

Slut! Insult of Insults

Leora Tanenbaum

Women living in the United States are fortunate indeed. Unlike women living in Muslim countries, who are beaten and murdered for the appearance of sexual impropriety, we enjoy enormous sexual freedom.¹ Yet even we are routinely evaluated and punished for our sexuality. In 1991, Karen Carter, a twenty-eight-year-old single mother, lost custody of her two-year-old daughter in a chain of events that began when she called a social service hot line to ask if it's normal to feel sexual arousal while breast feeding. Carter was charged with sexual abuse in the first degree, even though her daughter showed no signs of abuse; when she revealed in court that she had had a lifetime total of eight (adult male) lovers, her own lawyer referred to her "sexual promiscuity."² In 1993, when New Mexico reporter Tamar Stieber filed a sex discrimination lawsuit against the newspaper where she worked because she was earning substantially less than men in similar positions, defense attorneys deposed her former lover to ask him how often they'd had sex.³ In the 1997 sexual-harassment lawsuits against Mitsubishi Motor Manufacturing, a company lawyer asked for the gynecological records of twenty-nine women employees charging harassment, and wanted the right to distribute them to company executives.⁴ And in 1997 a North Carolina woman sued her husband's secretary for breaking up their nineteen-year-marriage and was awarded \$1 million in damages by a jury. Dur-

ing the seven-day trial the secretary was described as a "matronly" woman who deliberately began wearing heavy makeup and short skirts in order to entice the husband into an affair.⁵

It's amazing but true: Even today a common way to damage a woman's credibility is to call her a slut. Look at former CIA station chief Janine Brookner, who was falsely accused of being a drunken "slut" after she reprimanded several corrupt colleagues in the early 1990s.⁶ Consider Anita Hill, whose accusation that Clarence Thomas sexually harassed her was dismissed by the Senate because, in the memorable words of journalist David Brock, she was "a bit nutty and a bit slutty."⁷ Clearly, slut-bashing is not confined to the teenage years.

Nor is it a new phenomenon. If anything, it is the continuation of an old tradition. For girls who came of age in the 1950s, the fear of being called a slut ruled their lives. In that decade, "good" girls strained to give the appearance that they were dodging sex until marriage. "Bad" girls—who failed to be discreet, whose dates bragged, who couldn't get their dates to stop—were dismissed as trashy "sluts." Even after she had graduated from high school, a young woman knew that submitting to sexual passion meant facing the risk of unwed pregnancy, which would bar her entrée to the social respectability of the college-educated middle class. And so, in addition to donning cashmere sweater sets and poodle skirts, the 1950s "good" girl also had to hone the tricky talent of doling out enough sexual preliminaries to keep her dates interested while simultaneously exerting enough sexual control to stop before the point of no return: intercourse. The twin fears of pregnancy and loss of middle-class respectability kept

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er desires in check. The protagonist of Alix Kates Hulman's novel *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* summed up the prevailing attitude: "Between me and Joey already one thing had led to another—kissing had led to French kissing, French kissing to necking, necking to petting, petting to bare-titting, bare-titting to dry humping—but somehow, thank God, I had always managed to stop at that penultimate step."⁸

No wonder that obtaining a reputation was even more frightening than becoming pregnant. An unwanted pregnancy could be taken care of—somehow, somewhere. A reputation, however, was an indelible stamp. "Steve's finger in my cunt felt good," reminisced Erica Jong's alter ego, Isadora Wing, about her 1950s high school boyfriend in *Fear of Flying*. "At the same time, I knew that soft, mushy feeling to be the enemy."

I yielded to that feeling, it would be goodbye to all the other things I wanted. 'You have to choose,' I told myself sternly at fourteen. Get me to a nunnery. So, like all good nuns, I masturbated . . . at fourteen all I could see were the advantages of being a woman. . . . All I could see was the swindle of being a woman."⁹ The maneuvering was so delicate that pretty girls, the ones most sought after by the boys, sometimes secretly wished they were ugly just to avoid the lemma altogether.

