



The H-Spot: The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness

Jill Filipovic

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What do women want? The same thing men were promised in the Declaration of Independence: happiness, or at least the freedom to pursue it.

For women, though, pursuing happiness is a complicated endeavor, and if you head out into America and talk to women one-on-one, as Jill Filipovic has done, you'll see that happiness is indelibly shaped by the constraints of gender, the expectations of feminine sacrifice, and the myriad ways that womanhood itself differs along lines of race, class, location, and identity.

In *The H-Spot*, Filipovic argues that the main obstacle standing in-between women and happiness is a rigged system. In this world of unfinished feminism, men have long been able to "have it all" because of free female labor, while the bar of achievement for women has only gotten higher. Never before have women at every economic level had to work so much (whether it's to be an accomplished white-collar employee or just make ends meet). Never before have the standards of feminine perfection been so high. And never before have the requirements for being a "good mother" been so extreme. If our laws and policies made women's happiness and fulfillment a goal in and of itself, Filipovic contends, many of our country's most contentious political issues--from reproductive rights to equal pay to welfare spending--would swiftly be resolved.

Filipovic argues that it is more important than ever to prioritize women's happiness--and that doing so will make men's lives better, too. Here, she provides an outline for a feminist movement we all need and a blueprint for how policy, laws, and society can deliver on the promise of the pursuit of happiness for all.

The H-Spot: The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness Details

Date : Published May 2nd 2017 by Bold Type Books

ISBN : 9781568585475

Author : Jill Filipovic

Format : Hardcover 336 pages

Genre : Feminism, Nonfiction, Politics, Gender, Womens

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From Reader Review The H-Spot: The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness for online ebook

Patti Webb says

I am an avid follower of Jill Filipovic on Twitter, so I was very excited to get an advance copy of this book. I've never read any feminist non-fiction before, so this was a straight-forward crash course on feminist history. "How did we get here?" is the foundation, followed up by an analysis of today's policy and staggering statistics of women's roles as mother, wife, daughter, friend, scholar/worker, and member of society. She clearly shows how federal and state government policies have not kept up with women's progress, and at times has even hindered it. And even though we're in the second wave of feminism, we as a society are not nearly along as we should be in regards to creating a climate that not only includes and accepts women as equals, but benefits them.

I did a lot of personal reflection while reading this book (as a college-educated woman of color from a mostly single, immigrant mother), and what I found most enlightening is that we are at a point where we can help design what this ideal society will look like. What does a feminist marriage and household look like? What programs can we create that not only assist women of color/impoverished women/single mothers/LGBT women, but help them thrive and succeed? What can we teach the next generation about how women should be treated and portrayed in the world?

Women are not a special-interest group. We are half of the nation's population. That comes with an immense power and responsibility to shape the next step. It's not about work-life balance, or "having it all", or man-hating. It's about shifting from "how things have always been done" to "how things should be."

Andi says

I am growing increasingly fed up with the patriarchy and all of the ways that women are still being treated as second-class citizens. So much of what Filipovic has to say is spot-on as it pertains to cultural norms regarding the expectations of and for women in our society, many of which are at cross-purposes...being turned into sex objects while being shamed for being sexual, for example. For me, reading books like 'The H-Spot' help me to question things I've just automatically accepted because it's the culture in which I was raised. There isn't anything particularly profound or new in this book, unless you find it jaw-dropping that women are people who deserve to find happiness and are not merely tools to serve the men and children around them.

~Geektastic~ says

February 2017: Extremely relevant, extremely good. Review TK.

(This review originally appeared on Bust.com, April 2017)

The Declaration of Independence enshrines the “pursuit of happiness” as an “inalienable Right,” right next to life and liberty as essential endowments for all people. Or, at least, for all men.

The inclusion of happiness as a right guaranteed to all men was a radical proposition in 1776, though it is now a defining aspect of American exceptionalism. The concept remains radical for women, however, because our social, political, and cultural systems are not actually built for us; these systems were constructed knowing our labor is what allows many men to be able to pursue happiness in the first place. In *The H Spot: The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness*, journalist Jill Filipovic dives into the history of American social norms and expectations, rooting out and revealing the many ways American culture, in the name of morality and rugged individualism (coupled with healthy doses of late-capitalist consumerism) undermines women at nearly every turn. Throughout this study, she asks the vital question: “what would we make if we all had the tools?” The current system is rigged; what could we build that would actually promote equality?—and by extension, happiness?—on a systemic, bottom-up level?

