How to be a Woman Study Guide

How to be a Woman by Caitlin Moran

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Summary

Caitlin Moran is a well-known English journalist and music critic who writes a memoir specifically dealing with her experiences on becoming a woman. Caitlin grew up in a working class family, the eldest of eight children, in the West Midlands city of Wolverhampton. She begins her story on her thirteenth birthday, the symbolic beginning of adolescence and the first step towards “womanhood.” Caitlin gets her first period and pubic hair soon after her birthday, but these rites of passage remain somewhat mysterious to her; despite her close knit family, her mother is reticent in discussing uncomfortable sexual topics, and leaves Caitlin to fend for herself. Caitlin spends her teenage years as a misfit, overweight and friendless, but learning about the world through art – books, television, and music. She teaches herself to masturbate and finds the pursuit of desire and pleasure her first true step toward understanding what a woman is, despite having to wear hand-me-down underwear and being uncomfortable with the word “vagina.”

At sixteen, Caitlin gets a job working for a music magazine called Melody Maker in London, and she interacts with adults regularly for the first time. When she uses her new freedom to explore her sexuality, Caitlin finds herself the brunt of casual sexism amongst her all male co-workers, despite their liberal views. By the time Caitlin is eighteen, she is hosting a late night television show about music and decides she needs a boyfriend as her next step toward womanhood. This boyfriend, a musician named Courtney, treats Caitlin terribly and only stays with her to make music industry connections. Caitlin struggles to make the relationship work, despite all the obvious warning signs that it is toxic, but finally, with the helpful clarity of her sister Caz, Caitlin dumps Courtney. Soon after, she realizes she is in love with her good friend and co-worker Pete, whom she eventually marries at age twenty-four.

Caitlin gives birth to two daughters after she and Pete marry. The first terrifies her so much she avoids preparing for it and ends up having a three day labor that ends in a an emergency caesarean. The pain Caitlin experiences gives her a new perspective on life, and the fact that she knows she can survive childbirth makes her second labor go much more smoothly. She is still breastfeeding her second daughter when Caitlin discovers she is pregnant again. She and Pete easily opt for an abortion. Though the procedure is painful, Caitlin never regrets it.

Meanwhile, in her career as a journalist, Caitlin is given ample opportunity to observe how women are presented in the media, and how feminism is playing out in the early twenty-first century. She escorts a fellow female journalist to a strip club and she interviews a “successful” female model entrepreneur named Katie Price whose only commodity is selling herself. Kate is self-absorbed and mean, but as her popularity wanes Caitlin is cheered to interview Lady Gaga, a talented female artist who uses her sexuality to disturb rather than titillate and has an inclusive fan base for the marginalized, as she actively advocates for gay rights.

At thirty-five, Caitlin sees women just older than her begin to face the aging process and balk in fear, injecting and tucking their bodies to appear as youthful as possible. But Caitlin wants to age gracefully. In the twenty-two years since she turned thirteen, she may have stumbled in her attempts to “be” a woman, but she arrives at the conclusion that “being” isn’t the point, it is “doing” that matters. She agitates for a world where politeness reigns, and everyone does the best they can to be honest, hardworking, and civil. Along the way Caitlin offers commentary on everything from Brazilian waxes, pornography, underwear, strip clubs, housecleaners, flirting, abortion, having children, fashion, feminist icons and role models, princesses, and plastic surgery. She is not afraid to state her bold opinions, and she hopes that by sharing her experiences other women will be encouraged to speak out as well, and everyone will be proud to proclaim themselves as feminists.

Prologue - Chapter 1: The Worst Birthday Ever, I Start Bleeding!

Summary

On April 5, 1988, Caitlin Moran turns thirteen and gets chased by a group of remorseless boys (whom she calls “Yobs”), who call her rude names and throw rocks at her. They tease her for her androgynous, almost masculine dressing style. Her “dumb” dog Saffron does nothing to protect Caitlin from her tormentors. Caitlin is understandably upset, crying on her front porch because the three-bedroom house shared by her parents and five siblings is too crowded for privacy. Caitlin, ever optimistic, changes gears rapidly for her birthday party, happy to eat a baguette with cream cheese in lieu of a birthday cake. She writes cheerfully in her diary about her day, only briefly referencing the bullies, re-framing it as their burgeoning sexual interest.

The age of thirteen launches Caitlin into “womanhood,” the beginning of her teen years and all the hormones that accompany puberty. But no one ever tells Caitlin what it is to be a woman, or how to respond to the hormones, the attention, the shifting priorities and perspectives. She notices that most of her strong, self-possessed female role models were crushed by men. The adult Caitlin, aged 35, wants to tell her story because she thinks it is important to share with other women, so they can have a sense of common, non-shameful experience, but also because she thinks the feminist movement has died and it is necessary to keep fighting the patriarchy lest all the daily ways women are oppressed become so normalized no one sees them as problematic anymore.

Right around the time Caitlin turns thirteen, she discovers menstruation. Finding the vague things she can glean about it unappealing (her mother won’t discuss it with her), Caitlin would like to opt out. However, she finds herself bleeding at the public library. At home she is initiated into the use of cheap and massive sanitary pads, which fall to pieces and lead to a lot of leaking and cleaning up for Caitlin. She bleeds for three months and frequently faints.

The onset of puberty also gets Caitlin’s sex drive revving. She develops an enormous crush on the actor Chevy Chase, dreaming about him. With her newly minted adult library card, Caitlin checks out a novelization of one of Chevy Chase’s movies, Fletch, as well as a book called Riders by Jilly Cooper. Riders contains graphic sex, and Caitlin quickly teaches herself to masturbate while reading it. Masturbation becomes her primary hobby throughout her teenage years, and she spends time sneakily watching any TV shows that contain explicit sex, keeping her finger near the TV’s off switch lest her mother catch her. Orgasms and desire itself seem to Caitlin to be the first good step toward adulthood her life takes.

Her access to pornography is limited to novels and mildly salacious television, and as an adult, Caitlin thinks she was better off maintaining some sense of mystery around

sex, unlike the teenagers of today who can find anything they can imagine via the internet. At thirty-five, Caitlin is not offended by pornography itself, but that almost all pornography depicts emotionless intercourse in which the man's pleasure is all that matters, generally ending with his ejaculation on the woman's bored face. Caitlin does not find porn inherently non-feminist, just the way it has manifested in recent years. She wants women to create pornography for themselves in which desire is the dominant element, and all involved achieve orgasms. She wants pornography to contain a sense of joy, the excitement of two people sharing a moment of intense pleasure.

Analysis

Moran's book is part memoir, part commentary on living as a woman in the early twenty-first century, navigating the waters of misogyny that still exist despite the progress women have made towards equality. She quickly sets her tone and theme, writing, "Again and again over the last few years, I turned to modern feminism to answer questions that I had but found that what had once been the one most exciting, incendiary, and effective revolution of all time had somehow shrunk down into a couple of increasingly small arguments, carried out among a couple of dozen feminist academics, in books that only feminist academics would read" (Page 11). Moran is clearly not going to take an academic bent, mixing irreverence and humor into a discussion that is seen as serious and plodding. She wants feminism to be fun, so more people will join the conversation. Moran makes her story personal, both by revealing things about herself, and by inviting the reader to think about feminist issues in terms of their own experiences.

In addition, Moran writes in the present tense, mixing stories from her teenage years with the actual present, giving her storytelling a sense of immediacy that draws the reader in. She uses anecdotes to parachute into a universal topic, such as menstruation, which is itself a symbolic rite of passage denoting the rush of teenage hormones that overwhelm young, impressionable minds. This is the launching pad from which she dives into masturbation and pornography, demonstrating early on that she has no intention of shying away from uncomfortable topics or bold opinions (she isn't against pornography; she is just against the way women are portrayed in pornography). One school of writing theory maintains that linear narratives that result in climax and denouement is masculine, and Moran eschew this style, embracing a traditionally more feminine circular structure, less concerned with a clear beginning, middle, and end, and more interested in exploring her feelings on a subject.

Because of her use of the present tense throughout, the lines are often blurred between the thoughts of teenage Caitlin and adult Moran. It can be difficult to note when she is just a precocious, self-aware young woman, and when she is inserting commentary articulating what she was feeling at the time, though she could not have expressed it then. This also brings up the issue of memoir as a genre, and how trustworthy is the narrative voice when working from memory. The adult Moran seems to have access to her youthful diaries to jog her memory about the exact time and place and feelings she experienced. But as she describes her thirteenth birthday, Moran writes, "A moment of

unwelcome clarity washes over me. Here I am, I think, sharing my bed with a toddler and wearing my dad's old thermal underwear as pajamas. I am 13 years old, I am 182 pounds, I have no money, no friends, and boys throw gravel at me when they see me. It's my birthday, and I went to bed at 7: 15 p.m." (Page 7). Can Moran really recall having such a specific moment of sobering realization, more than two decades later? Readers should be aware of how Moran uses memory, and how it affects her credibility as a narrator. Are individual moments believable, or does it seem like Moran is pumping them up with commentary or humor to make them more effective?

Moran grew up in a three bedroom house, shared eventually by ten people. She comes from the working class, and her early experiences reflect this background. This also influenced her entertainment options – Moran read a lot of books form the public library, an easily accessible form of entertainment. Clearly as a published author, Moran as an adult is no longer struggling with poverty, and readers should note how Moran's perception of class affects her perception of what it is to be a woman. Do working and middle class women deal with the same issues, and will Moran differentiate between them? She indicates that her early androgyny stemmed from a sense of personal style rather than simply a lack of access to fashionable clothing, and in this way Moran seems to establish her credentials as an outsider. She has never mindlessly followed the crowd, she seems to say, so her opinions cannot be construed as hypocritical or liberal, upper middle class complacency.

