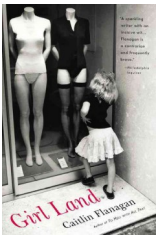


Girl Land



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In *Girl Land*, essayist and magazine writer, Caitlin Flanagan writes about the period she considers "the most psychologically intense period" of a girl's life--adolescence. Her focus is on how it feels and what mores and culture govern the lives of young women in the 21st century in the age of Facebook, 24 hour Internet and cell phones, etc.

Her premise is that each generation pushes the envelope for sexual and other freedoms more, and that activities that the last generation might have found shocking often become commonplace. If you're a parent of a female teen, or just want to compare your own youth to what it's like now, you'll enjoy this book. In a chapter on dating, Flanagan covers the interesting history of dating. It didn't become very popular until the roaring 20s and the advent of cars--roadsters--in those days. Sex became easier to do away from homes and watchful parents. Flanagan also postulates that the expectations that the female would apply the brakes to sexual activity also become prominent then.

Other chapters cover diaries, proms, menstruation, and sexual initiation. The one on proms is both scary and revealing. Scary because post-prom events have become occasions with lots of alcohol, drugs, and sex. Flanagan also describes upper and middle class girls dressing like streetwalkers and some schools hosting Pimps and Hos parties. She describes young people using these events as "an aggressive assertion of maturity." They get away with this because the parents have some decades-old image of proms as romantic, flower- and gown-filled events. Flanagan warns parents sharply that in this age of social media, girls in particular, need quiet "alone" time to discover who they really are, the adult women they are becoming. She strongly advises against having Internet availability in girls' bedrooms. As to social media, she believes that it pushes girls to present themselves in a very sexual way when they aren't at all ready.

My favorite sections occur when Flanagan writes more personally, for instance, she records the time her mother (shortly before dying) took off two gold bracelets and gave them to the author. Her Mom wore them--they had belonged to her mother--all through Flanagan's childhood.

If you're at all curious about the state of girlhood in America now, this is the book for you. For a more personal take, try Esmeralda Santiago's coming of age story, *Almost a Woman*. It's about a young Puerto Rican teenager describing her growing-up years in the new culture of New York City.

Posted by Dory L. on July 18, 2012

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