the most prevalent complaint about female bosses is that they are simply too emotional at work. We know from research on gender stereotypes that the stigma of female emotionality is not unique to bosses: “Making the belief that women are more emotional than men is the strongest gender stereotype that people hold” (Plant, Hyle, Kellner, & Devine, 2000). Shields (2003) even labels this belief the “master gender stereotype.”

The authors advise female bosses to inhibit their emotional expression at work. On first glance, this may seem like a harsh prescription; however, the authors may very well be correct. Madeleine Albright, previously one of the most powerful women in America, said of her experience as Secretary of State, “Many of my colleagues made me feel that I was overly emotional, and I worked hard to get over that. In time, I learned to keep my voice flat and unemotional when I talked about issues I considered important . . . In the end, I successfully changed opinions” (Albright, 2003, pp. 192). Perhaps Secretary Albright’s experience applies to other women as well—that women managers may benefit by expressing less emotion at work. Indeed, perhaps when women express emotion—even high-powered emotions, such as anger—their responses are activating gender stereotypes in perceivers. This activation of gender stereotypes, regardless of the emotion expressed, may diminish women’s managerial authority. This idea is an open empirical question in the psychology of gender, although our hunch is that the authors are correct in their advice to female bosses about the benefits of inhibiting workplace emotion expression.

Overall, Friedman and Yorio make a notable contribution by presenting practical ways to address the powerful double standards
facing today’s professional women, who are expected to be both competent in a competitive business environment and yet kind to those around them. This accessible integration of research and practical advice on a complicated topic should prove useful not only for female managers but also for any woman who supervises others.

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REFORMING ACADEMIA: TURNING THE IVORY TOWER INTO A FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE


Many times when I read books about motherhood and the financial, career, and social costs of the decision to have children (such as Crittendon’s 2001 *The Price of Motherhood*), I am left with an empty feeling. The problems are well described, yet the solutions, other than general calls for change, are often severely lacking. That was not the case with *Parenting and Professing*. Although the intended audience of this book is a relatively small group (parents working in academia), I believe parents in various different professional careers can find something to relate to in this collection of well-written and diverse essays.

Contrary to popular belief, the flexible schedule of academia does not lead naturally to balancing motherhood and a fulfilling career. Mothers are often thought of as less than serious academics and treated as such in academic positions. Flexible and family-friendly work policies, although sometimes available, are not taken advantage of by some for fear of being mommy tracked or not taken seriously. Bassett points out that, in the 1970s and 1980s, women achieved tenure less frequently than men. In the 21st century, despite increasing numbers of women earning doctoral degrees, the percentage of tenured female faculty has remained virtually unchanged.

*Parenting and Professing* is divided into three sections and contains 24 essays. Section one is entitled “Challenges,” and the nine essays it contains review the difficulties that parents, especially mothers, face when the biological clock and the tenure clock coincide. The essays reveal that, for many mothers, shockingly little has changed since the 1970s. This section serves as an excellent description of the “sociology of academia and of the family,” both described as “greedy institutions” (p. 20).

The eight essays in section two, “Possibilities,” give the reader many examples of how mothers have managed to carve out their niche in academia while making time for their families. The mothers who wrote these essays (there are no father authors represented in this section) focus repeatedly on the benefits to parents, academia, and children when this balance is achieved. There was one concept in particular that stuck with me after reading this section: social support, of one kind or another, is a prerequisite for success in this delicate balancing act. Equalitarian marriages, the kind of marriages that many women can only read about and dream of in our patriarchal society, were identified as the largest reservoirs of support for the essayists. Thus, this section did little to offer widespread solutions to the work–family conflict, yet it did offer some individual success stories and examples of how parenting can often make someone a better scholar, mentor, and teacher.

Were it not for the seven essays in section three, entitled “Change,” *Parenting and Professing* likely would have left me as frustrated as I have been with other books about balancing motherhood and careers. However, this section offers many suggestions of how tenured women (and men), when working together, can compel academia to change. Through mentoring, implementing family-friendly policies, and changing the culture of the Ivory Tower to encourage utilization of those policies, we can make the road much smoother for our younger sisters, daughters, and granddaughters who do not wish to choose either a fulfilling career or satisfying family life, but instead elect both. This section offers much hope and concrete examples of how change can be fostered, and can be viewed as a call to action, much like *The Motherhood Manifesto* (Blades & Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2006), but for tenured dwellers of the Ivory Tower such as myself.

Although this book, like all books on the challenges of balancing parenting and a career, lacks the male voice and perspective (only two essays are authored or coauthored by men), it does indeed reflect our patriarchal culture. Research has shown us time and again that, even when both mothers and fathers work an equal number of hours outside the home, most mothers end up shoulder-dering a greater percentage of child and home care. Whereas male faculty who become parents pre-tenure are virtually unaffected in
their quest for tenure, women who have early babies are less likely to achieve tenure than women who have babies post-tenure or no children at all (Mason & Goulden, 2002).

Parenting and Professing is well worth the read for every parent, future parent, and administrator employed in academia. The essays will resonate with the reader, and countless tips can be found on negotiating with the Ivory Tower and balancing our own hectic lives more successfully. Moreover, the Ivory Tower could pave the way for other career fields to follow. Parenting and Professing just may help inspire those of us employed in academia to leave behind a better opportunity for the next generation of working parents.

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REACHING MANAGEMENT SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS WITH A FEMINIST AGENDA


Writing this review for the audience of Psychology of Women Quarterly oriented me in a way that was probably not expected by the author. Although I could not find a statement either in Management, Gender, and Race in the 21st Century or from the publisher about the intended audience, I am assuming that Karsten intends to address academics and practitioners in management. Toward this end, I genuinely appreciate Karsten’s efforts to meet her audience on their own terms and bring to them a very thorough and research-based understanding of diversity in the workplace. This endeavor is both critically important and highly charged, making this work challenging if not downright intimidating. Thus, I start this review with deep respect for Karsten’s gustiness, comprehensiveness, and care.