In the realm of sexual choices we are light-years beyond the 1950s. Today a teenage girl can explore her sexuality without getting married, and most do. By age eighteen over half of all girls and nearly three quarters of all boys have had intercourse at least once.¹⁰ Yet at the same time, the fifties-era attitude lingers: Teens today are fairly conservative about sex. A 1998 *New York Times*/CBS News poll of a thousand teens found that 53 percent of girls believe that sex before marriage is always wrong," while 41 percent of boys agree.¹¹ Teens may be having sex, but they also look down

on others, especially girls, who are sexually active. Despite the sexual revolution, despite three decades of feminism, despite the Pill, and despite legalized abortion, teenage girls today continue to

be defined by their sexuality. The sexual double standard—and the division between "good" girls and "bad" or "slutty" ones—is alive and well. Some of the rules have changed, but the playing field is startlingly similar to that of the 1950s.

Skeptical? Just take a look at teenage pop culture. On the TV show *Dawson's Creek*, which chronicles the lives of four hip, painfully self-aware teens, an episode is devoted to Dawson's discovery that his girlfriend Jen is not only not a virgin, she's had sex with a number of guys. Dawson is both disappointed and disapproving, and before long the relationship ends. An ad for Converse sneakers, appearing in a 1995 issue of *Seventeen*, depicts two girls, one white and the other black, sharing self-satisfied smirks as a busty girl in a short, tight dress lingers nearby. The caption reads, "Carla and Rachel considered themselves open-minded, nonjudgmental people. Although they did agree Brenda was a tramp." In the 1996 movie *Jerry Maguire* you just know that Tom Cruise's girlfriend is a good-for-nothing tramp the moment you lay eyes on her: She makes her first appearance in a torrid, sweaty sex scene. (If it were a horror movie, she'd be murdered within ten minutes.) Indeed, her heartlessness is later revealed when she berates Cruise for allowing conscience rather than greed to guide his career as a sports agent.

But forget about make-believe characters in TV shows, ads, and movies: real life has enough examples. In Kentucky in 1998, two high school students were denied membership in the National Honor Society because they were pregnant—even though boys who engaged in premarital sex faced no such exclusion.¹² One Georgia teen wrote anxiously to *Seventeen*: "A few months ago, when my mom saw me hugging my boyfriend outside my house, she called me a slut and said we were 'putting on a show for the whole neighborhood.' I've never been so hurt in my life. I had done nothing to be called such an awful word other than display affection for someone I love very much. The word 'slut' doesn't need a definition; it needs to be abolished."¹³

Teenage model Jamie Messenger sued YM magazine for \$17.5 million because the magazine ran her photo, without her permission, alongside an advice-column letter that had no connection to her. The headline was I GOT TRASHED AND HAD SEX WITH THREE GUYS. After the magazine's two million readers received their issue in the mail, Messenger got a quick course in slut-bashing. The football team bet on who would sleep with her first; her best friend's parents wouldn't allow their daughter to visit anymore. Her brother was caught in a fight after someone called the model a whore. "She wanted to go to the prom, she wanted to go to the homecoming," her mother said. "She wanted to be part of that. But unfortunately, she couldn't."¹⁴

Jamie Messenger isn't the only girl who has turned to the courts. A number of high school students around the country have sued their school districts for sexual harassment because teachers and administrators allowed slut-bashing to flourish. In 1996 alone there were three well-publicized cases, all involving junior high school students. In upstate New York, Eve Bruneau was called "whore" and "dog-faced bitch" by the boys in her sixth-grade class and became so depressed that she transferred schools; her harassment complaint against the South Kortright School District was rejected.¹⁵ But Tianna Ugarte, a fourteen-year-old girl living near San Francisco, won a \$500,000 award from a jury that found school officials had ignored her complaints of verbal abuse from a male sixth-grade classmate.¹⁶ And in another northern California case, a girl identified only as Jane Doe from Petaluma won a settlement of \$250,000 because the faculty at Kenilworth Junior High did nothing to stop students from hounding her for a year and a half with rumors that she had sex with hot dogs. (It got so bad that one day a boy felt free to stand up in class and say, "I have a question. I want to know if Jane Doe has sex with hot dogs.")¹⁷

In 1988, educators Janie Victoria Ward and Jill McLean Taylor surveyed Massachusetts teenagers across six different ethnic groups—black, white,