Vocabulary

ergonomic, subjugate, solvent, procure, incongruous, nihilism, ebullience, disdain, benevolent, regress, attrition, incendiary, pertinent, deleterious,implement, risible, irascible, visceral, blithe, portent, mortification, lubricious, rile, dexterous, largesse, harbinger, licentious,impetus, inexplicable, desultory, sclerotic, detrimental,intrinsic, anodyne, ostensible, ostentatious

Chapters 2 - 3: I Become Furry! I Don’t Know What to Call My Breasts!

Summary

As a teenager, Caitlin’s family lives in a small, drafty house in which everyone shares a towel and dries after the bath in front of the fire. Caitlin emerges from the bathroom one Saturday night soon after her thirteenth birthday to dry off as all of her family watches television in the same room. She is mortified one night when her mother points out to everyone that Caitlin is growing pubic and leg hair. Caitlin, unsure what this means or how she should feel about it, decided to rectify it by “stealing” her father’s razor and removing all the unwanted hair. She cuts herself badly, and worries that someone will discover her by barging in through the door because it does not have a lock. She continues shaving for three months until she gets tired of cuts on her legs and fingers; she dislikes the itchy discomfort of the hair re-growth and she realizes no one is going to see her naked for a long time and she is wasting energy. When she loses her virginity in London at age seventeen, her partner simply desires her, without any interest in how much pubic hair she has.

The adult Caitlin uses this incident to conclude, “Hair is one of the first big preoccupations of womanhood” (Page 41). The way one deals with one’s hair results in societal judgements of what kind of woman one is. Women are required to spend a great deal of money to remove “unwanted” hair. As young adults, Caitlin and her friend Rachel would create an entire weekly schedule of hair removal for optimal social engagements and the possibility of sleeping with men. They are frustrated that they could put in so much time and effort without any guarantee that spending the money will pay off with intercourse. Caitlin laments that all this is done simply to maintain normalcy, not to be particularly attractive.

Caitlin takes umbrage at the trend of entirely removing female pubic hair, which she again blames on the porn industry. Pornography took what may have been a pleasurable kink and re-purposed it for the sake of clear penetration shots. This in turn normalized hairless genitalia to the point where women who don’t get Brazilian waxes are found less appealing by men. Caitlin criticizes a popular sex columnist named Suzi Godson for advising a recently divorced 38-year-old woman to get waxed because that is what her woman’s 29-year-old boyfriend would be expecting. Suzi Godson consoles the woman by saying the latest pubic trend is a “Sicilian,” waxing off all but a triangle of hair, “which at least means you still look like a woman” (Page 46). On the other hand, Caitlin thinks the removal of other body hair is acceptable – armpits, legs, facial hair – because these areas of the body are not indicative of sexual maturity. Caitlin chafes at the idea that men are attracted to a hairless, prepubescent-aping vagina. All other body hair is aesthetic, and women can keep it or remove it as they are comfortable with; Caitlin does not see armpit hair as part of the feminist “Struggle.” She urges women to luxuriate in their pubic hair, and to do with the rest whatever makes them happy.

Caitlin immerses herself in the biographies of prodigies when she is fourteen (1989), briefly wondering if she can excel herself, but her attention is quickly swallowed by the confusion of her raging hormones. A growth spurt leads to stretch marks, which Caitlin thinks is just a rash, then reclassifies as a life-crippling disfigurement. She and her sister Caz, often at odds, bond over what to call their genitalia, leading to a spontaneous hug. They both think “vagina” sounds like bad luck with its medial associations, but can no longer call it the “navel,” which was a family euphemism until recently when they learned it actually just meant belly button.

As an adult, Caitlin uses Twitter to discover her family was not the only one with unusual euphemisms, as a single tweeted question garners over 500 responses from her followers on what they called vaginas. Caitlin herself has embraced the word “cunt,” embracing its power to provoke as the worst possible swear word in the English language. Yet even Caitlin can’t call her daughters’ vaginas cunts, and she and her husband wrack their brains to come up with an appropriate euphemism. They settle on “bot bot,” which is what Caitlin’s mother called both male and female genitalia when she was young. Caitlin considers renaming genitalia a rite of passage for teenage girls, but once again worries about pornography’s influence on the current generation of teenagers. She dislikes the word “pussy,” because she thinks it leads to a disconnect between the body part and the person attached to it. Caitlin reviews a slew of genital slang, evaluating both the good and the bad. She finds breasts just as problematic to rename. She finds “boobs” too perky and jokey, as well as too “white and working class” (Page 63). “Breasts” is too clinical and resonant of cancer. None of the other frequently used terms quite fit either. Back in 1989, Caitlin and Caz simply agree to call their vaginas and breasts “there” while pointing.

Analysis

Moran’s attempts at humor sometimes result in statements that read as counterproductive. In Chapter One, she makes the generalization that “No one ever came with an imaginary bad bouff” (Page 36). In Chapter Two she refers to the way her father is able to tune out the discussion of her pubic hair, as an evolutionary adaptation to “survive the horror of daughters’ puberty” (Page 40). She and her friend Rachel have to analyze “Random Fuck Factors” when scheduling their personal grooming – their physicality is dependent on how a man might judge their bodies. These are easy laughs, but they also reinforce gender stereotypes and societal taboos. Women are unanimously obsessed with their appearance. Female puberty is terrifying and men should avoid learning about female physicality at all costs.

Perhaps Moran intends to subvert these preconceived ideas through humor, pointing out how absurd they are, but because of her light tone and determination to make the reader laugh, it is difficult to determine if she is thinking through the implications of every statement she writes. She would likely argue that such academic analysis is missing the forest for the trees, and would urge the reader to lighten up. Yet her capitulation on other body hair beyond pubic hair, leaving it to a woman’s personal aesthetics, fails to note that these are male and/or society’s aesthetics, not an individual woman’s. It is not

acceptable for a woman in Western society to have a moustache, despite how many women naturally grow facial hair. A woman who wore a mini-skirt without shaving her legs would be mocked or judged cruelly.

Moran claims these choices to shave or not shave are entirely up to a woman, as if a woman would shave her legs just for herself rather than because what others might say. Even in the realm of pubic hair, Moran orders her readers to “Keep it trimmed, keep it neat” (Page 49). Moran admits personal grooming is necessary, though she doesn’t explain why. For whom does one need tidy pubic hair? If it is for a male sexual partner, how is it different from waxing the hair off entirely? Furthermore, Moran does not leave space for women who prefer a bare pubic area. She does not acknowledge that there might be women who wax because they find it aesthetically pleasing, or more comfortable. Moran ignores delving too deeply into the topic; she fails to articulate the difficulty in delineating between what a woman does physically out of patriarchal oppression and what she does because it feels good on a personal level. She doesn’t discuss cultural norms that are so embedded women themselves might not know their reasons for acting as they do when it comes to body hair. Moran keeps her tone light and airy, and ending the discussion with an inclusive but vague “live and let live.”

Moran uses her dog Saffron to try to externalize her thoughts. It is difficult to believe that she remembers specific moments of speaking to her dog, but she uses Saffron as a narrative device to create dialogue rather than presenting the reader with a constant stream of navel-gazing monologue. Readers will note that Moran’s style also indicates an expectation of prior readership and familiarity with her work. She casually references her husband and daughters, assuming readers know the back-story of her marriage. Moran, a popular newspaper and magazine writer in England, who also hosted a television show, knows she is preaching to her own choir; most people who buy her book want to read it because they are already familiar with her voice and style. Her references to her many Twitter followers also indicates Moran is targeting a certain audience who know her. Readers may consider whether this is helpful or harmful to Moran’s book; is she inclusive enough for everyone to enjoy, or is she self-righteously speaking to those who already agree with her?

Moran’s discussion of hair leads her to muse, “As the teenage years are where you begin the complicated, lifelong business of starting to work this out, hair is the opening salvo in decades of quietly screaming “WHO AM I?” while standing in front of an array of products in the drugstore, clutching an empty basket” (Page 42). Yet she fails to examine how ideas of womanhood and femininity are linked to consumerism. One must buy endless products to be a “good” or “proper” woman. Moran gripes about the expense of being a woman, but she doesn’t fight it. She seems resigned to the idea that it is a simple fact of life. What is more troublesome is that the expense of being a woman must be prohibitive for the working class. Are women who cannot afford costly products to beautify themselves less “women” than those with more financial status? In her tendency to generalize, Moran doesn’t examine the nuances of the plight of women, and may therefore unintentionally marginalize some women, despite her own roots among the working class.

Moran positively portrays female sexual desire without pointing it out as something of note. She and Rachel simply seek “a beer and a feel” (Page 43). Her earlier frank discussion of her teenage masturbatory habits treats a girl’s exploration of her body as completely normal. The very casualness with which Moran treats the subject of desire in women is subversive and revolutionary. Sex is not something that men want and women use as currency. Women are just as lusty as men, according to Moran’s experiences, and should not be ashamed of it.

Vocabulary

nugatory, demure, baleful, transgress, didactic, chide, bucolic, abate, excise, frisson,impetus, dolorous, penultimate, suppurate, lexicon, ostensible, precedent, prodigious, appellation, lexical, implacable, couth, ostentatious, imminent, resonance, voluminous, prehensile, interregnum

Chapters 4 - 5: I Am A Feminist! I Need a Bra!

Summary

In Chapter 4, Caitlin urges her readers to taste their own menstrual blood, as Germaine Greer first recommended (Caitlin herself has done it). Barring an appropriate time and place to do that, Caitlin recommends readers (both men and women) proudly proclaim, “I AM A FEMINIST!” (Page 67). Caitlin first verbalizes her feminism at the age of fifteen (1990), three years after she wrote her “By the Time I’m 18” list in which she sets herself the goals of losing weight and getting good clothes and friends. Though she still doesn’t have friends, Caitlin is not lonely because books, music, and television open up other worlds to her. She devours autobiographies, discovering Dorothy Parker, who becomes her comedy idol. She notices a trend among smart, compelling women like Parker: they all have self-destructive tendencies. Caitlin eventually discovers Germaine Greer, author of The Female Eunuch. Watching Greer interviewed on television, demonstrating an entitled feminist perspective, Caitlin is transformed, and immediately reads and identifies with Greer’s book. It feels to her like rock music for women, though she doesn’t understand it at age 15, having rarely experienced sexism and self-loathing first hand. Caitlin idolizes Greer as a teenager, blindly agreeing her.

