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At twenty-three, Wendy Shalit punctured conventional wisdom with *A Return to Modesty*, arguing that our hope for true lasting love is not a problem to be fixed but rather a wonderful instinct that forms the basis for civilization. Now, in *Girls Gone Mild*, the brilliantly outspoken author investigates an emerging new movement. Despite nearly-naked teen models posing seductively to sell us practically everything, and the proliferation of homemade sex tapes as star-making vehicles, a youth-led rebellion is already changing course.

In Seattle and Pittsburgh, teenage girls protest against companies that sell sleazy clothing. Online, a nineteen-year-old describes her struggles with her mother, who she feels is pressuring her to lose her virginity. In a small town outside Philadelphia, an eleventh-grade girl, upset over a “dirty book” read aloud in English class, takes her case to the school board.

These are not your mother’s rebels.

In an age where pornography is mainstream, teen clothing seems stripper-patented, and “experts” recommend that we learn to be emotionally detached about sex, a key (and callously) targeted audience—girls—is fed up.

Drawing on numerous studies and interviews, Shalit makes the case that today’s virulent “bad girl” mindset most truly oppresses young women. Nowadays, as even the youngest teenage girls feel the pressure to become cold sex sirens, put their bodies on public display, and suppress their feelings in order to feel accepted and (temporarily) loved, many young women are realizing that “friends with benefits” are often anything but. And as these girls speak for themselves, we see that what is expected of them turns out to be very different from what is in their own hearts.

Shalit reveals how the media, one’s peers, and even parents can undermine girls’ quests for their authentic selves, details the problems of sex without intimacy, and explains what it means to break from the herd mentality and choose integrity over popularity. Written with sincerity and upbeat humor, *Girls Gone Mild* rescues the good girl from the realm of mythology and old manners guides to show that today’s version is the real rebel: She is not “people pleasing” or repressed; she is simply reclaiming her individuality. These empowering stories are sure to be an inspiration to teenagers and parents alike.

Girls Gone Mild: Young Women Reclaim Self-Respect and Find It's Not Bad to Be Good Details

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Diane says

In this book, Wendy Shalit criticizes contemporary fashion and entertainment for young girls for its overly sexual and immodest content. She also profiles young women who are making a difference by protesting against this state of affairs and trying to change it.

Some parts of this book are very good. The portraits that she draws of the young women standing up for modesty and decency are well drawn and compelling. Shalit's analysis of the role that African-American play in promoting human dignity was particularly strong. However, most of her information is anecdotal, leaving me to wonder how common the phenomena she describes really are (both in terms of the extreme immodesty that she describes and the reactions to it). I think she makes the mistake that many social conservatives make of generalizing from a few dramatic incidents of bad/wild behavior to thinking that "everyone" is acting that crazy.

She does make a compelling case for modesty. I would recommend this book to anyone with a daughter approaching adolescence.

Emily says

According to Shalit you can be a "bad girl" and have non-marital sex which will be horrible and you will immediately regret afterwards/ be scarred for life or you can be a "good girl" and wait til marriage. The world is not so black and white.

Dee says

I honestly couldn't finish this book...I was reading it and more and more feeling like I was being called a bad girl because growing up, I wanted to have the stuff that was bring criticized. It seemed as though the underlying motto was you can't be successful as a bad girl...and yet, I have multiple college degrees, a successfull career...so I don't know

Skylar Burris says

Whenever I have spoken to a baby boomer feminist about sex, it has felt something like this: A woman grows up at the end of thirty years of drought, while her daughters grow up in the midst of thirty years of flood, but the memory of the drought is so bad, that anytime she sees her daughters bailing water out of the boat, she instinctively cries, "Stop! Do you want to send us back to the drought?!" *GIRLS GONE MILD* is a book that acknowledges we need to bail out the boat but that we can do so without going back to the drought. The book relates the hope that a "fourth-wave" of feminism will empower women through modesty and sexual restraint in a world saturated with meaningless sex and ubiquitous sexual imagery.

Many younger feminists, writes Shalit, find the idea of "decency" tremendously appealing, whereas to the older ones, it is the chief problem." I can only hope she is right about the former statement; my own experience suggests she is probably right about the latter. I know older feminists who would be infuriated by the mere use of the word "decency" in that sentence: "How dare you suggest that a woman is being sexually indecent for ANY reason!" Yet, if we can't suggest that, how can we with any reasonable consistency suggest that a man is being sexually indecent for any reason? And how does it really benefit women, in the long run, when society removes all boundaries of sexual decency (with the single exception of rape)?