Moving to my feminist audience, this book continually left me to ponder two thought-provoking issues. I have no easy answers for either, and indeed, pursuing one almost seems to contradict the other. I believe these issues raise important questions for feminist scholars, so let me use Karsten’s work as a springboard to grapple with them.

Throughout my musings, I dubbed my first issue “fair and balanced.” I quickly dismissed a basically bogus approach, epitomized by Fox News (Greenwald, 2004), wherein lip service is given to authentically debating multiple sides of an issue while a single agenda is covertly pursued. In scholarly work, we generally see one of two genuine approaches: (a) offering multiple sides of an issue (typically two) without evaluative commentary or (b) making one’s biases and assumptions clear at the outset and making a data-based case in support of an assertion. Oftentimes, feminist scholars and teachers promote the latter approach; however, even within the Psychology of Women, we can find “debates” readers.

Karsten takes the former approach. At times, I think this almost forces her to find dissonance where none really exists. An example hit home for me in Karsten’s discussion of leadership. Although Karsten does an excellent job throughout the book of exploring the impact of social context on women and their experiences, I could not help but follow up on her contention that Powell and Graves (2003) “disagree with Yoder and Kahn” (2003) about contextual influences on women’s and men’s democratic leadership styles (p. 137). I must admit that I (Janice Yoder) have found little with which to disagree in the Powell and Graves book. However, my broader point here is that setting up an apparent alternative gives reluctant readers an escape route, easily overgeneralized, to discount a fundamentally shared point: context matters. Although Karsten herself makes a strong case for this conclusion in this section (and throughout her book), the loophole is there for readers wishing to essentialize gender differences.

Throughout the book, Karsten’s approach lets a skeptical reader waffle. For example, consider Karsten’s discussion of comparable worth as a means for achieving pay equity (pp. 56–58). Admittedly, I unabashedly support comparable worth and see its value in an occupationally segregated workforce. Yet, presumably to be balanced, Karsten parrots detractors’ worst fears about losing good workers to better paying jobs. She offers the case of a math teacher lost to a school unable to compete with the market forces of higher paying jobs in business rather than tackling the more complex issue of how market forces can work within a comparable worth model to address gender and racial wage inequities (see England, 2000).

My arguments so far build a rather convincing case against forsaking open evaluation of the materials we present in our work. However, my second issue muddles this conclusion by bringing in audience. Sometimes I worry that those of us working in the Psychology of Women preach too much to the choir. As a researcher, I find it more affirming to write my papers for a feminist audience than to deal with the more mainstream outlets in the discipline. As a teacher, I find myself connecting more with self-selected students in my Psychology of Women class than with those unsuspecting souls in my Research Methods class upon whom I often foist research with a social justice message. The former students repeatedly applaud my passion in their evaluations of me; a few of the students in the latter class critically reject and resent my bias.

Laura Brown (2000, 2006) captures this point so well in her discussion of subversion, subtly moving people toward a social-justice agenda. Social psychologists studying persuasion have long known that in-your-face challenges often fail; skeptical audiences respond better to two-sided arguments (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949). My guess is that Karsten knows her audience and is writing effectively for them.

For those of us in the Psychology of Women field, this book then offers a way to address an audience in ways that may open
doors to richer and more informed discussion about some powerful issues in working women's lives: pay equity, sexual harassment, employment discrimination, and equal employment. My advice about using this book effectively is to read the chapter summaries before launching into the full chapter, and then use the innovative outcomes introducing each chapter to engage in some spirited, post reading discussion. The end result of reading with discussion might be the persuasive influence I seek among management professionals who can make a positive difference for all women in the workplace.

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“SOMEBWHERE ALONG THE LINE I GOT ON THE BUMPY ROAD”: TRAUMATIC STRESS IN WOMEN’S LIVES


Whether the data are drawn from nationally representative samples, descriptive of more specific communities, or focused on the textures of individual lives in case studies or qualitative interviews, the message they contain is clear: Trauma and its effects are pervasive threads in many women's lives. Yet the consequences that follow from such events are as varied as the women who experience them. These points are at the center of Kendall-Tackett's compilation of critical reviews of the state of empirical research on trauma in the lives of women. The book focuses on key topics and issues related to variations in women's experiences of traumatic events, with a particular emphasis on child maltreatment, sexual assault, and intimate partner abuse.

At the center of this clearly written and accessible volume is a description of the range of traumas women experience, with particular emphasis on the negative consequences and effects of such experiences. Kendall-Tackett introduces the book by crafting an argument for examining women's lives in and of themselves, moving away from or beyond the alpha and beta bias described more than a decade ago by Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1990), who cautioned about comparing men and women while ignoring variation within groups. Rather, the starting point of this volume is the assumption, stated by the editor, that women's experiences of stress and trauma are important in their own right—the complexity of women's voices needs to be heard. Kendall-Tackett asserts that the trauma field was primarily founded on the study of men's lives, particularly combat veterans, and that, although such work is instructive, models based on men's lives are not fully descriptive of women's experiences. She highlights in particular the relationally based nature of trauma to which women are disproportionately exposed, as well as women's risk for particular consequences of trauma, including depression and physical illness. Thus, the book is not about comparing men and women, nor is gender construed as a moderator in the relationship between trauma and outcomes. Rather, the volume aims to portray the complexity and variation in women's experiences of trauma across the life course.

