

IS CASANOVA DEAD?

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A Review of the Book

Challenging Casanova - Beyond the Stereotype of the Promiscuous Young Male

by Andrew P. Smiler. 2013.

Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Imprint, San Francisco, 278 pages.

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Challenging Casanova - Beyond the Stereotype of the Promiscuous Young Male is about the common perception of young men being perceived as Casanovas. In the first of the book's three parts, Smiler defines the term 'Casanova'. There are many different names for a Casanova, like 'Don Juan', 'player' or 'Jet Set Playboy', just to mention a few. However, what is a Casanova, and more importantly, what characterizes a Casanova?

Andrew Smiler describes the Casanova Complex as a "culturally based image that says guys just want promiscuous *sex, not relationships, and that almost any behavior, ..., is OK if it'll get him laid*" (p. 17). The name Casanova goes back to Giacomo Casanova who lived in the eighteenth century and reported more than 100 sexual partners (Kesten, 1955). The typical Casanova is described by having numerous romantic dates and many different sex partners. Furthermore, they are more likely to have sexual intercourse without a condom (p. 24), and they have to be ready to engage in sex all of the time (p. 133). As a result of these trends, Casanovas have a higher risk of fathering unwanted pregnancies and possessing sexually transmitted infections (STI) (p. 24). However, it is key to note that the Casanova Complex does not describe the majority of the young male population, as only 15% see themselves as a Casanova. Approximately 75% (p. 65) of young men prefer dating over hooking up, and 90% would like to marry at some points of their lives, which contradicts the Casanova

Complex. Furthermore, it seems that Casanovas are more prevalent in a limited age range of 18 to 29 years.

In the second part of the book, Smiler describes the origin of the widely held perception of all men as Casanovas. First he tries to provide an evolutionary explanation and refers to the Sexual Strategies Theory (SST) from Buss and Schmitt (1993). The SST states that the primary goal of humans is to produce offspring. For a man, the goal is to sire many children, and consequently, the Casanova has sex with numerous different women. It is clear, though, that Smiler sees the Casanova complex actually originating in the media. He argues that nowadays, most American boys are able to watch what they want on television or the Internet. Consequently, everyday they see Casanovas in different shows and movies, as well in print media. He argues that all of these media teach young men how to be a 'real man' and that the Casanova is the pinnacle of manhood. Furthermore, the media show that if a male wants to be a Casanova, he must be sexually prepared, even if it means taking pills like Viagra. Smiler points out that there are more commercials for erectile dysfunction medication, than for condoms on American television, which reinforces this stereotype.

Part three of the book is focused on other types of men. As mentioned previously, Casanovas are only a minority of the total male population. Smiler refers to another group of men as 'Romantic Men'. The average Romantic Man starts dating by the age of 16, has had sex before he finished the high school and has sex with only a small number of different people. However, the risks of unwanted pregnancy and of contracting STIs are the same for a romantic man as for the Casanova. Besides the Casanova and the Romantic Man, there is another type of man, the 'Emo Men' (with Emo referring to emotional). According to Smiler, people generally describe this type of man as being concerned with his looks and clothes, as being nice, and who is expressive of his feelings and emotions, sometimes too often. Smiler proposes Emo Men are like Romantic Men but not equally successfully. He then proposes the fourth and last type of men, the 'Religious Men'. For these men, religion is a cornerstone of their life, and strongly influences their dating and sexual behavior. Given that the central function of dating is to find a partner to marry, he argues that the average Religious Man starts dating later than men of the other types, and dates fewer people. The rest of this part of the book is a guide for parents on how to talk to children about sex and relationships.

In my opinion, some points of this book have to be reconsidered in order to make it a noteworthy contribution. Most importantly, to adequately cover the whole range of sexual and dating behavior of young men, it would be necessary to include more behavioral observations. One of the more important drawbacks to the book concerns the methodology. Most of this research was performed using questionnaires and interviews, and hence, respondents could have provided socially desirable answers.

Moreover, while I agree that the literature shows the average male is not a Casanova, nor wants to be one, why is this the case? Are Romantic Men simply romantic because they do not fulfill the profile of a Casanova, in that the latter is typically attractive, smart and charming, and as such, Romantic Men are not able to date so many women? Or is the

variance in male mating strategy more distinct, allowing these categories to be clear-cut and definitive?

Although talked about at some length, there is no clear, empirically-based definition of what characteristics comprise a Casanova. For example, how many women does a man need to date or engage in sexual relations with to be classified as a Casanova? Owen and colleges (2010) reported that 45.3% of male college students do not have experiences with hooking up behaviour, whereas the remainder do have hookup experience. This statistic implies that every second man in a college sample (the sample in their study) has hooked up at least once, but who among these men are Casanovas? In addition, what is the role of women? Owen et al. found women and men do not differ significantly in their hooking up behavior, such that, for example, both sexes are more likely to hook up when alcohol is involved.

There are parts of the book that could benefit from incorporating more evolutionary theory. For example, Smiler says that many young men do not know '*how to start a relationship or a possible hook-up*' (p. 152) maybe because they are afraid of being rejected. However, from an evolutionary view, this conjecture is in contrast with Error Management Theory. That is, Buss and Haselton (2000, 2003) propose men tend to overestimate the level of sexual interest from women because it is less costly to approach women and to be rejected than to miss a chance to reproduce.

As mentioned, Smiler proposes that the media is responsible for promoting the Casanova as a male mating strategy. While I agree with this proposal to an extent, there must be an evolutionary origin of the Casanova - it is not simply a new idea generated by the media. However, this book provides a good and detailed review of studies about dating and sexual behavior of young men. The references to pop culture and the stories about real men make the book easy to read and should be of interest to a wide readership. The evolutionary and biological background is not as satisfying as it could be, but the book still has value if one is interested in sexual and dating behavior of young men.

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Alexandra Mühlhauser completed her master thesis 2013 at the University of Vienna about the 'Dynamic Nature of Emotional Expressions'

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