In a single sentence, Shalit summarizes what has been my primary concern about feminism as I have encountered it: "Girls must do everything boys do, even if it's not working." The sexual double-standard of the 1950's was overturned by dramatically lowering the sexual standards for women instead of by raising the standard for men. This is certainly the easiest solution to any double-standard, but is it really the best solution for the majority of women? Are casual sex, "friends with benefits," passing out condoms like candy in schools, and public displays of female sexuality really "working" for women?

The behavior of most men, to at least some degree, will be influenced by the demands of most women. If nothing is what most women appear to expect, nothing is what more and more men will begin to deliver. This may be fine if you're content to expect no chivalrous behavior from men, but what if you're not? Your world may nevertheless be affected by the low expectations of other women. As one ex-model interviewed by the author says, "the definition of a Decent Man has been expanded to include" all sorts of disrespectful behaviors towards women.

I agree with Shalit that "sexual liberation" has unfortunately involved (consciously or unconsciously) encouraging women to have sex by men's rules and then to repress their emotions (their doubts, their feelings of discontent, their sense of being used, their guilt) afterward. Well, sex divorced from love and long-term relationships doesn't seem to be "working" for many women, but many feminists are loath to admit it. If young women feel any guilt or pain about their choice to engage in unattached sex, it is because of the ugly remnants of society's sexist double standard, and not because their emotions are a valid warning that should be heeded. Young women, argues Shalit, have been fed the lie that casual sex is bound to be just as enjoyable for girls as it is for guys, leaving many women wounded with "the pain of feeling that society had abandoned them by failing to inform them of the emotional consequences of sex."

Having grown up post-sexual revolution, and not having been a part of a religious subculture until college, I myself remember hearing from the lips of countless educators and elders, "They're just going to do it anyway." In other words, if you were a young person with a desire to be abstinent, what you heard from almost everyone in authority was: "You have an ideal? That's nice. You're going to FAIL. Here's a condom." As a teenager, I don't recall any adult ever telling me, "You CAN succeed in being abstinent if you want to be, and it's a worthy goal." Shalit points out, and I think this is true, that the attitude of adults that kids "are going to do it anyway" only "adds to the pressure."

The silver lining is all this is that every generation rebels against its parents, and teenagers are now beginning to rebel against the "sexual revolution." Shalit recounts many examples of such rebellious young women in her book. So obviously I think this is a positive book with important truths. Why then do I not give it five stars? Shalit's approach is highly anecdotal and rather skewed toward extreme examples. While I agree with the author's basic thesis, I found her approach far too sensational.

At one point, she says, "You may insist that this is a crazy example indicative of nothing, but..." and I had to say, "Yes, I might." Far too many of her examples seemed to be "crazy" examples "indicative of nothing" except the existence of a minority of perverse and/or stupid people. I agree the pendulum has swung too far

in the direction of sexual liberalization, but I don't think it ever swung, for the majority of average Americans, quite as far as this book implies. In a sense, Shalit feeds into the very thing she criticizes: she perpetuates the false perception that sex absent long-term relationship is the social norm when it probably really isn't the social norm at all; it is only *perceived* as the social norm, which adds to the pressure for many young people. One final criticism I have is that the author waxes a little too nostalgic for a variety of eras prior to 1960.

Brittany says

So many great points- I'm really impressed with this author. Was a little hard to read as I live in a bubble and wasn't aware of how sexual our world has become. But I have hope that I can raise my girls to be modest and "good" girls.

Mary says

The things we do for research...

I tried to read this book (against Jessica Valenti's advice and my own better judgment) as part of a research project. Alas, it's unbearable. Shalit has created the worst kind of propaganda: a book that actively misinterprets its source material to shore up a regressive message. (And then dresses said regressive message up as empowerment.) In the bits I managed to power through, Shalit took issue with everything from the ahistoricism of Pleasantville to the "bitch" mentality promoted in the Dixie Chicks song "Not Ready to Make Nice." Now, for the record, the characters of Pleasantville travel into a spot-on '50s TV show - not the 50s proper- and the Dixie Chicks released Not Ready to Make Nice in the wake of endless boycotts, CD burnings, and death threats. But context is clearly irrelevant to Shalit. She further misrepresents the work of numerous reputable sex educators (Heather Corinna, Cory Silverburg, and the entirety of Planned Parenthood, for starters) -- replacing their good advice with heterosexist, sexist, drivel based on anecdotal evidence and her abstinence-only agenda. Plenty of studies have used valid measures to disprove her thesis (that we've made sluttiness socially acceptable, and thus girls are unhappy, so we all need to bake pies and wait out marriage), but since Shalit stuck with hearsay, I'll respond in kind: As a 20-something lady from the generation in question, trudging through this book made me far more unhappy than being sexual ever has. Reader discretion advised.

