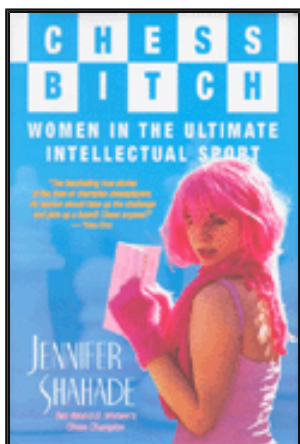




SKITTLES
ROOM



Bitching about the Word "Bitch"

A Discussion about the Title
of the New Book
Chess Bitch

by Gwen Feldman

"Bitching": A slang meaning to complain or to grumble.

How many English-speaking adults have never used this word? I would guess that the numbers of abstainers are very, very few. Is it offensive? Are the words "complain" or "grumble" offensive? It's just another word, used every day by millions of people, that paints a mental picture about a person's personality, attitude, mood, etc. In fact, the word "bitching" is so mundane that few give it a second thought, and that's how it should be – it's part of our culture, part of our language, and it rolls mindlessly (but often potently!) off the tongue.

We all live in a world of words, and people who have learned how to use their brains understand that every word has different shades of nuance attached to it. A good word has many levels of meaning, it contains energy, and it has the ability to draw attention to itself by its sheer gall, or sheer majesty.

If a word like "bitching" is so acceptably prevalent in everyday blither, why would its root, "bitch," be any less worthy of utterance? The fact is, it's used at least as often as "bitching," though perhaps those saying it are unaware of having done so – it's that common. How is it used? Let's take a look:

- Pet lovers who talk about a female dog use the word "bitch" all the time.
- If a woman is spiteful or overbearing (dominating), she might be referred to as a "bitch." It's an insult (Much like a woman calling a

man a “bastard,” which is a person who is thought to be mean or disagreeable), but an extremely common one. (Martha, who spitefully got Jane fired, is suddenly being called a “bitch” at the workplace.).

- If a man is thought to be weak or contemptible, he’s sometimes referred to as a “bitch.” (Jeremy Silman, when asked in a recent lecture how he’s done against Grandmaster Larry Christiansen over the course of his chess career, said to his audience, “I’m his bitch.”).
- The word “bitch” can also be used as a complaint, or when speaking of something unpleasant or difficult. (A man loses his job and says, “It’s a real bitch, isn’t it?”).

By now I would think the word “bitch” has lost its mystery, and it’s energy. I’ve beaten it to death with raw overuse, and made it plain, boring, and its appearance uneventful. Yet, I was quite happy with the title *CHESS BITCH: Women in the Ultimate Intellectual Sport* when Jennifer Shahade and I brainstormed it months and months ago. Oddly, I had tried to use it in a title several years before, when Silman-James Press published a book on a man’s unpleasant experience regarding divorce (it was actually a guide on how a divorce can be achieved with as little misery as possible). I wanted to call it, *BITCH BEGONE* (Okay, I was being a tad sarcastic and wasn’t 100% serious when I recommended that title.), but (sadly) I was overruled and a far more mundane title was used.

In the case of *BITCH BEGONE*, the meaning of “bitch” would have been extremely straightforward (i.e., getting rid of the unpleasant woman that’s torturing you). However, in the case of Shahade’s *CHESS BITCH*, the title has many meanings, both literally and metaphorically:

- I’ve met quite a few men who view (and speak of) any woman who beats them at chess as being a “bitch.”
- I’ve run into men who think women that play chess are jokes – that they are less than human due to their “unladylike” behavior. They too, are referred to as the dog form of bitch.
- Women are often thought of as victims when playing chess, since they are often weaker than their male opponents. Thus they suddenly take on the “weakness” form of bitch.

The title, then, is a metaphor on the way female chessplayers are often viewed by many male players. It *doesn’t* mean that this attack is justified. Instead, it *screams its defiance* against the bitch stereotype and makes a statement about how ridiculous such labels are. The subtitle is icing on the cake, and (we thought) rams the point home: *WOMEN IN THE ULTIMATE INTELLECTUAL SPORT*.

Sadly, Ms. Shahade and I failed to appreciate that the fundamentalist/Victorian climate now prevalent in the United States would create a situation eminently suitable for attacks by hate-mongers, rival

authors trying to manipulate the public, and people who mean well but are handicapped by their monumental ignorance.

This “rave” is meant to explain the title (which I’ve already done) and to bring the problems facing the book due to these mean-spirited attacks to light (which I’ll do now).

FEAR OF PUBLIC/FEDERAL REPRISAL

The first taste of what was to come occurred when a couple of producers on well-known TV-shows refused to accept Jennifer as a guest when they heard the title of her book. It didn’t bother them personally, but what would the public say? In this age of huge fines given to stations that dare utter a curse word or bare a nipple, they decided that it was best to avoid a possible firestorm.

