

READING GUIDE

Kristen R. Ghodsee

Why
Women
Have
Better Sex
Under
Socialism

“With acumen and wit,
[Ghodsee] lays bare the inequities
women face under capitalism.”

—O MAGAZINE

And Other Arguments
for Economic Independence





Reading Guide

1. How are your personal romantic and familial relationships affected by capitalism? How would they look different if women were economically independent?
 2. Did this book challenge your perception of what life was like under state socialism, and if so, how? What were you taught about socialism by your teachers, parents, or others, and how can we promote more nuanced discussions on the subject?
 3. What do you think is more effective in creating a gender-equal culture: structural change, individual change, or some combination of both? Why?
 4. Why do you think socialist ideas are making a comeback in the United States with the rise of politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez?
 5. What specific burdens does capitalism place on men in romantic relationships? How would they benefit from undoing the commodification of human interactions?
 6. How does the cultural expectation that men should be breadwinners shape men's career choices?
 7. How has capitalism shaped the type of consumerist and personal empowerment-based feminism that has become mainstream in American society? Can you think of some specific products or services that use feminism as part of their marketing strategy?
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Reading Guide continued

8. Why is the “Lean In” approach—the idea that women must simply work harder to win the same professional opportunities as their male peers—harmful, on both a personal level and a societal one? How does it distract us from combating structural inequalities? Do you think the “Lean In” approach makes women feel like it’s their own fault for lacking ambition if they don’t have both careers and families?
 9. Ghodsee says, “Sex work existed long before the advent of capitalism, it continued to varying degrees throughout the state socialist countries, and it will no doubt exist in some form well into the future.” What do you think sex work looks like under socialism?
 10. Why do you think that in capitalist societies, where all workers are forced to sell their labor power, sex work is still considered a taboo and is often criminalized? Why aren’t sex workers the same as other workers? Why is marriage, another institution that combines both money and sex, considered morally superior to sex work?
 11. How does it benefit capitalist societies to perpetuate the myth of gender essentialism (the idea that women and men have innately different qualities)? How does gender essentialism shape the types of societal roles that are available to women? How does it affect policy?
 12. How can we account for the biological realities of pregnancy, birth, and nursing done by some female bodies without reproducing gender stereotypes and essentialist thinking about women’s “natural” roles?
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