

the
good girl
REVOLUTION

*Young Rebels with Self-Esteem
and High Standards*

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See, cursing was cool when nobody was doing it. Or just a couple people. Like, if everybody wears the same clothes, then it's, you know—it ain't cool no more. You're trying to be different. One can't be different by being racy today. It's not interesting anymore. See, sexiness was in the mind. It was in your imagination. When you lose that, then . . . it's just old skin.

—PRINCE on *Tavis Smiley*, February 19, 2004

Every revolution was first a thought in one man's mind.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, 1841





*For my husband,
who makes being good seem so easy*



PREFACE

The journey we're about to go on is a tale of paradox and unintended consequences. It is about how we can be sexually liberated and at the same time emotionally stifled—connected with a touch of a computer mouse to anyone on the globe, and yet often lacking genuine friendship. Well-meaning experts and parents say that they understand kids' wanting to be “bad” instead of “good.” Yet this reversal of adults' expectations is often experienced not as a gift of freedom but as a new kind of oppression.

To find out why, my book draws on over 100 in-depth interviews I conducted with girls and young women, ages twelve to twenty-eight; fifteen interviews with young men; and over 3,000 e-mail exchanges with young people who wrote to me or my website, ModestyZone.net, during the years 1999–2006. These individuals came from diverse racial, economic, and religious backgrounds. Some identified themselves as liberal, others as conservative. Some of the young women called themselves “feminists” while others were uncomfortable with the term. But the one thing I heard over and over was how desperate they were for a new set of role models.

Since those who contact me are obviously a self-selected bunch, I made an effort to seek out others who did not share my views in order to better understand their perspective. I found forty-two individuals through news stories, on planes, and sometimes just hanging out at malls. Ten were parents. I also spoke with counselors, psychiatrists, and sociologists from around the country; attended conventions on abstinence in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.; and visited a high school on Long Island that had canceled its prom. As I swam deeper into the subject of this book, I grew bolder, even going undercover at a Cuddle Party—although I can't disclose where, since Cuddle Parties are rather secretive (see Chapter Five).

What does liberation mean to you? In her excellent book *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, Ariel Levy introduces us to nineteen-year-old Debbie, who experiences regret after doing a “scene” for a *Girls Gone Wild* video. Her

regret was not that the producer, Joe Francis, has made millions by using girls like her, while all she got for disrobing was a T-shirt. Nor did she regret (as others have regretted) that she was encouraged to masturbate on camera. Rather, Debbie was upset about “not doing it right” when, for some reason beyond her grasp, she couldn’t get excited during the proceedings. I found this detail particularly sad. Debbie doesn’t realize something basic: Women are typically paid to appear in pornography precisely because being a sexual object for strangers is not usually fun. Like many young women today, Debbie is publicly sexual while remaining utterly alienated from her own sexuality.

This book is about my search for an alternative to our *Girls Gone Wild* culture. It’s about finding a way to acknowledge sexuality without having to share it with strangers. It’s about rediscovering our capacity for innocence, for wonder, and for being touched profoundly by others. My goal is not to attack those who want to be “wild,” but rather to expand the range of options for young people, who I believe are suffering because of the limited choices available to them.

Warm regards,
WENDY SHALIT