Hispanic, Haitian, Vietnamese, and Portuguese—and found that the different groups upheld different sexual values. But one thing was universal: The sexual double standard. Regardless of race or ethnicity, "boys were generally allowed more freedom and were assumed to be more sexually active than girls." Ward and Taylor found that "sexual activity for adolescent males usually met cultural expectations and was generally accepted by adults and peers as part of normal male adolescence. . . . In general, women are often seen in terms of their sexual reputation rather than in terms of their personal characteristics."¹⁸

The double standard, we know, does not vaporize after high school. Sociologist Lillian Rubin surveyed six hundred students in eight colleges around the country in the late 1980s and found that 40 percent of the sexually active women said that they routinely understate their sexual experience because "my boyfriend wouldn't like it if he knew," "people wouldn't understand," and "I don't want him to think I'm a slut." Indeed, these women had reason to be concerned. When Rubin queried the men about what they expected of the women they might marry, over half said that they would not want to marry a woman who had been "around the block too many times," that they were looking for someone who didn't "sleep around," and that a woman who did was a "slut."¹⁹

Similarly when sex researcher Shere Hite surveyed over 2,500 college men and women, 92 percent of the men claimed that the double standard was unfair. Yet overwhelmingly they themselves upheld it. When asked, "If you met a woman you liked and wanted to date, but then found out she had had sex with ten to twenty men during the preceding year, would you still like her and take her seriously?," 65 percent of the men admitted that they would not take her seriously. At the same time only 5 percent said they would lose respect if a male friend had had sex with ten to twenty women in one year.²⁰

Teenage girls who are called sluts today experience slut-bashing at its worst. Caught between

the conflicting pressures to have sex and maintain a "good" reputation, they are damned when they do and damned when they don't. Boys and girls both are encouraged to have sex in the teen years—by their friends, magazines, and rock and pop lyrics—yet boys alone can get away with it. There's no way that anyone who talks to girls thinks that there's a new sexual revolution out here for teenagers," sums up Deborah Tolman, a developmental psychologist at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. "It's the old system very much in place." It is the old system, but with a twist: Today's teenage girls have grown up after the feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. They have been told their whole lives that they can, and should, do anything that boys do. But soon enough they discover that sexual equality has not arrived. Certain things continue to be the privilege of boys alone.

With this power imbalance, it's no wonder high school girls report feeling less comfortable with their sexual experiences than their male counterparts do. While 81 percent of adolescent boys say that "sex is a pleasurable experience," only 59 percent of girls feel the same way.²¹ The statistical difference speaks volumes. Boys and girls both succumb to early sex due to peer and media pressures, but boys still get away with it while girls don't.

Who Gets Picked On

Girls who are singled out for being "sluts" are by no means a monolithic group. And contrary to what most people think of when they visualize a "slut," many have no more sexual experience than their peers do, and some have no sexual experience at all. Whether or not a girl is targeted because of her sexual behavior, the effect is nonetheless to police her sexuality.

"She's So Loose": The Sexual Girl

One type of girl is picked on because she appears to flaunt a casual attitude about sexuality:

She is either sexually active or is perceived to be sexually active.

Pamela Spring, from Massachusetts, was a sexual girl who was taught a lesson. When she was discovered to have had intercourse with two different boys the summer before ninth grade, a girl on the basketball team called her over during lunch. "Pam," she asked before a packed table, "did you fuck Andy and John?" Everyone laughed. People talked about her in school and at parties. When she was a senior, someone spray-painted "Pam is a slut" on the school building.

On the other end of the spectrum, some girls who aren't sexually active at all are presumed to be so because of their physique. When everyone else in the class is wearing training bras, the girl with breasts becomes an object of sexual scrutiny. Yet when boys develop early, they are not similarly stigmatized. A girl with visible breasts becomes sexualized because she possesses a constant physical reminder of her sexual potential, whereas height, the marker of boys' development, does not carry sexual meanings, notes sociologist Barrie Thorne.²² (Boys generally don't develop in build or grow facial hair until they're in high school.) In other words, a girl can become known as possessing a sexual persona simply because of the way she looks, not the way she behaves.