Katie says

It seems weird to say this, but this was a fun read. Shalit's wry sense of humor pops up in unexpected ways (such as when she suddenly takes off on a reverie about "KUGEL" parties as an alternative to NYC's sex-saturated "CAKE" parties). There are stories of girls and women who are going against the grain of low standards and "sex sells" and this leavens the overall depressing news that the book reports about our current cultural environment in all its darkness and vapidity.

Generationally speaking, I'm somewhere in the middle of the women discussed in this book. I have two young daughters, and my parents were Baby Boomers. I experienced some of the pressure to be "bad" as a

girl, and especially when I got to college all the pressure to be "comfortable with my body" (which meant letting other people intrude on your personal space, as near as I could tell). But what I experienced was less intense than what is currently acceptable. And after all in the 1990s when I was a teen, dumpy jeans, logger shirts, and boots were the style, so if you wanted to keep yourself covered up there was at least a way to do so without stigma. Wearing a shirt with a vulgar sexual message would have still marked you as One of Those Girls--not a good thing. But on the other hand, we got bombed with massive TMI in sex ed class, and when my mother protested that maybe at 12 years of age I didn't need to know all about oral, we were blacklisted as that weird prudish "Christian" family, even though my mom was and is an agnostic, and there was a general attitude that only "repressed" people cared about having strict personal boundaries.

As a mother I am doing my best to keep my girls protected from this vulture-like hypersexualized culture, and it's amazing how early you have to start the constant vigilance. Reading this book made me feel really good about my decision to homeschool, as I believe that the toxic social environment in many schools is the single biggest threat to girls' intellectual and professional achievement. I also felt validated in my disillusionment with the feminism of my contemporaries, and what's supposed to pass for "empowerment" these days. I noticed a while back, for instance, that the "feminist" and "women's issues" section of the left wing webzine Salon.com consists mostly of fluff about celebrities and sexual trend stories about hooking up, porn, prostitution, etc. And not hard-hitting reporting, either, for instance about how porn reinforces negative images of women. Just stuff like "OMG porn is fun, wow!" breathless oohing over the fact that like, women can have sex too! It has struck me more and more as juvenile and even backwards. There's so much more to being a woman than having a body and having sex. And there should be so much more to feminism than Vagina Monologues vapidly--"what would your vagina wear?" But anymore, that's what we're supposed to settle with. Does anyone ever stop to wonder why?

Amy says

I checked this book out from the library because I had read about it somewhere. It's got some really incredible, incredible stuff in there. The downside was that while the author is contrasting some of the good decisions some people are making she describes some of the nastiness and immorality that is rampant in "normal" society. There were some things where I was thinking, "Oh, oh, I didn't need to know about that!" But it was so cool to read about some really inspiring people and the things they are doing to make their lives, and the lives of those around them, better than the lies we are fed by society and the media.

A few weeks ago when there was some stuff in the news about schools providing birth control to really young girls without parent notification, I had said to my husband how sad it is that girls don't have an advocate. It's crazy, I've read so much about young women, and even grown women who are intimate with guys they don't actually like because they are told on every side that if they say "no" for any reason that they're repressing themselves or feeling guilty because of old fashioned morals that don't apply anymore. The author makes the point that it seems more oppressive to have sex with someone you don't like because everyone is telling you that you should than to not have sex until it's someone who's really committed.

Gosh, I wish everyone could read this. She does a much better job of talking about things than I can. I wish I could offer my friends an edited version. :)

Ranya says

This book hit the nail on the head for me. Shalit put into words exactly my thoughts on modesty and sexuality. The book took me back ten years, to my high school days when a friend told me, "Be free," while signaling with her hand for me to remove my hijab (headscarf). I remember telling her, "This makes me free," and over the years I've come to appreciate just how liberating modesty can be.

Shalit posits that female empowerment does not come from women partaking in meaningless, casual sex as men do; nor is a woman being empowered by dressing (or not dressing for that matter) like an escort. True empowerment comes from being comfortable in your skin without having to show it to the whole world. And, like she says, just because a woman covers up or has the decency to keep her sex life private, it does not mean she is "not comfortable with her sexuality," or that she is ashamed of her body. In fact, the contrary is true: She is so comfortable with her sexuality that she doesn't see the need to make it public business.

I agree with Shalit that the sexual liberation these days is just as oppressive to women - or even moreso - as was the repressive pressures put on women in the past. Girls feeling like they have to dress like prostitutes to get attention, dolls that promote sexuality in CHILDREN..., these are pressures women doN'T need!

There definitely is a double standard when it comes to male vs. female sexuality. But like Shalit says, instead of lowering women's standards to that of men's (engaging in meaningless, casual relations while repressing emotion, dressing immodestly, etc), why not hold men to the same high standards of women (expecting fidelity and monogamy, demanding respect, etc)??? By dressing and acting modestly, a woman does JUST THAT.