In fulfilling this mission, the book has a number of strengths. The first is its lifespan perspective. The first section of the volume focuses on this theme. It contains a chapter on girls and adolescents, which discusses child maltreatment, bullying, and the problem of dating violence. Other chapters describe the unique challenges of young adult women, including the stress of multiple caregiving roles and intimate relationships, as well as unique traumas related to birth experiences or perinatal loss. Finally, several chapters discuss stressors faced by older women, including elder abuse in its many forms. Thus, one main way that the book unpacks women's varied experiences with trauma is by examining age and cohort effects.

A second strength is the volume's attention to what Merrill, Thomsen, Sinclair, Gold, and Milner (2001) have termed “third generation analyses” of abuse effects. Merrill et al., while speaking more specifically about the field of child sexual abuse, characterized the first research in this area as documenting the problem and comparing abused to nonabused groups. Second generation studies examined moderating factors such as characteristics of the abuse experiences and their effects on outcomes. The authors note the need for researchers to take additional steps by identifying key mediating processes that explain, for example, the persistent effects of relational traumas like child sexual abuse into adulthood. What factors link trauma and outcomes across time or explain relationships between particular aspects of trauma and specific outcomes? Kendall-Tackett’s edited book begins to review and explore such mediating processes. For example, a chapter by Brenner details a variety of neurobiological mechanisms that may explain links between exposure to traumatic stress and specific mental and physical health outcomes. Other chapters explore factors relevant to different levels of the ecological model (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1986) including the role of social support and marital relationship issues, the impact of ageism and sexism, and the potential of community members such as hospital staff to act as sources of risk or protection.

Finally, in its goal to give voice to the complexity of women's experiences, the book gives attention to understudied groups of women. There is some variation in the extent to which women are
treated as a monolithic or homogeneous group in the individual chapters. However, there is specific attention given to the unique nature of trauma in the lives of women of color, women with disabilities, and lesbian women. These selections highlight aspects of these social identities as they intersect with gender to create risk and also provide protective factors that foster recovery. Given the relative lack of attention to the intersection of various identities in our understanding of trauma, these chapters are a useful contribution.

Overall, *Handbook of Women, Stress, and Trauma* provides an excellent introduction to the research literature on the consequences of trauma in women’s lives. It is particularly strong in reviewing the range of traumas with which women contend and at what cost. Several individual chapters discuss strengths of trauma survivors, yet on balance the book does more to summarize the nature of trauma and its deleterious consequences than to discuss resilience and recovery. Most chapters also hint at applications such as directions for future research and clinical work. The greatest strength of the volume, however, is in the solid foundation it provides readers for taking such next steps on their own. As such, it is a book well suited for introducing the trauma field to professionals, including graduate students, clinicians, and researchers wanting to understand the current state of our understanding of trauma’s impact on women’s lives. The book provides the background for then moving further into more specific clinical literature on types of treatments for trauma-related consequences and for generating ideas for innovations in intervention and next steps for research.

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Victoria L. Banyard is an Associate Professor of Psychology and Justice Studies at the University of New Hampshire. She is also co-director of Prevention Innovations: Research and Practices for Ending Violence Against Women on Campus. She has conducted extensive research on the consequences of interpersonal violence, including resilience among survivors and strategies for effective community prevention.

**SELF-TALK AS THE NEW FEMALE MALADY AND ITS CURE**


Why are women more likely to be depressed than men? And how can women avoid psychological distress and achieve fulfilling relationships, work, and life? These questions are the focus of two recently published self-help books for women. The first one, *Women Who Think Too Much*, is authored by Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, a Yale University psychology professor. In her scientific articles, Nolen-Hoeksema challenged biological theories about women’s vulnerability to depression and presented compelling data and arguments supporting social and economic explanations. For example, she pointed to evidence supporting a link between women’s high risk for depression and their disproportionate exposure to depressionogenic adversities, including sexual abuse, chronic caring burdens, social prejudice, and economic discrimination. Nolen-Hoeksema has also articulated the role of psychological factors in the risk for depression. The second book, *Finding Your Voice*, is the product of the collaboration of seven private practice psychologists with eminent records of professional leadership. Dorothy Cantor is a past president of the American Psychological Association (APA). Carol Goodheart, Sandra Haber, and Karen Zager are past presidents of Psychologists in Independent Practice. Ellen McGrath and Alice Rubenstein are past presidents of the APA Division of Psychotherapy, and Lenore Walker is past president of the APA Division of Media Psychology. Some of these authors have also made important contributions to education and/or advocacy regarding female mental health. For example, Lenore Walker is a leader in teaching and providing service to battered women.

Given how crowded the women’s self-help shelves are with books by authors without professional credentials in women’s mental health research and practice, my initial response to these two books was enthusiastic. Here were two general readership books on women’s mental health by psychologists with strong records of scientifically and socially grounded scholarship and/or practice. Finally, mental health practitioners and their clients will have access to self-help books that do not blame women for their socially induced psychological liabilities, I thought. After reading these two books, my evaluation of their contribution to deconstructing dominant myths about women’s mental health is more tempered. Each of these two books has the strengths I expected, as well as unexpected weaknesses.

A strength of both books is that they provide valuable scientific information on the role of ecological factors in women’s mental health. Both books note that external conditions, including adverse events, adverse social conditions, and adverse social norms, are key to understanding women’s psychological vulnerabilities. This information is critical in educating the public about the big picture on women’s unique risk for depression. For example, Nolen-Hoeksema points to a psychological factor, women’s tendency to use a ruminative coping style (defined as repeatedly thinking about negative feelings and circumstances rather than doing something to change the circumstances triggering the negative feelings), as critical in women’s heightened risk for depression. At the same time, she notes that women’s dysfunctional psychological coping is rooted in, and supported by, adverse environmental conditions. Ruminating is more common among those who are overburdened with responsibilities as well as those who experience chronic strains, she explains. Women fit both categories. According to Nolen-Hoeksema, women ruminate more than men...
because they have more to ruminate about and because they face so many chronic hassles. Consider that women carry a disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities and what that means in terms of worries and strains, she notes. Consider also that women are more likely to be poor than men, and poverty brings chronic uncontrollable negative life conditions. Finally, according to Nolen-Hoeksema, women ruminate more than men because they have less control over the sources of their worries and less power to effect constructive change.

