



Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut

Emily White

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The American high school is a tribal place -- and often a cruel one. Divisions are drawn between jocks, cheerleaders, nerds, drama geeks, goths. But there is one person who exists outside of the cliques, who is never welcomed into any group. She is the girl with the reputation, the one boys are drawn to and other girls avoid. Many people remember her from their high school days -- some can even recall her name -- but few have thought about her significance: Why is she such a universal figure? Has she done the things of which she is accused? How is her reputation created in the first place? She is the high school slut, and "Fast Girls" explores her experience and her legacy. In this brilliant fusion of reportage, criticism, and memoir, Emily White provides an in-depth look at the girls who were labeled high school sluts and the culture that perpetuates the myth. White began this project by placing a query in a syndicated newspaper column -- "Are you now or were you the slut of your high school class?" -- and by setting up an 800 number in her home to talk with girls who were branded as sluts. Through interviews, e-mails, and other exchanges with more than one hundred girls and women across the country, White identifies the common threads in their life stories and deconstructs the archetype of the slut, revealing how it reflects our society's attitudes toward sex, women, and the outsider. She seamlessly combines her own research with cogent analysis of feminist thought and a critical examination of popular films and music, resulting in a book that not only explains the preconditions of the slut -- what qualities lead a girl to be targeted, which communities most often target her -- but also tells us why our culture "needs" her. With remarkable empathy and understanding for her subjects, Emily White opens a window on the tribal world of teenagers and the lasting effects of adolescent ostracism. Incisive and affecting, provocative and haunting, "Fast Girls" marks the debut of an important new voice for feminism.

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