In the present day, Caitlin boils feminism down to having a vagina, and wanting to be in charge of it. She wants to reclaim the word “feminism,” which has taken on a pejorative connotation, with less than half of American and British women identifying as feminists. Caitlin points out that women couldn’t even have the conversation on whether feminism is good or bad without feminism. Caitlin wants to reinvent the term “strident feminist.”

Caitlin riffs about women who hire women as house cleaners and how this simple act is used against the employers to argue that they are not feminists. Caitlin disagrees with this, pointing out that this argument only reinforces the gender stereotype that the domestic sphere is the realm of women, and domestic tasks should be performed out of love, not financial gain. As a teenager, Caitlin was a house cleaner, and she now employs one. She argues that people use the word feminism without actually understanding what it means; not everything that involves women automatically falls under the heading of “feminism.”

Caitlin argues with people’s assumptions that feminism must be kind to and uncritical to each other at all times. She does not subscribe to the argument that catty women keep women from thriving. She decides the best way to decide if something is “bad” is to ask if men worry about it as well. If men don’t worry how their behavior might affect their entire gender, than neither should women. Caitlin thinks everyone, both men and women, should live by the maxim, “Be Polite.” She uses this logic to rule against burkas, which she thinks were created to protect women from men – who do both the leering and protecting. It is a men’s issue to treat women respectfully as humans rather than

objects of sexual fetishization. Women shouldn't have to wear special clothing to help them achieve that goal (unless women genuinely like wearing a burka – Caitlin believes feminism allows for all types of women, and accepts their diverse and personal choices – or at least, it should.)

In Chapter 5, Caitlin discusses shopping, failing to understand cultural portrayals of women actually enjoying the pastime. She sees it as a necessary evil. At age fifteen, Caitlin needs underpants, having inherited old hand-me-downs from her mother, which Caz helpfully points out might have been born while one of their siblings was conceived. The adult Caitlin claims women's underwear and lingerie are "the specialist clothing of being a woman…We need this stuff, for the "work" of being a woman" (Page 87). Women need bras to survive.

As a teenager, Caitlin believes she is failing at being a woman because women are "supposed to" look good in their underwear, to the point where it is a category in beauty pageants. Even mediocre bodies will look great given the proper accessories. Yet Caitlin is concerned by the trend in women's underwear to be smaller and smaller, covering less of women's sensitive areas – while still being visible because of the corresponding smallness of women's outer clothes. Caitlin believes in big, spacious underwear that are both comfortable and functional. Women's underwear is becoming not only painful but unattractive, cutting women at bad angles and disfiguring them. She urges women to stop feeling as if their unclothed "hotness" might be judged at any moment and to simply be comfortable for themselves. Men don't spend every waking second prepared for an unexpected romantic encounter, and neither should women.

Caitlin moves on to the topic of bras, which she considers the saving grace of her breasts after breastfeeding two children and beginning to age. Since no one except those who already love her actually see her naked, Caitlin can project the illusion of proper shaping because of good bras - though paradoxically she finds no greater relief than removing a bra at the end of the day. Unlike the previous generation of feminists who burned their bras, Caitlin sees bras as good friends who support her.

Analysis

Moran claims, "A male feminist is one of the most glorious end-products of evolution," (Page 68), which is a troubling idea, made worse by Moran's additional statement that ladies should toast and congratulate male feminists for having evolved in this way. Moran blithely implies that there is something reasonable and natural about a man not believing in the equality of women, and that men must adapt and grow into this idea. Rather than claiming feminism is the obvious and natural way of thinking and expecting to be treated equally, Moran wants to celebrate the few men who have been won over to the cause. Moran weakens her arguments for feminism as a whole when she treats it like an unexpected treat.

Furthermore, Moran once again makes jokes that play into female stereotypes, wanting male feminists to stand on chair sand accept congratulations, and "maybe get you to

change that light bulb, while you're up there. We cannot do it ourselves. There is a big spider web on the socket" (Page 68). These jokes might dilute her message, though she intends them to playfully subvert the stereotype. As a comedian, Moran can't come out and say, "I'm kidding," as it would ruin the joke; but she leaves a great door open for reader interpretation, and some women might be offended that she makes them seem weak and dependent on men, even in a joking manner. Readers will have to trust her sly wink when she writes, "I don't really get massive generalizations— and I bet the rest of the world doesn't, either, I think" (Page 74).

Readers may question the credibility of Moran's opinions when she resorts to more serious mass generalizations. She claims that from the time of Dorothy Parker in the 1920s until the 1980s, there were no funny women in the public eye. This seems like an overstatement, with even just the single example of Lucille Ball to refute it. Catching Moran out in such small examples of exaggeration weakens her overall argument. If Moran is prone to hyperbole in these instances, couldn't she be overstating the case of modern misogyny as a whole? Moran's use of humor makes feminism accessible and entertaining, but she walks a fine line between irreverence and being dismissed as uninformed.

Language is important to Moran. First, her use of language anchors the book in her cultural idiom, and some words may be unfamiliar to an American readership, such as "Hoovering" instead of vacuuming. The use of language is a subtle reminder that Moran speaks from a relatively privileged white perspective, and might not be inclusive of everyone. Her language places her in a particular time at the beginning of the twenty-first century as well, as she uses the language of texting such as "rolfing" or "tbh." Moran references Twitter several times, a media that enforces succinctness with a 140 character limit, and Moran's breezy writing style lends itself to proclamations that could be cut and pasted as "tweets." This reinforces her intention to stay away from an academic tone – she is purposefully informal, and light. Most importantly, Moran is set on the idea of reclaiming words that have pejorative associations like "cunt" and "feminist," and she urges readers to flex the muscle of these words with overuse, until they become normalized and positive.

Moran's tangential diatribe about women hiring other women as house cleaners, in which she gets so worked up she resorts to writing only in capital letters, signposts again Moran's more feminine style of writing. She flows associatively rather than causally from topic to topic, and then circles back to her original idea later (this is also evident when she references a trip to a strip club, promising she will return to the topic in Chapter 9). Yet this section seems almost too divergent and specific, and readers may wonder if Moran is writing solely from a place of defensiveness. She herself has a house cleaner; therefore it is acceptable for women to hire housekeepers. She avoids the more relevant topic of value: it may not be inherently problematic for women to hire other women for domestic work, but it could be if upper middle class women aren't paying their working class employees a living wage. Moran sidesteps this question, and fails to consider the issue from the side of the working class house cleaner, whose experience as a woman may be different from Moran's; in this way Moran undermines her argument.

Similarly, Moran imposes her opinion on burkas as an outsider, from a liberal atheist perspective, without any effort to understand the culture and religion that dictate the use of burkas. Within two paragraphs she rules against them as a tool designed to ward off problems men create and perpetuate. Yet not wanting to seem too culturally insensitive, Moran allows, “Unless you really, genuinely like all the gear and would wear it even if you were alone watching East Enders, in which case carry on. My politeness accepts your choice. You can be whatever you want— so long as you’re sure it’s what you actually want, rather than one of two equally dodgy choices foisted onto you” (Page 82). Moran is oversimplifying the issue into a binary, whereas women who wear burkas likely factor in a much more complicated and nuanced thought process. Moran demonstrates here the limitations of her definition of “womanhood,” and perhaps a sense of condescending hypocrisy in her last minute willingness to “accept [the] choice” of women who have different beliefs than she does.

Moran’s discussion of underwear in Chapter 5 further narrows who might be included in Moran’s parameters for womanhood. She claims underwear is “technically necessary” (Page 87) to being a woman – but where does that leave women too poor to afford the quality garments Moran spends a full page describing in obsessive detail? Do poor women automatically fail the part of the “curriculum in being a woman” that requires looking good in underwear because they wear old, faded, hand-me-down underwear like Moran did as a teenager? She was fortunate enough to rise above poverty, but not all women are, and she makes no allowances for the working class in her discussion of undergarments. Moran ties womanhood to consumerism – women need “things” and accessories in order to be successful just at being women. One petticoat Moran has makes her “happier than nearly anything else she owns” partly because she looks “dead thin” in it (Page 90). Weight is another key issue Moran glosses over – are seriously overweight women able “to wear underwear brilliantly” the way contestants in a beauty pageant do? If not, does that erode their ability to “successfully” be women? Moran may intend her treatise on underwear as empowering – anyone can feel beautiful with the right accessories, and because no one but a select few ever get to see a woman in her underwear, the feeling of sexiness is for the woman alone. Yet too many women could little afford the sort of quality undergarments Moran favors, and Moran does not give them an alternative for womanhood. The fact that her lingerie choices are dictated by a desire to feel thin further indicates Moran has not risen above patriarchal and societal expectations as much as she may pretend.

Furthermore, Moran claims to find the task of shopping loathsome, but she waxes poetic about all the products available to help a woman feel beautiful; this implies at least some interest in shopping. But Moran assumes all women need sexy underwear to feel good – she literally thinks it is part of the work of being a woman. What about women who have no interest in shopping, lingerie, or feeling sexy? What about “Tom boys” or women who think a plain white pair of panties and nude bra suffices to protect her private areas? Moran does not mention such women, possibly because she cannot even fathom that they exist. But would she accept them as fully “women”? Moran’s definition is often narrow, despite how inclusive she aims to be. Women reading her book with no interest in fashion might genuinely feel alienated, as if they are not womanly enough.

Vocabulary

incongruous, construe, potent, velocity, revile, implicit, strident, dialectic, dichotomy, misandry, mercenary, infallible, alacrity, bequest, idyllic, paradigm, auto didacticism, entente, inadvertent, inimitable, panoply, predilection, synchronicity, pique, pacify

Chapter 6 - 7: I Am Fat! I Encounter Some Sexism!