A weakness of both books is that the scientific evidence and arguments on the role of adverse ecological factors in women's vulnerability to psychological problems is lost in the books' dominant focus on individual factors. This individual emphasis is particularly loud in the most visible and influential aspects of the books, such as the book titles, chapter and section headings, and the introductory chapters. For example, Nolen-Hoeksema's book title, Women Who Think Too Much, like the similarly titled best-selling predecessor, Women Who Love Too Much (Norwood, 1997), conveys the idea that women's stress and distress are the result of their weak psychological constitution and faulty coping. Consistently, in Nolen-Hoeksema's introductory chapter, overthinking is presented as a personal psychopathology and described as "a disease" and "an epidemic" (p. 4). One section heading in Nolen-Hoeksema's introductory chapter identifies overthinking as "the other curse of womanhood" (p. 24) (what would be the first curse of womanhood?). The heading of another chapter states, "If it hurts so much, why do we do it?" (p. 32). What is the implied answer? Because we are masochistic? Self-defeating? Incompetent?

Another weakness of both books is the advice they give to the reader, presumed to be a woman in distress. Given the data and arguments on ecological factors in women's mental distress presented in these books and in other professional publications by the same authors, I expected that their foremost recommendation would be that women avoid blaming themselves for things that are not under their control. I expected them to counsel women to seek relief from excessive life strains and burdens and to encourage them to make changes in the big picture. I thought they would tell women: "You are neither weak nor crazy. The burdens you carry are crazy. So give yourself a break; and if you can, take care of yourself with small private indulgences. But also see about ways to alter the family, social, and economic conditions that drain and exhaust you." Instead, the dominant advice of these books is that women mostly change themselves.

Yet another limitation of both books is that they draw on, and appear to address the experiences and needs of, a very narrow range of womanhood. For example, the case study protagonists in both books are middle class, primarily adult to mid-adult, and heterosexual. Ethnic, sexual orientation, and serious economic issues are virtually absent in the case studies. Hence, it is not surprising that the advice given by Nolen-Hoeksema to stressed, supposedly overthinking women includes that they have their hair done, take a bubble bath, get a massage, or go for a walk in a beautiful place. There is also an assumption, particularly in Cantor and colleagues' book that the problem with today's women is that they have too many choices. The opposite is actually true for women in general, relative to men. This choice-excess theory is particularly inaccurate with regard to less educated, poor, ethnic minority, immigrant, older, and sexual minority women. What is peculiar is that, in Cantor and colleagues' book, being a sexual minority is treated as one of these too many choices today's women have. They write: "All is permissible ... Unmarried? Embrace your singleness! Working mother? Good for you! Happy homemaker? That's great! Lesbian? Why not?" (p. 3).

Further, a peculiarity in Nolen-Hoeksema's book is that the case studies often include evaluations of the protagonists' physical appearance. Nolen-Hoeksema's overthinking women are described as "attractive" or "darkly handsome" or "pencil thin" or "crusty." I cannot help but wonder how these commentaries about physical attractiveness may affect a reader who is likely already hypervigilant and worrying, among other things, about personal appearance.

For centuries women have been deemed as the weak sex, as cursed humanity, as questionable humanity. Whatever was viewed as inferior, it was labeled as feminine. We were body and men were spirit. We were emotions and men were rationality. Most of all, women were assumed to be overexcitable, hysterical, instinctive, and impulsive (Showalter, 1985). In some ways, both of these books, by focusing on women's thinking, rather than on women's emotions, turn the old female stereotypes upside down. In other ways, these books follow the established tradition of pathologizing womanhood. The main difference is that the authors locate women's pathology in women's thoughts, rather than in women's emotions. According to Nolen-Hoeksema, the problem with women is that they do too much thinking. According to Cantor and colleagues, the problem with women is that they do the wrong kind of thinking. Ultimately, these books reinforce the scientifically inaccurate and damaging messages that the causes of women's problems are primarily internal and psychological. Once more, women are told that they have mostly themselves to blame for their problems and only themselves to change in order to make a positive difference in their lives. Self-talk is the malady. Self-talk (in psychotherapy or in the self-help version) is the cure. Women are encouraged to believe that by focusing on the care of their psychological selves they are cultivating their power. History, however, tells us differently. The personalizing and pathologizing of the political keeps women away from the places where they can actually make a difference in their lives: the social, economic, and political arenas. Hence, with Becker (2005), I think we ought to "question ... how the therapeutic culture has served ... women with regard to the ... social and political problems they face" (p. 1).

REFERENCES


Silvia Sara Canetto, Ph.D. is Professor of Psychology at Colorado State University. Her research deals with questions of gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, and culture in suicidal behaviors. She is the coeditor of the 1995 book Women and Suicidal Behavior and of two volumes of the Review of Suicidology. She has also published two books on teaching about human diversity, Teaching Diversity: Challenges, Complexities, Identity and Integrity (Atwood Publications, 2003), and 147 Tips on Teaching Diversity (Atwood Publications, 2005).
NOT JUST THE MOODY BLUES: UNDERSTANDING WOMEN’S DEPRESSION


Why are rates of depression higher for women than for men? Although depression remains a chronic and debilitating condition as well as a leading contributor to other disabilities, regardless of gender, in what ways does women’s depression uniquely disrupt the fabric of society? These are only two of the many key questions that editors Corey Keyes and Sherryl Goodman address in this important contribution to the study of depression in women.

