Cheating on the Sisterhood: Infidelity and Feminism by Lauren Rosewarne

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Book Review


In our modern, pop culture–infused American society, it seems only natural to look at personal issues through the critical lens of current times. That is exactly what Rosewarne does in her book *Cheating on the Sisterhood*. Rosewarne, a self-proclaimed third-wave feminist and member of Generation Y, examines her own role of the “other woman” by offering a critical postmodern academic debate with intellectualization at its heart.

The book is from a Generation Y perspective, and that adds to its readability. Rosewarne’s continual reference to modern popular culture makes the book unique. It also allows the reader to see the modern media influence on everyday society. Beyond that, the book makes an argument for how entwined infidelity is within our culture. Rosewarne makes reference to the idea that no soap opera, cinema, literature, or music would exist without the issue of infidelity. The placement of infidelity within the cultural realm, combined with the use of popular-culture references, tie the book to our way of life in a manner that is truly current in thought.

Infidelity is looked at not only through its popular-cultural lens. Infidelity is also placed in the critical debates of individuality and consumer culture. In a society where individuality reigns, how can infidelity be looked at in only one way? Relying heavily on the arguments of feminist scholars Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Gurley Brown, Arlie Hochschild, and a variety of third-wave authors, Rosewarne brings into question the idea of a unified sisterhood and how the “other woman” makes her decisions. Can all women be unified if they are all self-interested and disconnected? Rosewarne examines the issue primarily from her own point of view as the “other woman” but does make reference to the women in the relationship. One wonders how they can both be in a sisterhood when they both have competing self-interests. This analysis of individuality and the sisterhood not only examines whether the “other woman” is right, wrong, or the norm, but also brings the issue again into the current debate about society.

Rosewarne presents her own experience as the case study. She defends the use of her experience at the beginning of the book:
This book draws on my perceptions of two connected relationships; detached research is impossible, reflexive research is more feasible. Of course, my story is a strong example of the personal as political edict and while there are limitations in referencing my experiences, doing so is no less reliable than using case studies presented by psychologists and psychiatrists who have applied their own analysis. (p. 16)

Rosewarne’s use of her own case study does lead to a methodological issue. While reflexive study allows for insight into how difficult it is to fully analyze a personal experience in a critical academic manner, the lack of detached study does allow for a disjunction between the academic arguments and the reflexive commentary. This methodological issue expresses the difficulty in examining the human experience.

Throughout the book, Rosewarne does continue to struggle with the political ideals of feminism and her actions. She looks to feminist and cultural arguments about relationships, the politics of feminism, the personal role of love and relationships, and her need to understand her place in all of this. She journeys through the book as a way to understand how a self-proclaimed feminist having an affair with another self-proclaimed feminist fits into the academic arguments in society. In the end, one feels that she has broken down and analyzed her role and the role of the man in the relationship as deeply and intellectually as one possibly could, within these particular circumstances. There never is a sense that she can separate her feelings or experience within this reflective analysis to come to a final answer for herself. She concludes, “In my case, I suspect I simply made a decision that reflects my feminism.”

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