Summary

In 1991, at the age of 16, Caitlin takes a film class and befriends an attractive older boy (aged 19) named Matthew Vale. Caitlin has a crush on him, but Matthew sympathetically asks Caitlin if her classmates called her “Fatty” at school. Caitlin is shocked, thinking she has hidden her body well beneath over sized shirts and skirts. She has new store-bought clothes because she got a job at the magazine Melody Maker. Though she denied her weight as a teenager, and was hurt by Matthew’s question, the adult Caitlin can admit that as a teenager she was fat, mainly because she didn’t exercise or eat healthily. Her entire family is overweight, but no one talks about it. Mid-30s Caitlin also realizes that the word “fat” is a pejorative that ostracizes, and teenage Caitlin was an outcast. Caitlin, though hurt, cheerfully answers Matt’s question, telling him no one ever called her “Fatty” (they called her “Fatso.”)

Just as the adult Caitlin thinks the words “feminist” and “cunt” should be reclaimed, she advocates that people repeat “fat” so often it loses its power. Caitlin thinks the new standard for “normal” (another word she acknowledges as loaded) should be “human-shaped.” If one’s body can be described with a basic shape (her own teenage body was triangular), then likely one should exercise and eat better for one’s health. Caitlin inadvertently became “human-shaped” because of Matthew, whom she spent weekends dancing with in a pub (and smoking, which curbs her appetite). Her dancing days begin a long process of learning to like her body.

Caitlin is disturbed that being fat and over (or under) eating are shameful and secretive activities in modern society. A friend of hers who went to rehab for bulimia admits that the eating disorder patients are the lowest in the social hierarchy of the rehabilitation clinic. Caitlin wonders why pop stars with drug problems are glorified and forgiven for bad behavior, but people with eating disorders are vilified even though they maintain social functionality. She classifies people who are overweight as “carers,” people who don’t have the luxury of screwing up their lives because too many people rely on them, mainly women. She thinks eating disorders should be more discussed; if women acted more like rock stars about their vices, to the point of bragging about them, maybe society as a whole would stop being so obsessed with fat in such a negative way.

Caitlin calls her role at Melody Maker, “The Least Important Person” working for the company, but at sixteen, she has lost weight and can buy clothes for herself. Melody Maker is a music magazine staffed by quirky, passionate misfits. However, besides Caitlin, they are all men. Caitlin has little experience interacting with adults and walks in on her first day smoking a cigarette and offering everyone a shot of Southern Comfort. She believes her new adult lifestyle should also involve losing her virginity, and she is

determined to sleep with as many men as possible while living in London, without getting a “reputation.”

Caitlin tangentially riffs about flirting in the workplace. She acknowledges that most feminists refuse to do it, wishing to succeed to their intellectual merits and not their sexuality. Caitlin believes this is an acceptable and even admirable attitude, but some women, like herself, can’t help but flirt – it is an action without an agenda or sexuality attached to it, as it can be equally aimed at women and animals. She believes flirting is just a way to keep conversations happy for everyone involved. But she claims her career was not built on flirting, as her co-workers saw her as a kid sister and she was repulsed by men over thirty. Still, she believes women should use any advantage they have in the odds-stacked-against-them business sphere, and flirting is as reasonable a tactic for getting ahead as any.

Caitlin explores her sexuality, trying to flirt with men in bars and clubs. She has little success until she bluntly asks men to kiss her. Word about her kissing escapades get around at the office; the music and media industry is insular in London. Caitlin soon becomes uncomfortable with the commentary her co-workers offer on her personal life. She fights fire with fire, and when an editor tells her on sit on his lap in order to discuss a potential cover story, Caitlin, never a small girl, crushes his legs. But she is aware that she has become the victim of sexism, even in an office filled with liberal men who like her.

Twenty years later, Caitlin finds sexism is insidious, rarely overt, but still a daily part of life. Caitlin’s thousands of Twitter followers regale her with their experiences with sexism, both obvious and subtle. It can be difficult to recognize, which makes it harder to fight, such as when men mournfully claim they “just aren’t as good” at housework as their wives, or when a woman who is made redundant is consoled by her boss, who says, “Don’t worry, love – at least you still have great legs” (Page 126). Caitlin suggests that the solution to this is to apply the question, “Is this polite?” to every situation of dubious intent to determine if someone is being sexist. If a woman accuses a man of being “uncivil” it is a dispute between humans rather than genders, and likely to make a man rethink his words more closely. Caitlin doesn’t believe men secretly hate women, or every inter-gender interaction is about sex. She argues it is a question of “winners” and “losers.” Throughout history, men have been stronger and more dominant, and so they naturally look at women as “losers.” There is no historic proof that women are equals; almost every great achievement in human history was achieved by a man. She thinks claiming the successes of ancient women were destroyed by men depletes the case for women; it proves that women can be defeated, and therefore the human race is better off with men in charge.

Returning to Melody Maker in 1993, Caitlin considers how rarely the writers could feature female artists of any significance. The liberal bent of the magazine makes them want to represent women equally, but there simply isn’t quality work to showcase. Caitlin realizes that simply giving women the right to vote did not make them equal. She chalks it up to the physical disparity between genders, which is finally being eased by industrialization (women can easily perform the same jobs as men) and birth control

pills (women are no longer subject to enormous physical consequences simply for enjoying sex as men do). In 1993, Caitlin discusses sexism with her gay friend Charlie, a member of another marginalized, “loser” group. She is irritated because her editor has vetoed an idea for a mainstream piece about the American punk Riot Grrrl movement, in an effort to help it reach the poor girls it could actually inspire, who don’t have access to alternative outlets. Her editor tells her she doesn’t know what it’s like to be fat teenage girl. Caitlin and Charlie share irritation that all the female and gay voices in fiction, on TV and in film, are written (and idealized) by men. Caitlin is frustrated that women in media are never funny. But she decides what she needs to make her life better is a boyfriend.

Analysis

Moran’s discussion of weight in Chapter 6 hinges on a few dubious ideas. She continues to be precise about language and hopes to reclaim “fat” along with “cunt” and “feminist.” While she acknowledges the difficulty, or even inadvisability, in classifying “normal,” her distinction between “human-shaped” and “fat” still implies a judgement on any number of women’s bodies in modern society. Moran’s motives for refusing to say fat can be as attractive as thin may stem from a desire to prod women into better health for their own sakes. She is sympathetic to the forces that conspire to give women eating disorders such as compulsive overeating, an addiction she views as on par with the escapism of drug use. Yet Moran does not argue that all women are beautiful no matter their size; she does not battle the patriarchal pressures that push women to aspire to thinness almost as a necessity. There is something almost prudish about Moran’s attitude, as when she writes, “If you can find a frock you look nice in and can run up three flights of stairs, you’re not fat” (Page 106). Moran returns again and again to the idea that women can use the accessories of fashion to cover up their flaws. As long as they can dress reasonably well, no one needs to see the hideousness that lies beneath, and even those few men who might see a woman naked are “forgiving” (Page 93) enough to not mind what lies beneath a nice dress.

Rather than urging women to celebrate their bodies, Moran advises them to package their bodies well. Moran says that during her obese teenage years she “wasn’t a woman” (Page 106). The implication extends to all obese women; Moran is, perhaps unintentionally, marginalizing fat women and forcing them to identify more with their weight than their gender. This is particularly unfair given that Moran’s obesity may have been linked to her family’s poverty; feeding a family of ten on a tight budget meant buying cheap food, which is generally not healthy. A modern working class woman may face the same dilemma, yet Moran calls into question the womanliness of anyone who does not address her weight issues. Heavy middle class women or upper middle class women may feel just as marginalized, even though they have made peace with their weight and have no interest in subscribing to cultural aesthetics for beauty. Her own weight loss is partially spurred by smoking which leaves her no money for lunch – thin at any cost?

Ultimately, Moran offers sympathy to woman who feel compelled to overeat (she remains almost silent on the topic of other eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia)

but doesn't over solutions beyond trying to open a space for women to discuss their compulsion. She does not want to revolutionize the idea of beauty, or fight to change male aesthetic desires. She simply thinks it's terrible that women feel pushed to food for comfort, but are not allowed to talk about it. Readers may question whether Moran's attitude is truly useful. Is honesty and openness about food addiction enough to turn the tide on it?

On the other hand, Moran's aim, stated early in the text, is simply to start a dialogue about issues that affect women. She wants women to embrace feminism, and by sharing her own experiences, she hopes women will identify and feel safe enough to share their own. Perhaps solutions are simply not on Moran's agenda (though she is not shy about offering up opinions on how to fix things she disagrees with), and this invitation to converse is the step that could lead to solutions created by a community of women. A sense of community is clearly important to Moran, and her narrative voice lends itself to including her readers. She frequently directly addresses her reader with the use of "you," as when she challenges them to say "fat" until it becomes meaningless, or to not waste their lives completely obsessing about the size and shape of their bodies. The book is intimate, as if Moran is speaking individually to each reader.

Moran's position at Melody Maker gives her a chance to leap the class divide at the exceptionally young age of 16; even if she continues to be broke for several years, the tenor of her poverty changes, shifting to a more sophisticated "starving artist" semiotic state. Most people don't rise out of the working class so easily, but Moran makes no effort to explain how she achieved it. She does not attempt to inspire young readers to similar feats by regaling them with her success. Moran's modesty may be admirable, and her self-deprecation as "the least important person" at Melody Maker may be typically English, but her failure to acknowledge the difficulty of what she managed again marginalizes working class women. They might be left with a sense of inadequacy for not similarly bettering their lot. What space do working class women occupy in the modern world? Once Moran ascends to the middle class, she largely leaves their plight behind.

Similarly, because Moran works in a liberal environment she is able to counter acts of sexism boldly – sitting on her boss's lap, humiliating a co-worker who publicly shames her, scoring free drinks off another who hurts her feelings. Most women who encounter sexism could not behave in the same way without risking their jobs. Moran fails to acknowledge that bold women who are powerless (i.e., in the working class or within cultures that systematically subjugate women) are punished for defending themselves. Moran does not offer advice to these women, and again, her silence might marginalize women who most need Moran to speak for them.