Eighteen-year-old Paula Pinczewski, from northwestern Wisconsin, got her period in the fifth grade and by seventh grade wore a 36C. In eighth grade, classmates called Paula, a virgin, a "five-cent whore," "hooker," and "slut." They took her notebook and wrote things in it like, "You're not worth shit" and "You're a bitch." "If I didn't get one of my daily insults," Paula tells me, "it was not worthy of being a school day." For her part, Julie, the girl who was raped when she passed out from drinking, was singled out as a "slut," she suspects, "because I was chesty. I was wearing a C bra in ninth grade. Even my girlfriends would make comments about my chest. It made the stories about me easier to believe. I fit into a stereotype."

"She Asked for It": The Raped Girl

I never expected to find so many "sluts" who had been raped or attempted-raped. In fact, when I first thought about why certain girls might be singled out as "sluts," the issue of sexual coercion did not occur to me, nor did I ask a single interviewee if she had been assaulted or raped. And yet over and over again my interviewees volunteered that they had been raped by a date, acquaintance, or stranger, or that the boys in school assumed they were "easy" and therefore gang-raped or tried to gang-rape them. (Others mentioned that they had been sexually abused by a relative or baby-sitter.) Not one reported her assault to the police or school.

The parenthetical way some of the girls and women told me these stories made me wonder how reliable rape statistics are, especially for teenagers. According to a 1997 Commonwealth Fund survey, one in five high school girls has been physically or sexually abused, with nearly one in ten of the older girls reporting abuse by a date or boyfriend.²³ But I wouldn't be surprised if the real numbers are much higher. The fact is that most people refuse to believe that a teenage girl has been raped, especially if she knows her attacker. They assume that the sex was consensual, not forced.

The "slut" reputation protects rapists because it makes the victims believe that they are partly to blame. Julie, for instance, did not press charges against her rapist. "I knew no one would believe me," she explained to me. "And I didn't want to tell my parents because they'd be mad that I was out drinking." She did confide in a few of the girls at school, but as expected, they thought she was making the rape up. "They felt, 'Oh, she's just saying it because she has a bad reputation.'"

Two of Julie's friends heard from another friend that the sex was in reality a rape. But Julie sensed that they didn't really believe it. "They never came out and said they thought I was lying, but if we'd be talking about past boyfriends, they would bring up the rapist's name, as if he were a boyfriend. In their minds they believed the ru-

mors. My friend Liz, who had seen me passed out, would stand by me in those cases. She was like, 'Well, that was a different situation; Julie couldn't help that. She was raped.' But the group always liked to have someone to make fun of, and I was the butt of jokes at times. Even though they were my friends, it stopped being funny."

"Not One of Us": The Outsider

Adolescents label everybody. When they are confronted with someone who doesn't fit their idea of how a girl should act or look, they grasp for an insulting label. Typically the girl with the "slut" reputation fails to conform in some way. "Slut" becomes an insult like any other, with sexual implications thrown in for added measure.

Jaclyn Geller is a tall, striking-looking woman with defined cheekbones and penetrating blue-green eyes. Born in 1963, she is currently an essayist and doctoral candidate in English literature. She was called a "slut" in junior high. "I didn't have sexual relations with people aside from playing Spin the Bottle," she says, "so I knew it was a crazy thing." Jaclyn was taller and older-looking than the other kids. She read books while everyone else went to football games. She always sensed that somehow she was different.

Jaclyn grew up in the leafy suburb of Scarsdale, New York, where "popularity did not necessarily mean wealth—everyone was affluent. Popularity meant conformity." During the seventh grade, boys called her a slut when she walked down the halls. The jokes turned into violence when she was in the eighth grade walking to the cafeteria: Five boys pushed her down on the ground and climbed on top of her; Jaclyn had to fight them off. They were all boys who lived in her neighborhood.

Janice, now thirty-six, was a new student when she entered seventh grade: her father was in the military and the family had just moved to town. Almost immediately the boys in her Illinois junior high school started a rumor that she stuffed her bra. "I was very embarrassed. I changed my seat to get away from the boys who were talking about me, but my teacher made me go back.

When my mother found out, she said, 'Don't you care about your reputation?' This was already her third school, and in eighth grade she moved again. Each time she was a new student, the boys looked her over. Even though Janice was not sexually active, the boys reinforced the idea that she had no right to be sexual. Janice began to hunch her shoulders and wear a coat whenever possible. I never really felt comfortable with my body," she says. "To this day I don't like people to hug me or feel my body."

