

TUNE OUT, TURN ON

Attorney and television legal analyst Lisa Bloom calls on women to reclaim their minds from a 24/7 tabloid culture



Once upon a time in America, smart women had to play dumb to get ahead. Then along came feminism's second wave in the 1970s—a movement that upped the value of being female and ushered historic numbers of women into new professional, social, personal, and political arenas. The glass ceiling that had hovered over higher education, career choices, sexual equality, and family dynamics took hit after unprecedented hit.

But fast-forward to today and smart American women are playing into a dangerously, unabashedly stupid celebrity- and celluloid-saturated culture, argues lawyer and television commentator Lisa Bloom, who is a fortysomething single mother of two college students and who also happens to be the striking brainiac daughter of high-profile trial lawyer Gloria Allred (some of whose clients are celebrities) and a father who was a privacy-prone autodidact.

Bloom makes her provocative, prove-me-wrong case in *Think: Straight Talk for Women to Stay Smart in a Dumbed-Down World*, out this month from Vanguard Press.

Speaking by phone from her Los Angeles offices, Bloom has a voice and manner that mirror the energetic, exacting tone of her book. She's logical, funny, and relentlessly on-topic as she explains its genesis. "The tipping point for me, as a legal analyst who covered the trial of Saddam Hussein, one of the most important international-law trials of the century, was being asked the other 95 percent of the time to weigh in on celebrity trials. It became a question of balance."

Bloom's manifesto mixes advice with insights backed up by examples, studies, anecdotes, and polls about our current kingdom of dumbdom, where "young women would rather be hot than smart. Middle-aged women are too busy to think. And older women are exhausted and just want to zone out." Bloom's key recipe for mind retrieval is to read more, and read better. One disturbing stat from her book: Almost 25 percent of women ages 18 to 34 would rather lose their ability to read than lose their figure. And this response, she writes, may actually be rational, given "a culture that values a specific, high-maintenance feminine beauty over female brains." In a chapter titled "What a Waste It's Been to Lose Our Minds," Bloom argues that the co-opting of women's hard-won gains by a society that rewards us for embracing idiocy "without embarrassment" has repercussions that reach all the way to the third world, where women's troubles are legion.

The book offers step-by-step solutions in the chapter "Reclaiming the Brains God Gave Ya." The most daunting challenge for many women, Bloom claims, is simply clawing back the time to think. How? Downsize your relationship to housework, for example, and don't worry about your child's every emotional upheaval. For single women, she's equally blunt: Stop obsessing over your love life. Be busy. Be happy. She candidly spills about her own struggle with the time-robbing beauty bias. "As a television personality, I spend a fair amount of time keeping up [my appearance]—and I hate it," she writes. "That's hundreds of hours a year [I'm] not getting back."

When I ask Bloom if the cheeky chapter titles with which she addresses her concerns pay homage to her first favorite magazine—*Mad*—she laughs. "I think I found *Mad* through my dad. I read everything." She even tore out and taped up one infamous issue's deceptively mind-expanding THINK poster on her bedroom wall.

While Bloom's book is directed specifically at women, aren't men also losing ground under the rule of dumb? "It's a good question," she says. "But women are my people. Most of my clients are women. I've always been passionate about women's issues. I was born a baby feminist."—LISA SHEA