Though Moran clearly experienced hardships as a child, her early successes (writing for Melody Maker, The Times, and even hosting a television show about music) make it hard to see her life as a struggle. Perhaps her tone fuels this view as well, as Moran remains ever optimistic and never seems too upset by anything she experiences. Readers should consider whether a "protagonist," even in the realm of nonfiction, needs to struggle and overcome concrete obstacles in order to be sympathetic? Moran is

undoubtedly likable, but is the credibility of her story diminished by the ease with which she breezes through life? Is she doing feminism a disservice by keeping the tone so light that even the times when she experiences sexism seem more like jokes than problems?

Moran's opinion on flirting in Chapter 5 mirrors her rant about hiring female house cleaners: because she herself engages in it, she thinks it is acceptable. She acknowledges that many feminists don't want to use their sexuality in any way for advancement, but Moran cheerfully wouldn't mind if flirting helped her career, though it never has. Moran spends three pages on the issue of flirting, and as with the housekeeping, it seems more defensive than a genuinely well thought out feminist position. Moran sums up her opinion with, "Find [flirting] an easy way to just crack on? Then crack on— and don't blame other women for doing it. Well, not to their faces, anyway. Bitching in the bathroom is always allowed, of course" (Page 120). Here again, Moran's attempt at humor may backfire into diluting her argument. She encourages women to do what they think is right with regards to flirting, but implies they shouldn't be surprised if other women judge them for it.

Vocabulary

adjudicator, lithe, stoic,imperious, subvert, nubile, replete, consensual, cogent, soporific, appellation, retinue, antediluvian, recrimination, demur, rudimentary, curtail, diffuse, pernicious, uncouth, disparity, eschew, disseminate

Chapters 8 - 9: I Am in Love! I Go Lapdancing!

Summary

In 1994, Caitlin is dating a musician named Courtney. She thinks he is “The One,” despite the fact that he treats her poorly, criticizes her weight, her writing, and makes her unhappy. Courtney’s band has had little success because he is lazy and egotistical, and Courtney moves into Caitlin’s house without helping to pay the bills. Caitlin smokes marijuana to cope. Even though she hosts a late night television show called Naked City, Caitlin is overwhelmed by self-loathing, both because of Courtney’s treatment of her as well as the public’s. Caitlin becomes homesick and uses her co-worker Pete Paphides as a comforting soundboard, sharing her problems with him. She doesn’t end her relationship with Courtney because she “believes in feeling bad for love” (Page 139).

Caitlin moves from the discussion of this first relationship to a discourse on women and love; she claims, “love is a woman’s work” (Page 139), and notes how throughout history, the greatest tragedy that could befall a woman is to be unloved. For this reason, Caitlin doesn’t blame women for being obsessed with relationships, and she describes how compulsively women over think and try to predict the arc of potential relationships. As a teenager, Caitlin fantasizes an entire romantic tragedy about a famous comedian, and when she meets him years later, she has to restrain herself from discussing their miscarried baby. She believes women’s capacity for fantasy is part of evolution, allowing women to consider possible mates without wasting their limited fertile time on them. She worries women sometimes can’t distinguish reality from fantasy, particularly when women over analyze disinterested male behavior to bend it into the shape of love. Women over think bad relationships; but, with the right man, they are quiet, because they are simply happy and living their lives.

In 1994, Caitlin is boring everyone with her analysis of Courtney. She is particularly boring her sister Caz, whom she vents to late at night via phone. No matter how loyal Caitlin is to Courtney, he is indifferent to her. Even when she discovers in Courtney’s diary that he is only dating Caitlin to make career connections, she still cannot end their relationship. She tries to win him over by making a reservation at a fancy restaurant – which Courtney misses, because he is getting drunk with his band. Caitlin finally gets irritated with him, and they get into a drunk screaming match that leads to a late night visit from the police. Caitlin doesn’t like herself around Courtney, so she decides to end their relationship, but he refuses to leave, not wanting to give up free accommodation in a nice neighborhood.

Caitlin decides to try to fix things by going away for a weekend with Courtney. They travel to Wales to hang out while friends of Courtney’s are recording an album. Caitlin invites her sister Caz, who calls Courtney out for criticizing Caitlin, right down to the way

she laughs. Caitlin deals with her embarrassment by getting drunk and taking ecstasy, while her boyfriend irritates everyone with his pretensions about being a musician. Caitlin and Caz reconnect, acting goofy with maracas and agreeing that Courtney is a jerk. They watch the musicians and Caitlin realizes she is trying too hard to fit in. When Courtney asks them to be quiet, Caitlin announces she is changing the locks on her house in London.

In Chapter 9, it is the year 2000, and Caitlin accompanies her friend Vicky to a strip club called Spearmint Rhino where Vicky is researching a journalistic piece on the resurgence of stripping for the Evening Standard. Strip clubs have become socially acceptable by the end of the 1990s, with prominent women like the Spice Girls attending. Caitlin refuses to go with Vicky based on her "feminist principles," until Vicky tells her there will be free champagne. Caitlin is surprised by the entitlement with which men enter the club, entirely lacking in shame. Caitlin and Vicky spend the evening chatting as if they were simply in the pub. By 1:00 am they are drunk and a bouncer tries to force them out of the club; he thinks they are prostitutes. This sours the experience for Caitlin, who calls strip clubs "arenas of abuse," but Vicky philosophically points out that they will both write good articles from the experience.

Caitlin finds the concept of strip clubs "impolite," to return to her interchangeable phrase for sexist. Men have never had to take off their clothes as a means for paying for a higher education (one argument in favor of stripping), so women shouldn't either. Men are physically stronger and attracted to women, so women have been subject to their whims for millennia; even today, raping one's wife is still legal in many countries. Caitlin thinks strip clubs bring out the worst in everyone, both men and women, because they are joyless. The strippers are resentful and bitter, and the men view them as objects for sale. Iceland outlawed strip clubs in 2010, and Caitlin would like to see the rest of the world follow their lead. Caitlin believes pole dancing classes are acceptable, or doing a strip tease for one's partner; the rule of thumb for her is that the women must enjoy whatever they are doing. Similarly, Caitlin finds burlesque a joyful and smart form of entertainment, because the women are individuals with names and jokes, who perform as highlighted entertainment for an audience, not simply as background naked bodies.

Analysis

Moran proclaims, "Along with underwear, love is a woman's work," essentially tying women to the stereotype that romantic relationships are of paramount importance to them. She supports this thesis with anecdotal evidence about her own and some friends' obsessive thought patterns about potential partners. She refers to this fantasizing as "previously concealed levels of female insanity" (Page 140), yet this statement is more damaging than humorous. Moran postulates that all women participate in this speculative fantasizing, and if that is the case, isn't this behavior absolutely normal for women? Why should it be disturbing to either women or men if all women do it? It should not be qualified as "good" or "bad," but simply human behavior. Moran is generally so careful with language, deconstructing the semiotic associations of

“bachelor” versus “spinster,” that these moments where she goes for the cheap laugh stand out as incongruous.

Chapter 8 is less driven by diatribe than storytelling, a slight shift from the structure and tone of previous chapters. Moran is simply recounting the tale of her first, misguided failure at love. It is a universal human experience, but Moran recognizes she cannot coax women out of it. It simply has to be lived through, and learned from. A soured romance isn’t simply the result of patriarchal oppression, though women are made to feel bad for being single, so an unhappy relationship is better than no relationship. Similarly, women are generally raised to try to please, so in a negative relationship, women frequently absorb all the blame, as if they are not working hard enough to make the love work. As Moran writes about her relationship with Courtney, “The problem is that I am the problem” (Page 146). But still, Moran does not urge readers to look for red flags early, or criticize women who stay with men who use them far longer than they should. Unlike pubic hair and strip clubs, bad relationships can’t simply be solved and completely avoided in the future.

In Chapter 9, regarding strip clubs, Moran writes, “In Britain, the mid-nineties have been all about the rediscovery of the British working class’s monochrome tropes— pubs, greyhound racing, anoraks, football in the park, bacon sandwiches, “birds”— and strip clubs come under this heading” (Page 158). This is one of the few times Moran addresses issues of class directly, though she indicates that by participating in these pastimes, the middle class is simply “slumming” it. Crucially, Moran judges both the men and the women harshly, admonishing, “One doesn’t want to be as blunt as to say, “Girls, get the fuck off the podium—you’re letting us all down,” but: Girls, get the fuck off the podium— you’re letting us all down.” (Page 163). Moran refuses to accept that strippers can be empowered by their work, using the money they earn to fund university degrees. She believes if men don’t need to take off their clothes in order to earn an education, women should not either. Moran’s principles may be correct and good intentioned, but she fails to concede that women most likely don’t want to strip to pay for school, they simply do not have other options. Again, Moran is (however unintentionally) marginalizing the working class, alienating them because they don’t have easy access to money and education. A working class girl can’t afford an education, so her hypothetical options are minimum wage work or stripping. Minimum wage jobs will oppress a woman for decades, ensuring she never gets an education, a fulfilling career, or a home of her own. While one wouldn’t want to necessarily advocate for women to strip, Moran judges those who choose to do so harshly. She criticizes strip clubs for failing to give women opportunities for “self-expression or joy” (Page 163), but doesn’t acknowledge these two abstract ideas are the luxury of those with expendable income. Moran denounces the system but offers no concrete alternatives for women who are in financial duress to achieve their goals.

Readers will note that Moran referenced Chapter 9 and her session at the strip club in the chapter on underwear, describing how she and Vicky were mesmerized by a stripper in part because of her beautiful underwear. This cross referencing is indicative of a feminine narrative style, in which women make meaningful connections across

seemingly unrelated subjects, as well as jumping into and out of stories rather than telling them in a single, linear narrative.