I couldn’t believe it when this happened. Were TV-shows and radio stations really so beaten down by the conservative-mindset being hurled at them that they feared to take a stand or even air something so innocuous as Shahade’s book title? Had TV and radio become the bitch of the powers that be? Apparently they had (it’s like fearing to make ripples in a pond, since that might attract the baneful glare of Sauron/Federal Government).

More recently, this was *stressed when that bastion of liberal expression, the NEW YORK TIMES, asked CHESS BITCH author Jennifer Shahade to write an article (and make comments for a second article titled SEX AND CHESS, is she a Queen or a Pawn?* which appeared in the Style section in the same issue!) in their Sunday (November 27) edition (in the Op-Ed Section).

Clearly, the Times considered Jennifer an authority on chess, and they wanted to ride the wave of popularity that her book brought by making use of her services. Yet, the *TIMES* blatantly and ungraciously censored the name of her book (*i.e., Jennifer Shahade, the United States women’s chess champion in 2002 and 2004, is the author of a recent book about women in chess.*). Incredibly, they had no problem reviewing an independent film called *FOLLOW THE BITCH* in 1997, and in 1975 reviewed another movie called *SUPER BITCH*. Clearly, their reticence is a sign of the times, and a sign that the *NY TIMES* has lost its backbone. They should be ashamed.

AMAZON.COM

Amazon has a long history of allowing public reviews to be posted on their pages. If someone wants to post a review airing their opinion on a book, all the more power to them. All I ask is that the “reviewer” post his/her real name with the review (demanding a credit card number would quickly verify a person’s identity). Unfortunately, Amazon doesn’t do this, and as a result, an enormous quantity of fake reviews with fake names are posted, which often feature one person writing ten or even more reviews using various kinds of aliases.

This horrific situation allows:

Anyone with a grudge against a specific publishing company or individual author to repeatedly trash every book they put out.

Anyone who has a similar book can badmouth the competition.

People, hiding behind a false identity, can eschew all morals and seek a “cyber-assassination” of a writer’s good name. They can claim you killed Lincoln, that you are actually Saddam Hussein in drag, or that you eat babies for breakfast. And ... Amazon more often than not posts this trash on their pages, allowing hate and avarice to reign supreme.

Let’s take a look at some of the no-name reviewer’s points:

- Several said it was in poor taste, claiming that it was more gossip column than anything else. It quickly becomes clear that an enormous percentage of these “reviewers” never read *CHESS BITCH*, since it’s actually the best book ever written on women in chess, and also an interesting look at many of the female stars of the present. I had to laugh out loud when one of these fools stated: “At first, I thought this would be a book about women in chess history. To my total disappointment, it turned out to be a chess gossip book.” Well, it IS about women in chess history. A pity that this fake personality didn’t read the book.
- A few people (I presume the fake personality creatures are actually people, and not someone’s family pet or some alien life form) said that promoting feminism was “highly inappropriate” in a chess book. Is that so? More on this in a moment.
- Quite a few claimed it was insensitive to young readers. I’ll discuss this soon, along with the previous comment about feminism.
- The majority of false-name hate mongers simply trashed the book because of its title, claiming that it’s “disgusting,” “revolting,” “offensive,” etc. When these (or “this,” if only one person is writing multi-reviews) people learn to understand and appreciate the Queen’s English, or even American slang, they might pull their thumb out of their ass, leave the safety of their trailer for the first time, and try and get a real job.
- I had a good laugh when a couple of typing slugs said that *CHESS BITCH* is bad because there’s no chess instruction in it. That’s like saying that a biography of Einstein is trash because it didn’t offer lessons in basic math.
- One “woman” said that the book gives male members of her club permission to use the “B” word! Is she kidding? The “B” word?! Tell me that I’m having a nightmare and such stupidity isn’t real!

I could go on and on, but I’ll end this section by saying that “Amazon”

should be held accountable for providing a forum for lies and hate. Character assassination is despicable, and if people want to criticize (which is fine, whether it's thumbs up or down), show your face, give your name, and stand by your words instead of hiding in the shadows like the cowardly, diseased vermin these people are. Oh, and if these offenders (and you know who you are) don't like what I've said, write me using your real name and let's talk. Or, if you live in Los Angeles, let's meet for tea and you can voice your views face to face. But I know that won't happen. Instead, you'll enter some chat room (or write more swill on Amazon!), sitting happily in your underwear by your computer and sex toys, and make up any lies that enter your perverse, sick little minds. Somehow the name Gollum comes to mind.