The editors present scientific research on the understanding, treatment, and prevention of depression in terms of the gender gap with the explicit intention of bringing together relevant disciplines rather than reducing or isolating human life into pieces. To rectify this gap, the handbook underscores a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates the biological, sociological, and psychological dimensions of women’s depression. The editors have three specific aims: first, to enhance readers’ understanding of the factors that increase women’s vulnerability to depression; second, to review theories of etiology and relevant findings that shape interventions at the primary, secondary, and policy levels; and third, to examine the risk research in light of prevention, treatment, and social policy approaches to ameliorate women’s depression.

Women and Depression consists of 19 chapters divided into five sections. Consistent with the aims of the handbook, the chapters are organized under major headings that include (a) nosology and epidemiology; (b) biological, developmental, and aging models of risk; (c) cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal models of risk; and (d) systems and processes of treatment (prevention and policy). The chapters unfold in a scholarly, thorough manner and contain state-of-the-art scientific research. Authors engage in a concerted effort to summarize empirically supported findings, expose knowledge gaps, and identify needed directions for research.

The totality of presentations serves to capture women’s depression in a diverse and illuminating manner. The Goodman and Tully article addresses the extent to which daughters may be more affected by their mothers’ depression than sons. The Jackson and Williams presentation examines the cultural characteristics of racial/ethnic group experience of depression, and Penninx explores the risk factors for late-life depression within psychosocial, biological, and social domains.

This handbook includes multidisciplinary elements, although neither the research field nor the handbook is intended to offer an interdisciplinary perspective on women’s depression. For example, Marecek discusses the place of cultural narratives in organizing and shaping the interpretation of women’s depression in form, frequency, and social relations. Unlike other contributors, Marecek asserts that the views we have of depression are influenced by the forces of history, personal interpretation, society, and cultural location. She advises us to “ask what strategies for expressing and managing suffering are available to women and men in particular settings” (p. 290). She also asserts that scientific explanations are constructed from particular theoretical vantage points that reflect the gender politics of a certain cultural moment. As a result, our questions, observations, and interpretations arise from the reality of cultural artifacts.

In contrast, Wilhelm reviews the disorder of depression within a global context, using the psychiatric nomenclature of disease, diagnosis, and mental disorder. Many of the other authors assume a North American discourse on depression, thereby reflecting certain dominant accounts of depression and categories of suffering that situate the locus of pathology within the individual. In other words, depression is something someone possesses.

The emphasis on biology, sociology, public health, and psychology is a significant strength of this handbook. This multidisciplinary perspective on understanding women’s depression will appeal to providers in the health care field, psychologists, sociologists, women’s studies scholars, health policy makers, and public health and research workers. Although the foreword describes the handbook as an “instructive primer” (p. xvi), the depth and sophistication of scholarly research renders this book anything but a primer. In fact, for readers to appreciate and value Women and Depression, they will need a significant knowledge base and familiarity with technical terminology, empirical research methods, and relevant policy. Furthermore, this handbook draws largely from a North American, Western perspective and will particularly benefit readers who value this point of reference. (For example, Mexican Americans and African Americans are the most common minority references and many of the chapters present American statistics and research.) Readers seeking a wider cross-cultural emphasis may not be satisfied. This book is also written in a scholarly style, enriched by historical and empirical data, and may be less accessible to readers not comfortable with this style of presentation.

Future volumes on depression can extend the scope of this work by devoting attention to other diversity themes such as spirituality/religion, sexual orientation, and ableism. Further research should examine the critical and important challenge of conducting research from an international perspective and grapple with occasions when European American, middle-class, Western-trained scholars represent a minority. An exploration of transnational research would serve to provide important fresh perspectives on power imbalances between the researcher and the researched, which is a critical aspect of feminist methodology (Miraftab, 2004).

Overall, this handbook holds value for a broad readership. Those interested in a multidisciplinary approach to understanding women’s depression will find the perspectives and findings invaluable and informative. Researchers who want an empirically supported and scholarly approach will appreciate the examination of current findings and the future research directions. In particular, graduate students and mental health professionals in training programs have much to gain from learning about how the understanding and treatment of depression can be understood from a life-cycle perspective that spans from childhood through old age. Readers will also gain valuable knowledge of the obstacles and options that ameliorate this experience. However, it must be noted that this book neither intends to be, nor is, a how-to text. Clinicians such as psychiatric nurses, psychologists, or social workers who are seeking strategies to work with depressed women may find the absence of practical strategies somewhat disconcerting.

A core theme of the book is that the locus of power resides with the experts. Thus, there is a noticeable gap in the acknowledgement and exploration of women themselves as agents of healing and change. In evaluating this text, however, it is important to take...
a broad definition of a feminist approach. The contributors of the book represent a wide range of disciplines and share the desire to better understand women's depression so that prevention and treatment can take place on multiple levels. The book therefore contributes to the empowerment of women and efforts to make a difference in their lives. The feminist notion that acknowledges women as the experts on their own lives is more explicitly found in works based on qualitative research, such as *Situating Sadness: Women's Depression in Social Context*, edited by Janet Stoppard and Linda McMullen (2003). Yet ultimately, we need the contributions of all experts to make lasting changes.

**REFERENCES**


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**DISSECTING THE DSM: CHALLENGES FOR ASSESSMENTS**


In the field of mental health, the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) has a profound influence on the understanding and assessment of mental health disorders. In fact, it often serves as the primary model for understanding the presenting problems of clients. Although widely accepted, there are many critics of the DSM who believe that the model is too limiting. The DSM operates from a medical model, yet some believe family and developmental models are much more comprehensive. In an effort to increase awareness around the limitations of relying strictly on the DSM when assessing and treating clients, Karen Erikson and Victoria E. Kress wrote *Beyond the DSM Story: Ethical Quandaries, Challenges, and Best Practices*. This book is unique to the field because it challenges the DSM's utility in making accurate diagnoses. The book highlights the model's tendency to neglect important individual components (i.e., racial background and gender) during the assessment process. This critical perspective is rarely considered in the field of mental health. As a result, it is a very timely piece that should, at the very least, be read by those working or planning to work in the mental health field. Although some readers may not agree with the perspectives of the authors, they are likely to benefit from increased awareness of criticisms of the DSM.