Vocabulary

ardent, maudlin, rationalize, postulate,febrile, benign, dolorous, equivocate, cavalcade, interminable, supercilious, sapphic, androgyny, edify, ersatz, putative, discombobulate, regale, wry, explicit, deferential, fallacious, behoove, eschew, libertine

Chapters 10 - 11: I Get Married! I Get Into Fashion!

Summary

Caitlin begins Chapter 10 with a rant on behalf of her sister Caz, who has been in multiple weddings, each an expensive, complicated, and tedious affair, often involving traveling to distant locations (such as camping on a pig farm) and mediocre food. Caitlin believes weddings as a whole are bad for women, and women are to blame. Her first gripe with weddings is the cost: tens of thousands of dollars which could go toward something permanent, like a house. She finds it problematic that a wedding is the best day of a woman's life – not a man's, or any of the guests – as if this is the pinnacle of female accomplishment.

At the age of twenty-four, Caitlin herself inflicts a painful wedding on those she loves: she invites everyone to a monastery in Coventry, two days after Christmas. It is inconvenient in every way. She briefly describes her life post-Courtney: she spends a month in 1996 exploring her sexuality with a variety of men, all the while recounting her antics in a weekly dinner with Pete from Melody Maker. By mid-February, the romping around London had waned, and Caitlin feels restless, as if something is missing from her life. She has a dream about an endless upward journey on an escalator, made okay by the presence of Pete, and she wakes up realizing she is in love with him.

Caitlin and Pete plan a cheap wedding – a visit to a registry office and a party in a pub – but Pete's parents want something more grandiose and Caitlin capitulates after reading too many bridal magazines; she winds up in a red velvet dress in Coventry. She recounts her wedding as spectacularly bad; her father's final words to her before walking down the aisle are "Remember you're a womble," a reference to a popular 1970's children's song. Everyone gets drunk and acts out. The reception ends with a fire alarm forcing the guests into the cold. Caitlin discovers her siblings set off the smoke detector by smoking pot in their hotel room.

Despite her terrible wedding, Caitlin prides herself on having avoided a bachelorette party, which is another disservice women do to each other. Her sister Caz has particularly borne the brunt of terrible "hen dos," as they are called in England. Caitlin further decides women should stop trying to bring together everyone they love for a wedding. She has embarrassed herself at the weddings of friends by mingling badly with their families; she once spilled red wine all over the white décor of a friend's parents' house, only to try to clean it up using a bottle of expensive white wine.

Finally. Caitlin thinks weddings are bad for women because of women themselves. First, weddings set women up for failure – expectations that high are destined to be disappointed. Second, the obsession with weddings makes women's interests seem small. Women's petty desire to feel like a celebrity, combined with the day representing

the pinnacle of their life's achievement, oppresses women. Men don't view weddings as the height of their success. After the wedding, women dissolve into lists of self-improvement and housework, placated by having had one day for themselves. Caitlin wonders if perhaps marriage should be abolished completely.

In Chapter 11, Caitlin analyzes fashion. At age twenty-four, Caitlin has been broke for two years paying off income tax she didn't realize she owed. She considers a dress that costs less than $20 as a frivolous expense. Her husband points out that most women spend a lot of money on new clothes, and Caitlin realizes this might be a way she is "not being a proper woman" (Page 191). She decides to work harder at fashion. This leads her down a rabbit hole in which each choice requires myriad other purchases to accessorize the first item of clothing.

Caitlin dislikes high heels in particular. At twenty-four she decides to follow the advice of fashion magazines and buy heels in order to be taken seriously. The first pair she buys (blue jelly sandals) result in her spilling a drink on a famous musician from Blur. She still amasses a collection of heels that make her weepy and clumsy, left unworn under her bed. Her twelve or so pair of useless shoes is small compared to her friends' collections. She wants women to admit they can't walk in heels, and to give up trying. But she knows this won't happen. She believes women wear heels in order to make their legs look thinner, while men loathe heels because they make men feel small. At thirty-five, Caitlin has given up wearing heels, and prefers comfortable, functional men's shoes, which allow her to dance and run from murderers.

Caitlin's other gripe is with handbags. Women's fashion magazines make her feel inadequate, despite all her accomplishments, because she hasn't purchased an "investment handbag" for hundreds of dollars. She worries that people are judging her based on her £45 bag. She visits eBay to find a good deal, but finds all the expensive bags ugly. She continues to feel poorly and lower class, until she buys a £225 silver purse, which almost immediately gets stolen. She settles on a £25 handbag and decides what is inside it is more important than how much it cost: tissues, eyeliner, safety pins, biscuits.

Women are judged based on what they wear in a way men can't understand. Caitlin claims clothes determine how a woman gets treated before she opens her mouth. In a worst case scenario women's clothes are blamed for sexual assault. Women obsess about clothes because they want to ensure they are sending the right message on any given day. On the other hand, women are frequently unhappy with their wardrobes because buying mass-produced clothing means nothing is made specifically for a woman's particular body and personality. Caitlin experiences this first-hand during an eight-hour photo shoot for The Times that leaves her crying and ashamed. The photos come out well, but do not indicate the time it takes to find a pose that suits the clothes (not Caitlin). The stylist admits that even models can't stand in heels. Caitlin realizes fashion is more about a tableaux than life, and little of it is functional for people in the real world. Caitlin has her own rules for fashion: leopard print, red, and silver lame are neutrals; belts are bad; and don't buy something you can't afford.

Analysis

In Chapter 10, Moran analyzes all the ways weddings are bad for women – weddings are a problem women create for themselves. Speaking about the exorbitant cost of weddings, Moran is once again marginalizing a section of the female population who could never dream of having a destination wedding. Her ideas of what is important to women is frequently limited to the middle or upper class. Though her approach is geared toward the day-to-day absurdities that face women (this allows her to keep the tone light and humorous), she fails at being truly inclusive; working class women likely face a slew of misogynies and hardships Moran does not address, which almost makes it seem like their struggles are less important.

As with her discuss of strippers in the previous chapter, Moran's judgement of women and weddings is universal and harsh. She does not offer exceptions to her proclamation that weddings are bad for women. Though her argument that women should believe in their own abilities enough to expect to achieve more than getting married, she does not allow for women who like to do "girly" things like look at dresses, taste test cake, and hang out with their girlfriends. Moran finds certain "girly" things acceptable about being a woman – caring about one's hair, buying beautiful, expensive underwear – but weddings are not on Moran's "acceptable" feminine activities list. Though her brand of feminism is more informal and possibly feminine than previous incarnations, Moran still offers harsh criticism of women who enjoy the "feminine" things Moran herself has distaste for. If Moran simply argued for moderation (the fact that the average wedding costs $35,000 seems extreme) there would still be space at her feminist table for a range of women, but the fact that her final statement on the subject is that perhaps marriage itself should be abolished indicates women who are excited at the prospect of getting married and having a wedding may feel alienated and left out of Moran's conversation, too embarrassed to admit their true feelings. Although Moran keeps arguing women should be true to themselves, that seems limited to only if you agree with her.

Moran claims, "Being a woman is very, very expensive" (Page 172) because besides things like tampons and child care women need good haircuts so they don't feel "naked." Moran is making a broad generalization for the sake of a joke, something she does frequently in her rants. Yet she creates a perplexing double standard: generalizations are acceptable when one is trying to get a laugh, but not acceptable when men use them to oppress or marginalize women. She is allowed to use them because she wants to be funny, but men can't use them. Readers should question whether Moran's use of generalizations is useful to her argument. Should they be forgiven, because Moran uses them slyly, or do they create just as many problems and reinforce misogynistic attitudes, albeit inadvertently?

Moran describes the time between her boyfriend Courtney and her settling into a relationship with Pete as one of rampant and easy sexual exploration. Moran's presentation of female sexuality is positive and liberal, existing in a space where women and men are fully sexual equals. Though earlier she had briefly worried about "getting a

reputation" about her sexual activity, Moran does not present it as a real anxiety that caused her to modify her behavior. She has no sexual hang-ups, and no problem with having sex without dating. Because of her own experiences, Moran glosses over an issue that faces many women: a sense of shame surrounding sexuality. While her own attitudes are worthy of emulation, she may unintentionally marginalize women who don't feel as free to use their bodies as they wish. In today's culture of "slut-shaming" Moran fails to address an issue that in particular affects teenage girls who are just starting to learn "how to be a woman." Perhaps attitudes toward sex are simply more tolerant in England than in America, but the fact that she briefly mentions "reputations" indicates Moran knows there is an issue here, but she never faces it head on.

Moran's discussion of weddings and the subsequent chapter about fashion links womanhood strongly to consumerism. At the age of twenty-four, Caitlin has not purchased an elaborate wardrobe, so she feels, "I'm not being a proper woman" (Page 191). Being a woman is intricately tied to having possessions – and frequently, the "right" possessions, the best brands, the most expensive products. Femininity can only be expressed through spending money. Moran presents an interesting, paradoxical position towards consumerism. On the one hand, she argues vociferously against elaborate, expensive weddings (though she herself got to have one). She doesn't believe women should buy expensive high heels or handbags. The amount of money spent on such accessories baffles her, though she admits the seductiveness of glossy women's magazines that make women feel insecure about not owning such items (Moran, however, does not take on the magazines that help erode a woman's sense of self, though they are certainly a day-to-day inescapable part of female life).

On the other hand, Moran is still swept up enough in the idea that women need "things" to feel like women that she documents a list of her own, albeit cheaper, recommendations. She uses her disinterest in handbags to proudly reaffirm that she is "resolutely of the underclass" (Page 200), yet she still urges women to spend money (money the underclass likely doesn't have) to feel good about themselves – she recommends everyone buy a particular style of 1950s dress because there is no body type that looks bad in it. It seems consumerism is so embedded for Moran that it doesn't occur to her that women shouldn't buy things to make themselves feel more attractive. Indeed, Moran seems resigned to the idea that "How women look is considered generally interchangeable with who we are— and, therefore, often goes on to dictate what will happen to us next" (Page 203). Moran offers no advice for how to combat this, makes no effort to suggest a revolution in which what women wear does NOT matter. It does matter to Moran, and the best she can hope for is women find clothes that they feel reflect their personality, hide the imperfections of their bodies, and suit their budget. This is certainly a new brand of feminism, that accepts and allows fashion to be important to women, and does little to fight any patriarchal assumptions of how a woman "should" look.