Girls Slut-Bashing Girls

A refrain throughout the interviews was how cruel girls could be. Nearly every "slut" told me that girls either had engineered the ostracism themselves or were more hurtful than boys. In some cases a girl spread a rumor about another girl whom she envied or resented.

Janet Jones, twenty-four, has radiant brown skin and deep brown eyes. In her South Carolina high school, she was captain of the cheerleading squad. "I don't mean to sound conceited," says Janet, now a student at a black women's college in Atlanta. "My immediate friends in my circle—I ain't gonna say they weren't *as* attractive—but they weren't. And girls can be extremely vengeful and extremely jealous when it comes to things like that. Friends that I thought were friends turned out not to be at all. That was my first important lesson in life. I found out that people I thought I could count on would turn on me."

One Sunday, Janet spent the afternoon with a close male friend, talking and hanging out. The next day everyone was buzzing about how the two of them had slept together. "What really hurts is that no one came back to me and asked me, Janet, is this true?' They just accepted it." It was girls, not boys, who made the rest of her high school years miserable. Even her best friend from elementary school stopped talking to her.

Boys and girls both can inflict emotional harm, but when girls are involved, the harassment tends to become more personal. Julie, the girl who was raped, says that it hurt more when girls judged

her than when guys did. "If a girl gets a reputation and then does something that gets on another girl's nerves, that girl is going to immediately mention the reputation. Like, 'Not only did she do better than me on that test but she's also a slut.'"

Because girls rather than boys are often on the front lines of slut-bashing, teachers rarely identify the behavior as a form of sexual harassment. Americans seem to care more about harassment when it involves a male and female than when both harasser and victim are the same gender. Yet, as we will see, girls can bring enormous pain to other girls, leading them to engage in a number of self-destructive behaviors. . . .

Shame

Public humiliation is in vogue. Former independent Whitewater Counsel Kenneth Starr publicized all the details of Bill Clinton's sexual affair with Monica Lewinsky, it seems, mainly to embarrass the president. When a thirty-six-year-old Dallas woman was arrested recently for stealing three cartons of cigarettes, she was given a "shaming sentence": Judge Ted Poe of the 228th State District ordered her to stand before a supermarket carrying a sign reading, "I Stole From This Store. Do Not Steal! This Could Be You!" Judge Poe has similarly required welfare cheats to take out ads in local newspapers detailing their frauds.²⁴ In La Mesa, California, men convicted of soliciting prostitutes find their names and photos published in *The Daily Californian*, right next to the winning lottery numbers.²⁵ And in Kansas City, the television show *John TV* broadcasts on cable the names, mug shots, birth dates, and hometowns of men arrested for trying to buy sex and of women arrested for trying to sell it. The show is so popular that it runs four times every Wednesday.²⁶ . . .

In 1995 [Newt] Gingrich, then Speaker of the House, declared that he wanted to institute the public stigmatization of sexually active, unwed girls. Gingrich told Congress that in Victorian

England "they reduced the number of children born out of wedlock by almost 50 percent. They changed the whole momentum of their society. They didn't do it through a new bureaucracy. They did it by reestablishing values, by moral leadership, and by being willing to look at people in the face and say, 'You should be ashamed when you get drunk in public; you ought to be ashamed if you're a drug addict.'" ²⁷

But even without the intervention of Congress, girls who are sexually active (or believed to be sexually active) are disgraced every day. The "slut" label makes them feel very ashamed indeed. Over and over, girls and women told me about the disgust, guilt, and squeamishness they felt about sex for years. Some adult women, former "sluts," continue to feel uncomfortable with sex to this day. . . .

Abstaining from sex, hitting the books, and wearing loose-fitting clothes are common ways that girls try to molt their "slutty" image. But more often their shame leads them to self-destructive behavior. They become willing to do things that they wouldn't have dreamed of doing before they were scandalized because they now feel they have so little to offer. Some girls do drugs or drink to excess in an attempt to blot away their stigma. Others become depressed and anorexic. And others think so little of themselves that they date boys who insult or beat them.