The H Spot is not a narrative of personal discovery or a self-help guide on how to make the “right” choices. Rather, it combines history, recent sociological research, interviews with women from a range of backgrounds, and some of Filipovic’s own personal experience to focus on the root causes that render the American system of politics and culture inadequate to the task of promoting equality and, to an even greater degree, happiness. Through an intersectional lens, Filipovic looks at female friendship, sex, parenting, marriage, work-life balance, food and body image, and personal identity, revealing the antipathy and even outright hostility American society has for women’s pleasure and fulfillment, an opposition that often rises to outright hatred when race and class become involved. What she uncovers time and time again is that “[o]f course women can’t flourish in a system that needs us as support for someone else’s building. We’re here to prop it up, not live in it.” Which brings us back to the question: so how do we build a system that doesn’t require one group of people to sacrifice for the support of the other?

There is no easy answer to this or to the many other questions she raises, but Filipovic dives deep into the machinery of American culture and politics to uncover the underlying causes of continuing inequality, demonstrating the necessity of re-framing our deeply held cultural beliefs. Some of the most challenging work will involve completely rejecting and reworking the narratives that have become foundational to our culture?—the myth of “traditional” single-breadwinner, heterosexual marriage as universal; the idea that there is a limited definition of success; the distorted view of female sexuality that is commodified and punished in equal measure; institutions that rely on free or undervalued female labor to thrive. “What could topple the most stubborn roadblocks,” Filipovic writes, “is a feminism and a politics that reorients itself away from simple equality and toward happiness and pleasure.” Policy that supports equality cannot simply focus on pay or removing glass ceilings, but on understanding and supporting what makes people genuinely happy and opening up the opportunities for embracing those things, even (or especially) when they don’t fit the narrow confines of “success” and “family values” in American culture.

Filipovic’s research is focused exclusively on American policy and tradition, but the issues are not limited to the US. Many places around the world have made attempts to support the pursuit of happiness by helping to level the playing field, providing options such as paid family leave, universal healthcare, and higher minimum wages, but no nation has truly dismantled the systems that have perpetuated the inequality in the first place. America, with its peculiarly individualistic outlook and longstanding issues of sexual, racial, and economic inequality, is an ideal case study for the ways the system is built for the advantage of some at the cost of others. Ultimately, Filipovic’s intent in *The H Spot* is not to provide a road map for policy (though there are certainly many solid recommendations throughout), but to propose a thorough revision of how we look at the causes of inequality and take action from a new vantage point?—an undertaking that feels both more crucial and less hopeful under the current US administration. “That so many of us are so unhappy

demonstrates not an individual failure to seek pleasure,” Filipovic insists, “but a political failure to insist that the ability to pursue happiness...is a fundamental right and bedrock feminist cause.” Perhaps happiness, so long (mis)characterized as frivolous or tangential to basic survival, may actually be the key to a healthier, more successful?—?and more equal?—?society. Maybe it’s time to pursue it.

Maxine says

3.5 stars

Nothing in this book will be new concepts to you if you read widely within this genre; however I did really enjoy Filipovic's centring of all of these ideas around the idea of female happiness.

It's a concept that has only recently started to get play, and is still looked down upon (i.e. a woman's role is caring for others first, and caring for herself second). Her conceptualizing of this concept by going through a woman's life (marriage, childbearing, schooling, etc...) was great, and easy to follow. The only thing missing was talking more about life post-marriage - for widows, for divorced women, for the elderly.

Numerous times she makes reference to the research she did and the interviews she did with hundreds of women, but that doesn't entirely come through in this book - the women she does mention are great, but I feel like there was more aggregate data that could have been shared. Certainly, however, her focus on women of colour, poor women, and intersectionality was highly welcome.

This is a readable, relevant, and important work. Truly, a necessary read for our current times.

With thanks to the publisher for the ARC.

Kate Walton says

Enjoyed Filipovic's approach, investigating whether we should be searching not for equality but for happiness. Not a lot of new thought or information here, but a good read nonetheless.

Ensley says

A great “Feminism 101” read that’s not too dense but packs a punch.

Jill reframes so many things we just go along with and made me think about what this means for women. A chapter that stood out for me the most was the recent push for women to have natural childbirth, that it makes them more “womanly” and implies they’re better mothers. Except we expect women to be highlighted, plucked, well-exercised, made up, perfumed...the only time we value women being “natural” is when they’re in an immense amount of pain. Mic drop. Mind blown.

And that’s just one example. A book that keeps you thinking well after the last page is turned. Read it.

Trisha says

Part review of feminist theory and the feminist movement, the author presents different ideas of happiness from the perspective of different women.

"One of the goals of this project was to show that there is no one definition of womanhood, no singular experience of pleasure seeking, and no individual thing that will bring happiness for all women, but there are a great many commonalities, and a great many ways to improve the status quo."

Her suggestions for improving the status quo?

- Fostering relationships, especially nontraditional ones
- Promoting sexual pleasure for women
- Providing time for play
- Providing time for parenting
- "Making food feminist"

Each of these suggestions is backed up by theory, history, statistics, or personal interviews. It is a great introduction on what makes women happy, and the movement toward these things. A call to action, of sorts.