In the first chapter of the book, Erikson and Kress provide an overview of the value of DSM diagnosis, although they focus primarily on the limitations. The authors believe that the benefits are well recognized by those practicing and training in the field, and as a result, this chapter focuses on their concerns. Subsequent chapters provide a detailed review of the major shortcomings outlined in the first chapter. These chapters help readers begin to challenge DSM diagnoses and to think about ways in which to resolve some of the limitations of this model. The authors examine the DSM strictly from an ethical standpoint, they center on multicultural challenges, and they discuss feminist challenges.

The second portion of the book is dedicated to helping readers consider some of the limitations of DSM diagnosis so as to engage in contextually sensitive diagnostic practices. The authors offer a variety of ways in which clinicians can resolve the quandaries of DSM diagnosis and then present clinical cases that incorporate the recommendations made throughout the book. Erikson and Kress conclude the book by offering a contextual, developmental, and holistic diagnostic model that addresses the major limitations of the DSM.

The challenges of the DSM that Erikson and Kress raise throughout the book are well thought out, clearly presented, and supported with ample evidence to support the authors' concerns. Contributing to the quality of the arguments made against the DSM diagnostic process are specific examples of DSM quandaries that clinicians may face. These examples help to illustrate the authors' points and solidify a strong understanding of their perspective. Additionally, Erikson and Kress enhance the chapters by providing ways for readers to begin integrating the information presented in their book with information they have learned previously about the DSM diagnostic process and psychopathology in general.

Overall, the book encourages readers to question the current DSM diagnostic process and to consider the impact that this process has on the way clients are assessed and treated in mental health settings. The book also encourages readers to explore different, more encompassing models during the diagnostic and assessment process. Erikson and Kress present their work in a scholarly manner that is accessible to all readers. It is important to note, however, that because Erikson and Kress do not provide an extensive review of the utility and benefits of DSM diagnosis, readers will need to have some fundamental understanding of and exposure to the DSM prior to reading this book. Without being familiar with the DSM, the reader will not be able to fully comprehend, appreciate, or contemplate the issues discussed throughout the book. The book will also carry more meaning for readers who have utilized the DSM in clinical practice. DSM exposure and clinical experience do not need to be extensive, but will enable readers to think about the issues on a more practical level. Despite the fact that it does not review the positive functions of DSM diagnosis, this book will benefit novice clinicians such as graduate students, as well as experienced clinicians in the mental health field.

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BEYOND HE SAID, SHE SAID: DEBATING ISSUES IN GENDER


Yes or no? Right or wrong? XX or XY? Female or male? These twofold distinctions, often applied to issues regarding sex and gender, are challenged in the variety of perspectives that the third edition of Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Gender offers to its readers. This text presents arguments within a binary format; however, it is made clear in the overall introduction and in the prefaces and postscripts to each of the issues that this distinction does not adequately reflect the complex nature of the topics. Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Gender (3rd ed.) has been updated substantially from its predecessors both in terms of the articles used to support the positions as well as in terms of the issues themselves; in total, six categories of topics and 20 issues are presented. The topics range broadly from a discussion of the innateness of gender identity to a debate on the most effective sex education. Students are given a brief introduction to the topics of sex and gender and are then instructed on ways to effectively analyze the arguments presented within the text. The positions presented in each section are prefaced by a brief summary of the issue and are supplemented by a postscript offering comments on the issue and giving additional readings and website links to further inform readers.

The goal of Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Gender is to stimulate critical analysis regarding provocative topics related to sex and gender within a multidisciplinary approach. The issues chosen are topical in nature, and the authors provide readers with the opportunity to identify and challenge their personal beliefs. White does an excellent job of selecting engaging articles from a variety of fields and sources; readers will increase their understanding that these issues are not simply related to women’s studies, or gender studies, but truly range across fields and touch everyone. A variety of writing styles are presented and readers are given the opportunity to critique the mode of argument presentation.

One of the strongest points for this book lies within the structure of the text and the ease of its use. This volume is an excellent fit as a main textbook in an upper-division class in women’s studies or as a supplementary text for classes within a variety of fields, including anthropology, sociology, ethics, and biology. Instructors can easily select the topics most relevant to their class or use the text as a whole. The use of Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Gender as a classroom resource is supported by an instructor’s manual and test bank offered by the publisher, as well as a guidebook to facilitate ease of using this text. Additional online references are provided to enable students to continue their learning beyond the classroom. The topics analyzed in the book are wide ranging, relatively easy to read, and seem very likely to produce strong reactions in the readers and lively debate in class. Standout issues include: “Is Gender Identity Innate?,” “Do Sex Differences in Careers in Mathematics and Sciences Have a Biological Basis?,” and “Is Female Circumcision Universally Wrong?”

Despite these recommendations for Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Gender there also exist some limitations to its use as a textbook. Given that this is a multichapter edited book, the quality of opposing arguments presented ranges widely. The strongest coverage of issues occurs in those selections that present balanced arguments on either side of the debate, such as “Is Fetal Sex Selection Harmful to Society?” Weaker coverage occurs when articles related to a topic seem to have distinctly different foci, such as in “Do Women and Men Communicate Differently?” In this section, one article discusses general gendered communication as it is related to verbal speech and the other focuses primarily on gendered communication as seen in a study examining written responses to personal ads. Weaker coverage also occurs in articles that discuss statistics or research data yet include limited or no citations, as in “Violence and Gender Reexamined.” Although this issue is most likely due to space limitations and the use of excerpts rather than full texts, it becomes problematic when readers attempt to assess the quality of the arguments presented or the veracity of the statistics or studies cited. In addition, the articles vary considerably in their writing styles; for example, there are readings that use a relatively conversational style from published debates, and there are others that use a more technical writing style from research studies. As a result, students may find some articles more challenging to review and analyze.