THE "IT'S FOR THE CHILDREN" MENTALITY

The Amazon false-faces raved that *CHESS BITCH* wasn't appropriate for children. Some well-known chess names raved about the same thing. Each time someone did this, I scratched my head in wonder. Does it need to be said that *NEXUS* by Henry Miller is inappropriate for children, and therefore should never have been written? That's absurd!

When did adult content turn into "inappropriate" content? Did I blink and miss something? If Mr. and Mrs. Smith choose to have children and turn their personal vocabularies into tiny sound bytes of nonsense, by all means be my guest. But don't insist that I refrain from speaking like an adult and reading adult material with adult ideas.

This whole "for the children" question smacked me in the face when I visited a tournament and was approached by a "chess parent." He said, "Jeremy, I'll be writing a review of your book for Amazon and you really missed the boat with that title. You could have made it a great book for young chessplaying girls, but instead you used an obscene word. I showed it to my teenage daughter and she took one look at it and said, 'Yech!' and then walked away."

My first thought was to reach out and choke the guy. However, his being bigger and stronger than I was made me reconsider. Instead, I merely said, "I didn't write it and it's NOT obscene!" He said it was, I repeated that it wasn't, and then I walked away, disgusted that I didn't say what I was really thinking: that words and ideas that don't agree with my slant on an issue are fine, but raw ignorance devoid of logical thought ... no, it's not acceptable.

When this man told me his 14-year-old daughter took one look at the title and said, "Yech!" and then put the book down, I wanted to tell him that her reaction had more to do with his lack of ability to teach a child how to think/reason/analyze than it had to do with the title. I wanted to tell him that allowing her to embrace dogmatism was doing her a disservice. Instead, he should have said, "That's a surprising title. What is the author trying to convey? What's its meaning?" Teach your child to think, not to mindlessly

judge. Also, teach them the word, “context.” For example, if a mother is nursing and the baby *takes a teat in its mouth and sucks*, is the act considered to be obscene, or merely dinner?

Personally, I find 95% of *CHESS BITCH* to be appropriate reading for anyone 14 on up. If a parent finds an odd paragraph of adult prose here or there, simply don't allow junior to read that page. If a parent feels that junior has never heard the word “bitch” before, wake up and smell the roses. Finally, if you have decided that “bitch” is a code for “Satan,” rest assured that you'll enjoy hours and hours of fun trying to decipher the author's true, hidden meaning behind every paragraph (The *CHESS BITCH* album will be coming out next year. Make sure you play it backwards for the full effect).

PROMOTING CHESS

It amazes me to hear people screaming that we have to keep chess pure or the sponsors will run away. WHAT SPONSORS? Sponsors want to put their money into things that attract attention – things that are vibrant with energy and life. A few have given chess a try, but invariably they turn away since they simply don't get much advertisement bang for their buck.

Modern chess promoters have “stayed the course” with the regular formula of chess as a good, clean pastime. Yawn. And, as sponsors worldwide turn their backs on our beloved game, as tournaments attract less and less participants, the masses of chess people insist that we continue to follow a strategy that's clearly a dead end street.

Somehow, it never occurs to the many well-meaning chess fans that the public would be more interested in the game if we had a few “bad boys” to upend the milk truck from time to time. The fact that Fischer was the biggest name in chess history and attracted the most publicity should have been a “tiny” hint, but somehow nobody got it.

Instead of dehumanizing chess, why not show that real people with real emotions and real needs play it? Why not scream to the heavens that chess and the chess experience enriches people in many ways? Travel, adventure, sharpening the mind, combat, equality of the sexes (believe it or not, feminism will have the right to exist in this new vision of chess), and (dare I say it?) even sexuality is part of the lives of our chess heroes!

Jennifer Shahade has given us a taste of the real chess experience in *CHESS BITCH*. She shares the ups and downs of past female players trying to gain respect in a male dominated sport. She describes how many modern female players travel the globe (thanks to chess!) and enjoy adventures few ever get to experience. She even talks about sexuality (since putting men and women together in some remote tournament locations WILL lead to sex – sorry to share this fact with those trying to hide from it).

CHES BITCH certainly isn't *WAR AND PEACE*, but it's a groundbreaking first effort by a talented young writer who had the courage to be different and say what was on her mind. All the internet graffiti (i.e., hate filled, ignorant views posted on-line) in the world can't take this accomplishment away from the author. The title is exactly what it should be – it tells you that the book is filled with emotion and realism. It also creates interest among non-chess playing people (thus bringing the game to a far wider audience). But ultimately the book will be judged by what's inside. Pick up a copy and find out for yourself.

Gwen Feldman is an employee of Siles Press, the publisher of *Chess Bitch*.



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