It can be academic at times, however, and I found myself having to take a break every now and then to refresh.

Four stars.

Maggie Gordon says

If you pick up *The H-Spot* because you remember the good old days of *Feministe*, prepare to be disappointed. This book is pablum. Now, admittedly, pablum is important. This is a good book to give someone if they don't understand this whole gender equality thing and need to start somewhere. It includes more references to intersectional ideas than most introductory texts of this type (but it's still not fantastic), and it's up-to-date in terms of references. But it's baby feminism 101.

I had hoped the happiness framework would differentiate Filipovic's book from others, but really it's the same breakdown of work, sex, parenthood, etc... that most pop feminism books touch on. None of the topics are mindblowing, nor are Filipovic's insights new. There are plenty of books and articles about the things she writes about that are more informative and interesting. I found it quite boring, particularly given the fact that Filipovic was quite wishywashy in her argumentation. Sure, patriarchy bad, but her solutions were too broad, and even her engagement with the issues was a bit too "well, everyone is different". There was a lot of description without proper analysis, and this weakened the intersectionality section quite a bit.

All in all, it's not a bad book. It's not a book for me though, nor will it probably be all that interesting to anyone with more than a base knowledge of feminism.

Alexis says

The book has a good thesis--that women should seek to maximize their happiness. There's a lot of good material scattered through the book. Despite that, it doesn't really succeed, largely because Filipovic doesn't know what kind of book she wants to write. The scope is too wide: each chapter focuses on a part of women's lives that could take a book to cover thoroughly on its own. The content flips between research, interview material, and her own thoughts, and it's an uneven mix. She's upfront that she's exactly the kind of middle class white woman that's been too visible in feminist texts, and she does try to bring in data and interviews from people who aren't like her, but in sections, her voice dominates. It's most noticeable in the Parenting chapter, where her lack of personal experience with the topic makes her musings sit somewhat uneasily and her recommendations feel too packaged. In addition, while she is aware of her race and class, and religion gets a nod in the sex chapter, other issues go unmentioned--disability is barely spoken about.

It's not bad, but if you've read any of the recent books about feminism as applied to people's lives, it probably won't tell you anything new.

Morgan Schulman says

Same old, same old, re-framed in the terms of women's happiness. Single, Childfree, affluent, educated 30-something urban white girl who's written on the internet. This is no longer critical theory. This is live journal 15 years later.

Stella says

While this was informative, I felt this book referenced many (better) books that I have already read about feminists and the feminist pursuit. This book did a good job of changing the concept and turning it more to the focus on the idea of female happiness.

The inclusion of women of color, lower income females and the hot button issue of intersectionality was a highly welcome addition as many of the referenced books just touched on or completely left out.

This is a highly relevant, readable book that is a perfect read for this exact moment, if you are just starting to dig into feminist writing.

Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for the opportunity to read and review.

Keytelynne says

I have been working on reading this book for a while with dogged determination. I really had a difficult time getting in to this book by Jill Filipovic. At the end of the day, it felt like I was reading a book I didn't choose for a class. I was disappointed because in reading the description, it sounded just like something I would love

to read.

Filipovic focused on reframing the conversation around feminism. It was an interesting approach. Some of the writing was dry and repetitive, which is where I started to lose interest. Others may like it, but I also am not a fan of the author's personal life being so prominent in the writing.

Interspersed in the novel were some very interesting facts. Having a background in social justice, much of this was information I've already read in other works. I really tried to enjoy this novel, but I don't think I would recommend it. For some of these novels, I think of if I were to put a syllabus together for a course, would students get excited about it and be interested? I just didn't see that with this book.

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review of the book.

Jessica says

Darn. I had high hopes for this book since I like Jill's tweets and her articles and op-eds a lot. She's a smart, incisive writer.

Somehow, that skill did not carry over into this monograph. Maybe it's because I'm well-read on the topic, but with the possible exception of her chapter/analysis of sexual pleasure, she was re-stating well-trod territory around how America isn't really set up for women's happiness/success. If you still need to be told that affordable childcare is a problem and need 20+ pages to do it...sure, read away!

Each chapter was too long; many read too much like history reports, not real analysis. And the policy recommendations--that's the main reason I was excited about this book, to see some innovative policy ideas--were relegated to the final chapter and ticked through like a laundry list. Which meant 80% of the book was "things really SUCK A LOT" without tying to possible paths forward. A quicker, back and forth between issue & solution, with a bit of history (some of which was indeed interesting) would have been a compelling structure. And not just the policy but ideas about coalition building to actually ACHIEVE the policy, too!