Overall, Taking Sides: Clashing Views in Gender is a good resource for instructors looking for a way to not only introduce these issues into the classroom, but also to facilitate and encourage their students’ critical thinking skills. Students will be drawn in not only by the topics themselves, but also by the variety of viewpoints presented, and readers will likely find themselves personally and intellectually challenged. Students will be pulled in by some of the arguments and put off by others, yet they will likely have a strong reaction to all of them.

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A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE INFLUENCES ON REPORTING OF SEXUAL ASSAULTS


The issues surrounding the reporting of sexual assaults in the United States have been problematic in both the prosecution of
the offenders and blaming the victim. Kim Ménard, in *Reporting Sexual Assault: A Social Ecology Perspective*, has compiled a comprehensive and useful tool to look at factors that have an impact on whether an assault is reported. Ménard’s analysis of current available data focuses on contextual factors, such as the social climate of the county in which the assaults occurred, severity of the assaults, whether the assaults were committed by a stranger, and how individuals and their support systems understand the assaults. This research is important for raising awareness about the reasons sexual assaults are among the least reported crimes, for guiding future research, and for educating about ways to assist in outreach to provide support to those victims who do not seek help.

This book also identifies the complex nature of sexual assault crimes. To report an assault, the individual and her/his support system must label the event as a crime, and the crime has to be seen as severe enough so that the survivor feels that the criminal justice system will also believe the assault to be a crime and not turn the process against her/him. This frequently means that there must be a weapon and the perpetrator must be a stranger so that no long-standing dispute between victim and offender will complicate the interpretation of the event. As Ménard points out, in spite of the fact that rape shield laws state that any information about a prior relationship between the victim and offender is inadmissible, the issue of consent becomes blurred in the legal system when there is a prior relationship. This research reveals that victims are less likely to contact the police when the assault was committed by someone they know. Ménard’s research also indicates that people in rural communities are less likely to report assaults than those who live in urban communities and do not understand crimes in the same way as people in larger cities.

One of the most important understandings to come from this work is that the political and social climate pertaining to sexual assaults in this country sends a message to victims that they should not report or seek help for services if an assault does not fall in the category of a violent stranger rape. Even when the assault is consistent with a violent scenario, the victim may still be blamed. Social psychologists point out that blaming the victim allows others to feel safer because they can then believe that the assaulted individual must have done something to bring on the attack.

As a researcher, educator, and clinician, I find this information to be of paramount importance for helping to inform outreach programs and identify existing issues that need to be resolved. As I train new clinicians, promoting an understanding of the obstacles a victim must overcome to access helping services will contribute to a more empathic therapeutic relationship. This information also is valuable for those designing and implementing training and outreach programs for the community, the police, and lawmakers. Ménard’s statement that “normative definitions of rape are inconsistent with the legal definitions of this crime” is an important insight to come from this book. If this society’s definition is so different from that of the criminal justice system, how can we expect to resolve the underreporting of sexual assault crimes? The variability and complexity of this type of crime requires that both lawmakers and researchers clearly understand what each community needs to help victims step forward and seek help, as well as to prevent perpetrators from rationalizing that they did not commit a crime and then assaulting again.

The finding that sexual assaults are higher in rural areas, which Ménard states is consistent with other studies, is also important in helping to guide intervention and outreach programs. Rural communities are often underserved with regard to mental health services, and this study identifies specific issues that must be addressed to create any successful intervention or outreach program in rural areas. Ménard does an excellent job of identifying many of the challenges of working with rural communities.

This research sheds light on the factors that prevent victims from seeking services. The next step is to find solutions.

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**THE MEANING OF WIFE? LOST IN THE DETAILS**


*The Meaning of Wife* was a disappointment. The enticing subtitle is cast on a striking cover depicting a woman’s raised ring finger set against a Tiffany-blue background, leading to high expectations for a book of controversy and discussion of the Western role of wife. However, as Kingston defines in the second to last page, there is no singular meaning of wife. “That is the meaning [that there is no meaning].” One could imagine that this statement would leave readers thinking, “I just read this entire book for that?” It is only at the end of the entire text that the thesis statement of the book is clearly stated, having been only hinted at before. Frankly, the book is too analytical for the leisure reader and not analytical enough for the researcher or those well-versed in issues of women’s or gender studies.

On the positive side, Kingston does provide the reader with a relatively in-depth historical perspective of the changing conceptualizations of wifehood in Western society. Multiple popular culture references are given. Additionally, personal narratives and anecdotes are used as examples throughout the work. These serve as points of interest for the reader.

One major problem with the text is the use of extreme statements, often based solely on anecdotal evidence. For example, in the chapter about bridal lust, Kingston compares historical coveture to current bridal trends. “Coveture has been replaced by commercial forces that work to reinforce conformity and make women subservient to events spinning beyond their control” (p. 58). Some anecdotal experiences follow to support this statement; absent from the chapter is empirical or other supporting data. Another somewhat offensive chapter focuses on the abused wife. Kingston seems to reject the idea that abused wives are victims. Although part of her point is that women can also be aggressors in relationships, she seems to lose sight of the plight of the abused woman and focuses instead on the commercial value of the abused wife. For example, one of the concluding lines of the chapter is, “She [the abused wife] had become a noble commodity, able to sell magazines, win awards, further careers, and even promote products such as tobacco” (p. 169). This conceptualization trivializes the reality of abused women.
Kingston also often refers to the wife gap, which she defines as polarizations in the meaning of wife. Throughout each chapter, multiple examples of the wife gap are presented, with the author seeming to take an almost condescending view of each extreme of any given continuum. Kingston appears to be frustrated at the stereotypes of the wife role. For example, in her “Sex and the Married Woman” chapter, she gives the impression that neither the chaste wife nor the sex kitten wife should be embraced by society. Kingston’s use of these examples was a bit confusing. Readers are left wondering what her vision is for what a wife should be or how she would suggest we redefine the meaning of wife.