Vocabulary

ineffectual, emulsify, fidelity,insidious, ineffable, supercilious, funereal, lethargic, raucous, expenditure, capricious, dysmorphia, potent, mollify, covet, inverse, incessant, intrinsic, schism, vexation,demoralize, lambaste

Chapters 12 - 13: Why You Should Have Children, Why You Shouldn't Have Children

Summary

In Chapter 12, Caitlin describes giving birth to her two daughters. Her mother gave birth to eight children, several of which left her with hemorrhages or pinched nerves. Caitlin develops an irrational fear of giving birth because of her mother's experiences, which leads her to deny that she can even do it. She refuses to believe that her cervix will open, and she stays willfully ignorant of the birthing process. When her contractions start, she learns her baby is in the posterior position, and she must go to the hospital, despite planning a home birth with a midwife. Caitlin's contractions stop, and her cervix does not open on its own; she continues to think birthing is magic and she is simply not a magician. After three days of failed labor, Caitlin has an emergency caesarean section, and her daughter Lizzie is born.

Going through the enormous pain of Lizzie's birth gives Caitlin the perspective to stop letting life's little inconveniences bother her. She continuously feels the high of having survived the torturous birth without dying. She believes the pain of birth turns a girl into a woman, and she is able to live life with much less fear afterward. Caitlin compares raising children to war, but still finds it the most rewarding, joyful experience of her life. She is amazed by her own capacity to love. But rather than simply focusing on the selfless aspect of that love, Caitlin reviews how raising children has benefited her. She is much better at using time productively. Her children make her more ambitious, wanting to leave a legacy her daughters will be proud of. Motherhood makes Caitlin believes nothing is impossible, and nothing can faze her.

By the time Caitlin gets pregnant again, two years later, she is confident and better prepared. She takes care of herself physically, and she attends birthing classes so her body's processes won't seem mysterious. She knows birth won't kill her, that the pain she experiences is part of the process, so she doesn't fight it. She walks around the hospital, breathing through her contractions, until finally her daughter Nancy slides out in the birthing pool with minimal pushing from Caitlin. Caitlin is overjoyed to have learned that giving birth is so easy.

In Chapter 13, Caitlin argues the reverse side; despite her joy in her own children, she does not think women should feel compelled to have children in order to fulfill their worth. She understands that despite the work of raising kids, it is often easier to have them than to not, because a woman without children will constantly be asked, "When are you going to?" The world pressures women about their "biological clock;" because woman have limited fertile years, people assume women need to have babies "now" whether they want them or not. Caitlin muses that the question is generally "when" not

“do you want” children. Caitlin herself was asked about having children at the age of 18. As a journalist, she asked her interviewees the same question because of editorial pressure.

Caitlin postulates that women (particularly celebrities) are asked this question because people want to mark when they are going to disappear from their successful lives – an issue that is never presented to men, who can have children and continue on with careers. Society decries women who choose not to have children as selfish; there is a prevailing attitude that childless women are somehow “incomplete.” Women cannot actually be women if they haven’t gone through the transformational wisdom-inducing process of birth. Older women are devalued in general, and those who don’t become mothers are even more worthless.

Caitlin disagrees wholeheartedly with this implicit societal belief. She argues that the world is populated enough without everyone reproducing, particularly in first world countries that produce high resource-consuming children. In addition, mothers become less involved in current affairs; this means useful, ambitious people are no longer helping the world as a whole as they care for a single child. Caitlin believes women can learn just as much about life by experiencing people, places, and things rather than simply through the motherhood. Women without children help prove that women are valuable as people rather than simply as mothers, and that being “thinking, creative, and productive,” (Page 238) is enough to demonstrate a woman’s worth.

Analysis

Moran goes for inclusion in Chapters 12 and 13 when she celebrates the dichotomy of motherhood/childlessness. Earlier generations of feminists pushed women out of the domestic sphere and into the workplace. They argued that there was more to womanhood than “being a mother.” For all their fighting, the decision not to have children is still harshly judged by a large segment of society, as is the decision to be a “stay at home” mom. The issue is a double edged sword, and Moran tries to examine - and argue in favor of - both choices.

Moran herself has two children and calls motherhood the most transformational experience of her life; the pain of giving birth took her from being a girl to being a woman immediately. Moran speaks so fondly about being a mother that her arguments in favor of remaining childless unintentionally pale in comparison. She lists the things motherhood can teach a woman: “Yes, you could learn thousands of interesting things about love, strength, faith, fear, human relationships, genetic loyalty” (Page 237) but insists these lessons can come to a childless woman via “reading the 100 greatest books in human history; learning a foreign language well enough to argue in it; climbing hills; loving recklessly; sitting quietly, alone, in the dawn ; drinking whiskey with revolutionaries; learning to do close-hand magic; swimming in a river in winter; growing foxgloves , peas, and roses; calling your mum; singing while you walk; being polite; and always, always helping strangers” (Page 237 - 238). Somehow these alternative options seem petty compared to motherhood. Moran frequently tells women not to do things she

herself has done – have a wedding (or possibly even get married), go to strip clubs, wax one's pubic hair, have children – but when she has performed these tasks fairly successfully, it weakens her argument. Despite how vociferously she rants that motherhood is not the quintessential experience of womanhood, readers might find the arguments hollow, and wonder what it says about twenty-first century feminism that women still feel so much pressure to have children.

As with most topics Moran covers, the anxiety surrounding having/not having children is culturally based. It is a "first world problem." There are many cultures in the world where women are still strongly tied to the domestic sphere and birthing children is essentially obligatory. She makes an odd qualitative judgement that western women should procreate less because western babies consume more of the world's natural resources – yet she fails to consider that "third world" mothers may lack even the simplest resources of food and access to medicine required to care for their children properly. She makes no effort to investigate what issues might face a woman living in an impoverished nation, but supports all women's right to "choose" whether or not to have a child. Even amongst western cultures, access to birth control is not always simple or cheap. The working class are more likely to face accidental pregnancies with no means to terminate them, so the question of "Should I or shouldn't I?" is moot. Moran's ideas of womanhood are tied to her own specific moment in a specific culture. Despite her desire for inclusion, there are still women even in England who would not identify with her arguments. Furthermore, as an upper middle class woman with a large supportive family, Moran has access to childcare services unavailable to many women. Though she never mentions the use of a nanny, Moran has been able to continue writing and publishing (and leaving a "legacy") while raising her two daughters, because she has the support of her husband, and the babysitting skills of her childless sister Caz. Moran does not acknowledge how much more difficult her life would be if she were a single mother who could not earn her living by working from home. She has a narrow perspective on womanhood.

One important aspect of Moran's feminism that differs from previous incarnations of the political movement is that Moran is resoundingly "pro-man." She does not believe that raising women up requires diminishing men, and she admires the many ways men themselves are "feminist." She writes, "The reason they don't ask men when they're having kids, of course, is because men can, pretty much, carry on as normal once they've had a baby… Millions of admirable men choose not to, obviously—they go, hand in hand, with their partners, and cut the sleeplessness and the fear and the exhaustion and the remorselessness of the birdlike squawking 50/ 50. As a result, I fancy them" (Page 233). Moran implicitly acknowledges that antagonizing the opposite gender (who still have most of the power) is not going to help the cause for women. She is much more careful about not making broad generalizations about men than she is about women, only pointing out "good" male behavior. Moran's tone is never vengeful or militant. Even in moments when she is irritated, she cuts her anger with humor, negating any sense of aggression.

Each chapter title prior to Chapter 12 ends in an exclamation point, but the final five chapter titles receive no punctuation. Readers should try to note whether Moran's tone

shifts with this punctuation shift. Are the final chapters more serious and less exuberant than the first eleven? Is Moran getting into issues that are more important and significant to the fundamental concept of “how to be a woman”? Does Moran set up different expectations with the simple use of this punctuation? Chapters 12 and 13 have the same humorous, ranting tone as readers see throughout, highlighting Moran’s ineptitude even at giving birth. Perhaps she merely wanted to ease readers into the shift that comes with the upcoming chapter entitled “Abortion,” where an exclamation point would have been inappropriate – though given Moran’s thoroughly pro-choice views, it seems almost hypocritical to give the issue such gravitas.

Vocabulary

recalcitrant, arduous, prise, intravenous, compunction, pugilism, mettle, winsome, profligacy, superlative, doleful, ephemeral, aphorism, ostensible, dilettante, dispiritment, shambolic, pertinent, extraneous, inconducive, anomaly, insurgency, undulate

Chapters 14 - 15: Role Models and What We Do With Them, Abortion

Summary

In Chapter 14, Caitlin argues that celebrity culture is the best way to judge broad social attitudes towards women. The constant output of newspapers, magazines and the internet allows one to gauge how successfully women are struggling toward equality. The rise of “cougars” (older women who date significantly younger men) but also plastic surgery sends conflicting messages. Caitlin admits that her own instinctive reactions to photos of women in magazines reflects the difficulty of overcoming society’s imposed gender constructs: she’ll denounce a celebrity’s red carpet fashion and hair at the same time she is irked that media judges women based on their appearance.

Caitlin examines the case of an English celebrity named Katie Price, who became famous for topless modeling and stayed famous by continually marketing herself (often via a sexual portrayal) as a commodity. In the mid 2000s, the media claim she is the next feminist icon because of her successful business ventures. Caitlin interviews Katie in 2006 for Elle magazine, and finds Katie mean-spirited, vapid, and completely self-absorbed. She can speak of little more than a desire to film a mascara advertisement. Caitlin is irritated that Katie’s press representative wants to sell information regarding Katie’s bra size to another magazine as an “exclusive.” Caitlin argues that just because Katie Price has earned a lot of money does not make her a feminist role model. She has earned her money by catering to men’s desire for a sexy woman, and thus she plays into sexism rather than fighting it.