Many times she claims to have done thousands of interviews, but there are two characters that show up most: Janet, a low-income African American mom, and Jill herself. This is problematic. Because she says all the right things about being intersectional, but still trots Janet out over and over for whatever issue is at hand. Did she not talk to other low-income or WOC? In terms of telling her own story, I suspect Filipovic got bad editorial advice to bring her own experience into it. Even by her own admission, her story is so dripping with privilege and non-struggle...she's thin, conventionally pretty, economically comfortable, partnered with, we are told, a dreamy guy. Her point seems to be "Look! Even ME! SO imagine others...." but it doesn't work. I just got annoyed.

I'm a fan, but not going to recommend this one to others.

Julie Ehlers says

The H-Spot was rather disappointing. In her introduction, Jill Filipovic advances a fascinating thesis: The United States was founded on the idea that we're all entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but

over the years, U.S. policy has not been neutral to all citizens; it has actually favored men (particularly white men, of course). Women have propped up this system long enough, no one is actually all that happy, and there is obviously still a lot of social injustice. The time has come to start making policy based on what would make women happy. But don't freak out, men—Filipovic also claims that focusing on making women happy will in fact result in *everyone* being happy. Sounds amazing, right? I want to know how this is going to work. What are the steps we need to implement to make this reality?

Well, I've finished the book and I still don't really know. Sure, Filipovic includes a few policy suggestions in the final chapter, but otherwise this is just your standard run-of-the-mill feminist book that points out all of the gender inequalities in U.S. society, broken down into the usual categories: sex, work, marriage/children, body image, etc. The happiness framework is rarely made explicit, and a lot of this was stuff I'd read in other feminist books already. Filipovic does make a few interesting points regarding the way the U.S. government infused cash into male-dominated jobs during the depression, setting up a disparity between "blue-collar" and "pink-collar" jobs that continues to this day and puts women at a major disadvantage. She also advances the best argument I've ever heard that no one should remain a virgin until their wedding night. Beyond these points, though, there was nothing new here and nothing as exciting as the thesis she originally laid out.

Filipovic clearly did a lot (a lot, a lot) of research for this book and of course it's valuable, but when *The H-Spot* really came alive wasn't when she was summarizing and explaining this research but instead when she was offering her own opinions—opinions backed by research, obviously, but still her own passionate thoughts and feelings. For instance, the penultimate chapter, "The Story of a New Name," starts out as Filipovic's compelling manifesto about the way girls today *still* grow up thinking that their identity will eventually be merged (and possibly subsumed) with someone else's, usually a male someone else. Boys don't do this! Filipovic clearly feels strongly about this idea, and her writing here was some of the most eloquent and urgent in the book. Unfortunately, she eventually retreats back to more research on the same topics she'd already discussed in previous chapters, and the whole thing settles down into something typical again.

Perhaps the biggest letdown for me was how few policy suggestions there were. In her last chapter, Filipovic reveals that initially her book was going to be more oriented on politics and policy, but she soon realized that would be "very boring." Not if it's done right it wouldn't! There are so many books out there that talk about the problems. I would've much rather read one that talked about some solutions. That's what this book promised, and it didn't deliver. If you are truly clueless about these topics, this is a good, up-to-the-minute feminist primer. Otherwise, I would not suggest looking for satisfaction from *The H-Spot*.

Maggie Chidester says

“What if, instead, the goal were happiness? Not at an individual level, with more yoga or self-care or Pinterest perfect hobbies, but a political one: What would the world look like if our laws and policies prioritized [women] feeling good?”

- Remember when this country was built and American citizens were given the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Mmmm, well that was actually only afforded to white male property owners so Jill Filipovic set out to write a book surrounding the idea of how politicizing and prioritizing women's happiness could benefit the entire country. In relation to repo rights, equal pay, relinquishing power instability in marriage, changes in welfare spending, policies relating to child care, sexual education in schools and more, Jill outlines a blueprint for how policy, laws, and societal expectations can deliver on the promise of the pursuit of happiness.

- I greatly enjoyed this book. There were many areas where I was knowledgeable on the content due to other

feminist works I've read and it felt like a refresher, but I also learned a lot - especially in the chapters of *Wife: The Feminist Transformation of Marital Happiness* and *The Edible Woman: Food, Fat, and Feminism*. My favorite chapter was on *Playing In The Dark: Sex, Pleasure, and Pain* that touched on sexual trauma, objectification, how to have better sex, the virginity construct and purity culture, the lackluster sex education in schools, "surprise" anal (yes that's a real thing), and sexual desires constantly being filtered through the male lens, experiences, and norms.

- I would highly recommend this book to people starting on their journey of feminist advancement. While it is intersectional in its research, there are many books that delve deeper into intersectionality that would be better suited for people who have been reading feminist works for a while. Some goodreads reviews say they were looking for more "solutions" to the issues that Filipovic brings attention to, but I thought she had a great balance of research and ideas for change, but maybe that's just me.