Carmen, the daughter of Ecuadorian immigrants, felt it was important to study hard and be a "good" girl to make her parents proud. But in her school's hierarchy of popularity, her honor-student image placed her squarely at the bottom. She felt like an outsider. Longing both to fit in and let loose, she went on her school's senior ski trip in Vermont, intending to get drunk and fool around with the boys. Her best friend helped her pour vodka into empty shampoo bottles so that she wouldn't get caught. Over the course of the weekend, she did indeed get very drunk. And while she was still a virgin when she returned home, she had experimented sexually with several different classmates.

Back in school Monday morning, everybody was talking. "Behind my back I was called a slut and a sex maniac," she remembers. One classmate boasted that he had "fucked Carmen four times" the night before. The story spun so much out of control that Carmen was rumored to have had two abortions. Miserable and ashamed, she began to drink regularly, smoke, and cut classes. She failed two classes that semester.

Carla Karampatos, a high school senior in the Northeast, was always made fun of because of her Greek name and complexion. In seventh grade the girls seethed with resentment when twelfth-grade boys called Carla cute. When she turned down the advances of a tenth-grade boy, he called her a slut, an insult that pleased the girls. Before long the girls were picking fights with her. In the beginning of eleventh grade, Carla was so despondent that she ingested an entire bottle of sleeping pills. She would have died if her mother hadn't found her on the kitchen floor and rushed her to the hospital, where her stomach was pumped.

Jackie Garcia, twenty-four, was called a slut by black girls at her Queens public high school who were jealous that all the black guys liked her, a Latina. Even though she was not sexually active, girls broke into her gym locker and wrote "Jackie is a ho" on the cafeteria walls and in the girls' bathrooms. In response, Jackie stopped eating and lost twenty-five pounds. She explains that she was trying to reduce the size of her bust. (It didn't work.)

Julie dated guys who abused her emotionally and physically. "Like I was with one guy who used to hit me, and like I let him do it for a while. I was with him for four months. Eventually I was like, forget it. It wasn't fun always being on guard. I started to not see him as much, and then I just stopped. I always kind of assumed, 'I have this horrible reputation, I'm never going to get away from it, so I don't really have a choice about whether or not a guy treats me badly,'" she explains. Then she dated a guy who cheated on her. "I was definitely attracted to men who treated me badly, maybe because I thought I didn't deserve

any better. Even in the relationship I'm in now, which is really good, there have been times where I've been like, 'Oh, I don't deserve you, you're too nice to me.'"

Strength

While many girls crumble, some muster their strength to defy the slut label. Faced with rejection by their peers, they in turn reject the values of their peers. They come to believe that being known as a slut may not be so bad after all; it may even have liberating possibilities. These girls flaunt a proud, rebellious persona. Their attitude is: Why not flee the suffocation of conformity? Why not show everyone that being "good" is a farce? Why not be "bad"—and have fun with it?

"I'm a lot stronger now," says Paula Pinczewski, the young woman from Wisconsin who was called a "five-cent whore" in the eighth grade because of her breasts. "I can stand up for myself now where I couldn't before. If somebody stares at me, I think 'Go ahead, stare.' If somebody throws an insult my way, I'll throw one right back. I wear whatever I want to wear—clothes that are as baggy or as sexy as I want. I even dressed up as a Playboy bunny for Halloween last year, with the little tail."

Susan Houseman, thirty-one, reports that being known as a slut gave her the freedom to have a lesbian relationship during her senior year of high school—something she never would have had the courage to do, at least at that age, had she stayed on course as a "good" girl. After graduation, instead of getting married right away as many of her classmates did, Susan traveled for a few years before going to college.

Because of her own reputation, Janet Jones, the cheerleader from South Carolina, decided to go to college four and a half hours away from home, to start fresh without any of her highschool classmates. She was able to escape her small town, where "no one had any long-term goals. Everyone just wanted to stay there and do the same old

thing. I felt like I grew up, but no one else did. So maybe the reputation stuff was a blessing in disguise."

None of the "sluts" I interviewed is a victim. Every one went through a painful experience, but each ultimately turned her experience into a positive thing. Having a "slut" reputation sharpened her thinking, gave her a sense of perspective about gender roles, and made her acutely aware of the small-mindedness of the sexual double standard. . . .

