



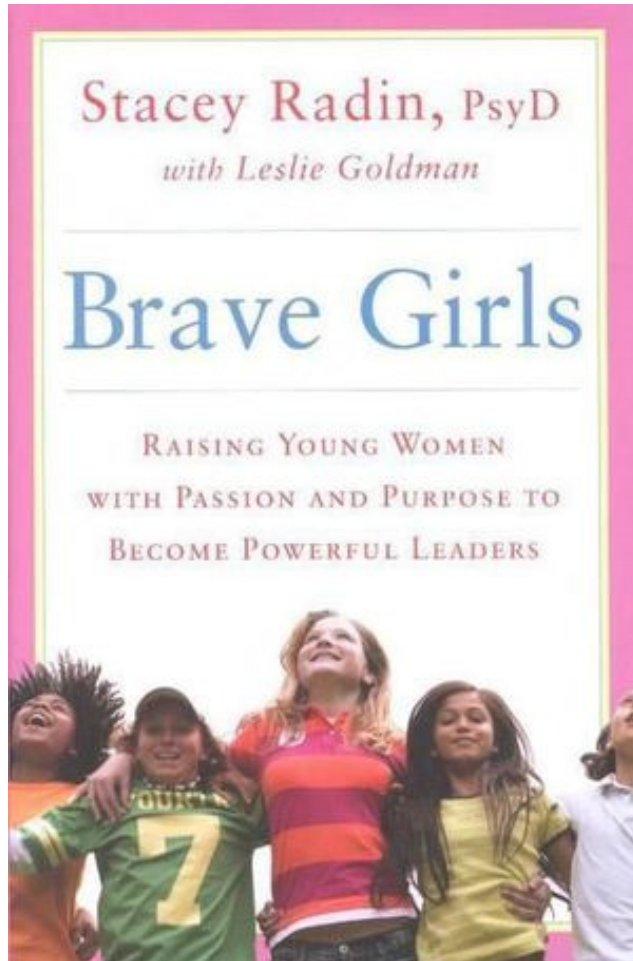
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DAILY NEWS

'Brave Girls' shows proactive path

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"Brave Girls: Raising Young Women with Passion and Purpose to Become Powerful Leaders," by Stacey Radin with Leslie Goldman. New York: Atria Books (a division of Simon & Schuster), 2015. 288 pages, \$25.



"We live in a world that places great emphasis on autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency," Stacey Radin explains near the beginning of "Brave Girls: Raising Young Women with Passion and Purpose to Become Powerful Leaders," the new primer on how to nurture leadership qualities in young women she wrote with Leslie Goldman. "But a relational, interconnected approach is the cornerstone of a female's psychological health and growth.

"Our culture repeatedly minimizes the degree to which it directly and indirectly shortchanges our middle school girls," Radin continues. "Girls this age need access to supportive environments that will continuously permit them to be authentic, experiment with new skills and gain unconditional acceptance while forming close intimate relationships."

Radin is founder and president of Corporate Equilibrium, a consulting firm specializing in organizational effectiveness. She has a doctorate in psychology from the Albert Einstein Medical Center. Her other graduate credentials include a master's degree and a

post-doctoral certificate in psychoanalysis from Columbia University. A member of the United Nations Working Group on Girls, she is perhaps best known for Unleashed, a 12-week program designed to help young women realize their full potential as leaders through participation in animal rights advocacy and social welfare programs.

"Brave Girls" is exceptionally well-researched, as evidenced by 11 pages of source notes at the conclusion of nine chapters sandwiched between an introduction and afterword. The bulk of this thought-provoking and uncompromising treatise is supported by rigorous empirical studies, which serve to distinguish it from comparable volumes primarily showcasing the authors' inherent biases and subjective opinions. In fact, Radin's narrative brought to mind the work of Deborah Tannen, whose "You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation" spent eight months atop of New York Times' bestsellers list.

I put "Brave Girls" in the same category as Tannen's celebrated scholarship.

Radin opened my eyes to a variety of issues and concerns related to gender. One of the reasons I found the effort so appealing had to do with the elegance of the prose. To reiterate, the subject matter consists almost entirely of relatively complex ideas supported by extensive qualitative research. But as is always the case with the best writers, she is able to communicate fundamental concepts in a remarkably accessible manner. Those with minimal exposure to the science on which much of her thesis is built will be able to grasp the undeniable significance of her conclusions. At the same time, anyone with a more-nuanced familiarity with the theoretical architecture underlying her primary arguments will not be disappointed by the profound realities encountered on virtually every page.

I found the entire book so inherently interesting it was difficult to decide which chapters I most appreciated. One that definitely captured my imagination was “Fearless Communication.” Here, Radin explains the developmental processes most pubescent girls progress through and how what happens during these immensely impressionable years can have a deep and lasting influence on the women they eventually become. Although the trajectory is somewhat analogous for boys, there are several considerations unique to the feminine experience.

“As they enter puberty, girls increasingly grow more aware of the pressure to conform to gender stereotypes,” Radin asserts. “Newly acquired abstract-reasoning and language abilities (including deciphering nonverbal cues), in addition to hormone surges leading to heightened sensitivity, contribute to their capacity to recognize the nuances and signals embedded in their world. ... A girl suppressing her emotions may engage in psychological warfare, attempting to destroy other girls’ relationships, thus impacting her self-esteem and causing her to be alienated from her social milieu. Rather than openly express her own feelings appropriately, she subverts them. As a result, she never learns how to cope with negative feelings, setting herself up for many more situations when she may be overwhelmed and at a loss for how to be candid and authentic.”

And I thought it was challenging to be a teenage boy growing up in a household that seemed to value manual labor more than education and hunting more than intellectual pursuits. Apparently what I had to negotiate during my formative years was not in the same league as what my counterparts had to endure on a daily basis.

A feature I found especially compelling was the inclusion of a supplemental addendum at the close of each chapter dubbed “Power Boost,” wherein Radin provides several thought-provoking exercises intended to help the reader apply the information and insights germane to the material just discussed. For instance, at the end of “Social-Emotional Intelligence,” three activities are provided to help precipitate self-examination. The one that caught my eye was: “Encourage girls to express their anger, viewing it as a normal, healthy feeling versus a forbidden one. Adults send so many messages to girls this age to squelch their anger, move past it, or ignore it because it isn’t helpful or ‘nice.’ On the contrary, girls need so desperately to vent both positive and negative emotions.” Radin then describes the possible reactions girls might exhibit, together with helpful explanations and strategies for dealing with those responses.

“Our society is approaching a critical crossroads in gender reformation and revolution,” Radin cautions near the end of the book. “One option is to accept that we are as close to equality as we will ever be, moving on to address other issues plaguing our society. The alternative is to admit that 51 percent of our country’s population is barricaded by archaic stereotypes and norms interwoven into the fabric of our culture, denying them opportunities and advancement.”

Clearly, Radin favors the more proactive path. I recommend “Brave Girls” highly.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*