A notable shortcoming of the book is the lack of a multicultural lens. The majority of the book focuses on the experience of White, upper-middle-class, Western women. Race, religion, and socioeconomic status are not mentioned, and sexual orientation receives a single appearance. This is particularly problematic in that Kingston herself refers to wife as a “culturally bound” term. Without discussing any diversity characteristics, it is difficult to gain a complete perspective about how the meaning of wife can be culturally laden.

When examined in sections, the chapters do become more manageable. However, as a whole, the book is likely overwhelming to most undergraduates and lacks appropriate depth for most graduate students. We are unable to identify how this work could be used to inform psychologists because the book does not add new information or perspective to the field. Researchers and clinicians will not find this book useful, though one possible utility of the book could be the use of excerpts in a women’s studies or psychology of gender course. Overall, the book was a somewhat tedious read. Though pop culture was referenced frequently, the amount was a bit daunting; in fact, we found ourselves lost in the details.

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EXACTING PATRIARCHY’S TOLL: LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF WOMEN WHO STRIP FOR A LIVING


Following the rise of second-wave positivistic feminism, there has been considerable disagreement among feminists, particularly between sex radical feminists and radical feminists, regarding various realms of women’s sexuality (Jaggar, 1994). Many believe the dichotomies that characterize such disagreement have grown stale. In these arguments, woman is seen as objectified and repressed by the culture’s view of her as an object intended to fill man’s sexual desires or woman is viewed as being empowered by the ownership and pride she can experience in the face of this cultural idealization of her body. Another iteration of this dichotomy is voiced when women engage in sexually taboo activities; often, these women are viewed as either whores or as victims. At the heart of this feminist controversy lies sex work, an array of professions for which women can earn some of the highest incomes among (less educated) females in the American workforce. In her book, Stripped: Inside the Lives of Exotic Dancers, Bernadette Barton’s intention was to reveal the multifaceted lived experiences of women involved in stripping for money. Barton largely succeeds at circumventing hackneyed dichotomies in her book, taking the reader on a different journey into women’s complex decisions about and experiences with stripping for money.

Throughout 5 years of interviews, observation, and personal conversations with women dancing in strip clubs across the United States, Barton immersed herself into the lives of women working in this controversial field. In her intensive qualitative research endeavor, she speaks of making explicit attempts not to raise certain issues that might confirm stereotypes about women who strip. Notably, Barton purposely avoids asking women about their histories of sexual abuse. However, she seems to have no similar concern about the possible confirmation of other stereotypes, for example, when exploring topics such as alcohol and drug abuse or sexual identity. Rather than avoiding all of these potentially controversial topics, Barton seems to evade only those that might corroborate the hotly contested notion that many women who strip for money possess low levels of sexual and body esteem, which may result in at least part from histories of sexual abuse. Of course, many women who strip have not experienced sexual abuse. However, even in Barton’s attempt to not encourage conversation specifically on this topic, several of her participants volunteered information about their experiences with sexual abuse.

Moreover, Barton’s choice to exclude questions regarding a woman’s background, especially questions pertaining to childhood sexual abuse, rape, and other sexual trauma, renders an incomplete picture of the lived experiences of women involved in stripping. One cannot fully understand another when the whole picture is not taken into consideration. In addition, when these questions are not asked, especially when many other intimate topics are addressed, the interviewer runs the risk of communicating to her participants that certain topics should not be spoken about, potentially exacerbating shame that may already be a part of the woman’s emotional life.

Perhaps similar to her unambiguous avoidance of the topic of sexual abuse, Barton also seems to generally avoid (albeit less explicitly) a feminist or sociological analysis of women who strip for a living. Indeed, other than a few allusions throughout the book, it is not until the last chapter that she begins to draw these crucial connections. At the beginning of the first chapter, in discussing the “single most common reason why any woman starts dancing (and continues) is for the money” (p. 24), Barton advises that “feminists take note” that sex work is the only occupation in which women earn a higher income than men. It is unclear what this notation is supposed to mean—perhaps that the only occupation in which a woman can achieve economic equality is one in which she must take on the multiple tolls of exotic dancing and in which she can expect to be successful only if her physical appearance conforms to the current patriarchal norms of beauty. Does the notation suggest that women without an education need not pursue one because they can make a great living in exotic dancing? Or, does it suggest that this occupation is an important viable option for women who want to earn a high living, given that they cannot do so in any other field? This notation can be somewhat
baffling to the reader, in part because it seems to suggest a bias that goes unexplored by Barton. To her credit, Barton relieves this apprehension when she explicitly acknowledges in the last few pages of her book that, going into this project, she disagreed with much of the existing radical feminist analysis of sex work. She then seems to concede that, after having immersed herself into the lives of exotic dancers, such analyses emerged as best fitting with her observations.

At least to us, two average feminist readers, the women’s stories throughout Stripped leapt off the page, unveiling quite a precarious positive side and a fairly disturbing toll of stripping. We can only guess that the avoidance of a systemic analysis was intentional, keeping the reader fully engaged in the unfolding of these powerful stories. Then, as Barton finally elucidates the patriarchal and capitalist underpinnings of the limited physical, relational, sexual, and psychological well-being of women who strip, her analysis eloquently and naturally unfolds.

REFERENCE


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