To tell you the truth, I began this book embarrassed about my research into slut-bashing. Whenever someone asked me what I was working on, I mumbled something vague about "sexual harassment" or "teen sexuality" without offering any specifics. This was a deliberate tactic: if I volunteered that I was writing about slut-bashing, inevitably, I knew, I would be asked how I became interested in the subject, and eventually I would be cornered into admitting that, yes, I was a high school "slut." But I've become an eager, sometimes almost Oprah-esque, confessor. I have come to appreciate the experience I went through. I have learned that once a person is labeled anything, she becomes a caricature rather than a full-fledged human being with both talents and flaws. I have learned about the subtleties of emotional cruelty and the enormities of biological difference. And I discovered all this with the help of girls and women around the country who shared their own experiences with me. Their strength proved to me that it's those who use the insult "slut" who should be embarrassed, not us. Definitely not us.

NOTES

1. In Jordan in 1993 a sixteen-year-old girl who had been raped by her older brother was killed by her family because, it was said, she had seduced him into sleeping with her. Kristen Golden, "Rana Hussein: A Voice for Justice," *Ms.*, July/August 1998, p. 36; Tali Edut, "Global Woman: Rana Hussein," *HUES*, Summer 1998, p. 41. In Afghanistan, where women must remain covered from head to toe in shrouds called

burqas, the General Department for the Preservation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice beats women for wearing white socks or plastic sandals with no socks, attire that is said to provoke "impure thoughts" in men. John F. Burns, "Sex and the Afghan Woman: Islam's Straitjacket," *The New York Times*, August 29, 1997, p. A4. And in Turkey in 1998 five girls attempted suicide by eating rat poison and jumping into a water tank to avoid a forced virginity examination. An unmarried woman discovered not to be a virgin risks being beaten or killed. The virginity tests were carried out as the girls recovered in their hospital beds; when one girl did succeed in killing herself, her father had the exam performed on her corpse. Kelly Couturier, "Suicide Attempts Fuel Virginity Test Debate," *The Washington Post*, January 27, 1998, p. A18.

2. Lauri Umansky, "Breastfeeding in the 1990s: The Karen Carter Case and the Politics of Maternal Sexuality" in Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, eds., *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 299-309. Karen Carter is a pseudonym.

3. Tamar Stieber, "Viewpoint," *Glamour*, August 1996, p. 138.

4. Stieber, p. 138.

5. Jon Jeter, "Woman Who Sued Ex-Husband's Mistress Is Awarded \$1 Million," *The Washington Post*, August 7, 1997, p. A3.

6. Tim Weiner, "C. I. A. to Pay \$410,000 to Spy Who Says She Was Smeared," *The New York Times*, December 8, 1994, p. A1; Tim Weiner, "Woman Who Was C. I. A. Chief Requests Criminal Investigation," *The New York Times*, July 18, 1995.

7. David Brock, "The Real Anita Hill," *The American Spectator*, March 1992, p. 27.

8. Alix Kates Shulman, *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* (Chicago: Cassandra Editions, 1985; first published 1972), p. 61.

9. Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (New York: New American Library, 1973), pp. 156-157.

10. *Sex and America's Teenagers* (New York and Washington: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994), p. 20.

11. Laurie Goodstein with Marjorie Connelly, "Teen-Age Poll Finds a Turn to the Traditional," *The New York Times*, April 30, 1998, p. A20. The poll, of 1,048 teenagers ages thirteen to seventeen, was conducted by

telephone in April 1998. The poll also found that only 18 percent of thirteen- to fifteen-year-olds said they had ever had sex, as against 38 percent of sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds.

12. Ethan Bronner, "Lawsuit on Sex Bias by 2 Mothers, 17," *The New York Times*, August 6, 1998, p. A14. A year later, however, after the American Civil Liberties Union sued on the students' behalf, the society was ordered to accept them. Michael Pollak, "Honored, a Year Later," *The New York Times*, May 19, 1999, p. C30.

13. "All in a Name" (Letters page), *Seventeen*, November 1995, p. 12.

14. Lorne Manly, "Off the Record," *The New York Observer*, June 23, 1997. (Messenger was ultimately awarded \$100,000 by a jury that found that YM was "grossly irresponsible" for using the photo without "valid consent."—Greg B. Smith, "'Trashed' Model Wins Mag to Cough Up \$100,000," *New York Daily News*, March 28, 1998, p. 6.)

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