The only negative I had in this book was that Shalit failed to even recognize Muslim women in her book... The hijab is worn for precisely the reasons she outlined in her book, and it would have been nice to see her include interviews with Muslim women, as I'm sure she could have found a modest Muslim woman or two!

Jessica Pierce says

I've been trying to get anyone who will listen to read this book, but it's hard to get past the word modesty when I'm describing it. That is usually the point you see people stop listening. In reality, this book isn't preachy or over the top. I think saying it's about modesty gives critics something to complain about, when in reality it's about teaching girls that they have something more to share with the world than just what is on the outside. I found it very interesting and enlightening. I hope someone I know will read it so we can discuss it!

Angela says

Wendy Shalit bugs me. She points out a lot of things about the way women, especially young women, are viewed & treated by society that suck, then accuses pretty much everyone who's not a born-again Christian preaching abstinence of contributing to the problem. Apparently, the only solution (and, conveniently, the complete and final solution) to any of this is for young women to "just say no" to sex until they find a nice, young man to marry.

There are so many problems with this I don't even know where to start. Good lord.

Nicole Cornelius says

Hmm...I really liked A Return To Modesty...Wendy Shalit's first book, but this one just didn't do it for me. I felt like she could of left out most, if not all, of the descriptions about the current sexual revolution...she didn't leave much to the imagination. One would expect a book about modesty to be written, in well, a modest manner. Plus many of these behaviors, at least I feel, tend to be on the extreme side of things and don't necessarily represent the norm. I see what's on TV and in the magazines and am very concerned with the messages that society is sending these girls, but I don't feel like I need a play-by-play. Wendy's points are well made, but I had to sift through a whole lot of shmuck to find them.

I appreciated the few stories of girls that are choosing to "go mild", I just wish there had been more of them. And again, these stories were on the extreme side too. I mean really...how many 15 year olds do YOU know that tour the nation giving lectures on modesty? There are many good things happening out there, enough to write a book on ironically enough, that illustrate the goodness in many of our young women. Do I feel like they are waging an uphill battle? Yes...the media is very powerful, and they (the media) know it. The sad truth is that those who are "mild" in every sense of the word, don't now, never have, and never will get the coverage they deserve. I can see the lies the media is serving our Nation, and find it sad that there aren't more like me, who recognize it, so that brings me to the last point of this review. I think Wendy Shalit was writing this more for the people who haven't "seen the light" if you will. But most of these people would never pick this book up anyway, and if they did they would already be on the defensive side. To bad, because they're the ones who need to hear it.

Katie says

This book was jaw-dropping. I had no idea how much sexuality is actually marketed to girls starting around age 4. The book talks about the Bratz dolls, toddler tees that say "Sexy" and "Lust", and Limited Too selling rhinestoned-thongs. Wow. This was an eye-opening read that, seriously, every parent of a young daughter needs to read.

Adri says

Wendy Shalit is trying to make a valid point: it is okay to be a 'good girl.' However, in order to prove she knows what the 'bad girls' are up to and she is, therefore, authorized to make the case for choosing good, she details so many graphic and disgusting things that I just had to put this book down. I was also a little disturbed that she gave little or no credit to religion as a means of instilling values. Her premise seemed to be that some girls are just born with the desire to be chaste and modest, but others can't really be taught to be that way. Overall, it is okay, in parts, but probably not worth wading through...

Becca says

While I agree with the basic point the author is making, I didn't like this book for two reasons.

The first (and biggest) reason is that the author spends so much time going into the graphic details of the sexual problems in our society that as a modest, chaste "good girl" I felt uncomfortable reading it. I often

didn't even understand the slang and terminology she was using, and found the book overall to be discouraging. Too much talk about the problem and not enough about the good alternative.

The second reason is that while I enjoyed her wittiness and sense of humor, the book would have made it's point better if it wasn't written in such an argumentative fashion. It felt disorganized and like she was repeating the same argument over and over again.

I did not, in fact, read the entire book. I first started skimming past the disturbing accounts of what sexuality in America has become, then found myself skipping to the next chapter when I got tired of each over-argued point. Then, when I set the book down to go to bed after having looked at most of the book, found I didn't have any desire to pick it back up again in the morning.

I also found much of what she presents as a new idea (basically that being good helps us be happier) to be common sense. That may be because I grew up with strong values and religious beliefs that already led me to the path of "goodness" and happiness.

In the end, the only good this book did for me was to make me even more grateful for that upbringing which taught me the way to live and be happy. Apparently most of our children are growing up without that kind of direction and are unhappy as a result of it.