By 2010 Katie Price’s popularity begins to diminish as smart, creative women whose status doesn’t revolve around relationships with men begin to flourish. Caitlin hopes that nearly a century after getting the vote and processing millennia of oppression, women are finally beginning to have the self-assurance to create successful art and businesses on the strength of their intellect and not their bodies. Caitlin thinks pop music, in its immediacy, showcases the rise of female artistry. Nearly 20 years after Melody Maker struggled to put female musicians on their cover, there is a glut that is hard for media to keep up with.

For Caitlin, the ultimate role model of this new era is Lady Gaga, who uses her sexuality to disturb rather than to titillate. Lady Gaga’s popularity includes space for those on society’s margins, because Gaga herself is strange and avant garde, while also being talented and having mass appeal. Caitlin interviews Gaga in 2010 as she is being celebrated as another feminist icon, a next generation, politically active Madonna. Gaga invites Caitlin to a sex club in Berlin where they drink, dance, and discuss how feminism doesn’t equate to hating men. Caitlin believes Gaga’s music is not about turning men on but rather exploring her own feelings and sexuality. Women need non-judgmental

spaces to create in, and Gaga has created her own that also encompasses all her marginalized fans, gay and straight, women and men.

The media uses photos from the same night to negate Gaga's power by fabricating stories about her "health problems." Caitlin finds media coverage of female celebrities "reductionist and damaging" (Page 256), preying on any sign of weakness, tearing women apart based on a single photo taken at a bad angle. Some media outlets argue that pointing out celebrities' imperfections humanizes them, but Caitlin finds it mean-spirited, demonstrating to young readers that no matter how hard one works, one will still be judged based on your appearance. Successful women don't need humanizing because they have earned the right to seem superior. Caitlin wonders if the global media is simply acting like a "total bitch" (Page 260).

In Chapter 15, Caitlin discusses abortion. Caitlin is still breastfeeding her second daughter when she discovers she is pregnant again. Caitlin imagines this is the gay son she always wanted, making a grand and unexpected entrance. But without skipping a beat Caitlin calls her husband and decides to have an abortion. This is not a hard decision for them because they are not prepared to give up another few years of their lives and careers to raise a baby. They have the children they want and they do not want to be fettered by a third.

Caitlin ruminates on the idea that women must express a sense of tragedy about abortions, even when they themselves have had one; society views abortion as inherently wrong no matter how liberal it seems. Women who choose abortion with no extenuating circumstances (such as rape or health issues) are judged more harshly, and those judged harshest of all are mothers, as if women who already have children should have an unlimited supply of maternal love. Caitlin's own children reinforce for her that having an unwanted child is the worst thing a human could do; unwanted children end up violently destroying lives. She rails against the political and religious arguments discrediting abortion rather than allowing women to articulate the personal experiences that demonstrate how necessary abortion is. Women are silent about their abortions; even women who write in favor of abortion are afraid to admit they've had one, for fear it will negate their argument. Caitlin had a miscarriage before her wedding, despite wanting the baby; her body wasn't ready for it. Caitlin trusts her mind as much as her body to know what she needs.

The Catholic hospital where Caitlin gave birth refuses to perform an abortion, so she and her husband must travel outside of London to an Essex clinic. Pete is completely supportive of Caitlin's decision. Because she is still breastfeeding, Caitlin can't afford to be fully anesthetized, so she has a procedure which will allow her to get home that day. Caitlin experiences a moment of panic as she is called in for the abortion, but she recognizes it as fear and trusts she is making the right decision. The procedure is more painful than she expected. She finds it violent and imprecise as they destroy the fetus with a speculum and then vacuum it out. She spends forty minutes is a "Recovery Room" with an older woman who hasn't stopped crying since she sat in the waiting room. There is also an Irish girl who had to travel all the way to England because abortion is still illegal in her country.

Despite her discomfort, Caitlin's story ends happily. She experiences none of the anticipated psychological after-effects; she does not feel sorrowful on the theoretical birthday or get jealous of friends with newborns. She is simply grateful for her choice, and her ability to sleep through the night, do her work, and love her two daughters fiercely and without dilution. Caitlin feels she has been misled: made to believe her body would rebel against her for this "unnatural" act of failing to let it fulfil its purpose. This is not the case, and Caitlin is glad that she did as women have done for centuries: taking care of a mistake before it ruined her life, and getting on with the business of living as she sees fit.

Analysis

In Chapter 14, Moran presents a very subjective interpretation of celebrity culture and how women can and can't use their sexuality as a means for achieving their ambitions. She criticizes Katie Price harshly; Moran thinks her topless modeling and extreme self-obsession in marketing herself is the antithesis of feminism, writing, "Women who, in a sexist world, pander to sexism to make their fortune are Vichy France with tits…you're doing business with a decadent and corrupt regime" (Page 245). These women are allowing men to keep the power, to pigeonhole women as purely sexual beings created for a man's pleasure. Moran expresses the satisfaction of schadenfreude that Price publicly falls from grace. On the other hand, she finds it acceptable that an artist like Lady Gaga seeks attention and self-promotes, and even uses her sexuality, because Moran thinks she does it to provoke and disturb, rather than turn men on. Lady Gaga proves women have value, and Katie Price does not. Moran is setting up specific rules for "how to be a woman" with these judgements. Women who have talent and can use it promote feminism even as they get rich off of it. But what about women without talent?

As with her discussion of strip clubs, Moran does not invite to the table women who have few options for getting ahead beyond their sexuality. Furthermore, she makes a sweeping generalization that men do not get aroused by Lady Gaga. Moran's arguments are intensely personal responses. In her desire to avoid a dry academic tome, she delves so deeply into the anecdotal as to be almost meaningless. She mentions a number of other female pop stars who are doing astounding work (Rihanna, Beyonce, Kate Perry) and brushes them broadly as good for feminism, despite the fact that many of them traffic in their own sexuality, no matter what talent they may have. Here Moran seems to miss her own earlier point, "these are all things that have simply INVOLVED WOMEN and have nothing to do with the political movement "feminism"" (Page 80). These examples do not necessarily speak to a greater cultural movement, and they aren't necessarily feminist; indeed, the media coverage of Rihanna's domestic abuse scandal with singer Chris Brown demonstrates that women are still not being treated fairly, no matter how successful they are. The use of these anecdotes also means Moran's book will quickly become dated (likely the Rihana/Chris Brown incident occurred after it was published). Moran's writing style and focus reflects her roots as a newspaper and magazine reporter, where today's trends will be quickly forgotten tomorrow. Will Moran's book be relevant in even a single decade? Perhaps Moran has no grand illusions of being remembered for posterity, and is simply creating a snapshot

of feminism in the year 2010. By noting how far women have come, they can also see how far they still have to go.

In Chapter 15, Moran tackles the controversial topic of abortion. Structurally, this chapter might have been better placed after the two chapters relating to birth and motherhood, rather than separating them with a light, odd tangent into celebrity culture. Moran deals with her own abortion, frankly and clearly. She does not sugarcoat it – it may have been a simple decision, and she may not regret it, but the procedure itself was painful to the point of punishing. In fact, her graphic description of her abortion might seem like an implicit argument against other women doing it. However, she describes her births in just as much detail. Moran is simply using the idea of full, raw disclosure as a technique for establishing credibility. She earns the readers' trust by admitting the procedure is terrible, but it was still the right decision for her. Dealing with a topic as personal and judgement-inducing as abortion, this trust between author and reader is of the utmost importance.

Furthermore, Moran's willingness to tell her story is significant; as she points out, even well-known women who advocate for reproductive rights rarely tell the story of their own, for fear of losing credibility, and "invalidating" their argument because they're speaking from too personal a place. Moran wants to counteract that trend. She writes, "Across the world, women are doing what they have always done throughout history: dealing with a potentially life-altering or life-threatening crisis, and then not talking about it afterward. In case anyone near to them— those people who are not bleeding, and who have not just had an abortion— get upset" (Page 270). If part of her agenda is to open a dialogue with women about the real things that affect them, by being the first to admit that she has gone through this decision and process, she opens a space for women to feel comfortable telling their own stories. In essence, Moran is putting her money where her mouth is. It is an extension of her desire to repeat words like "feminism," "cunt," and "fat." Through open discussions of abortion, society can become normalized to the idea and make it less of a taboo. This will in turn stop the unspoken judgement attached to abortion even in societies where it is legal.

On the other hand, Moran again writes from her position in a liberal, relatively non-religious First World nation. Even in England, abortions might not be affordable or accessible to all classes of women. Moran's agenda seems limited; she wants women to feel comfortable speaking about abortions they have already had. She wants these women to not feel less secure in their womanhood because they made this choice – having abortions, throughout history, has been an unspoken part of being a woman. But she is not agitating for better, safe abortion rights across the globe. She is still excluding parts of the population whose lives look very different from her own.

Moran avoids one of the most complicated questions of all: women who are anti-abortion. She acknowledges that society as a whole implicitly frowns on abortion, but what of women who think abortion is immoral? Do they have a seat at Moran's feminist table? Would they be considered "women"? Or would Moran judge them harshly as treacherous? One of the limitations of Moran's narrative is that she fails to address the most complex questions of womanhood, and how to make space for a broad range of

ideas and opinions. By keeping her book firmly nonacademic, she also limits its usefulness as a manifesto for a new generation of feminists.

Finally, even Moran can't avoid a bit of value judgement about abortion, describing the doctors at the clinic as having "to rectify the mistakes of others" (Page 273). "Mistakes" carries a negative connotation, a person who did something wrong, as opposed to a word like "accident" which cedes agency and therefore blame. Moran is so careful about language this word choice is jarring, but proves her point that except in the case of rape/health crisis, abortions are universally seen as bad.

Vocabulary

vile, populist, nexus, solipsism, flummox, capitulate, hapless, craven, curmudgeon, pall, perilous, autonomous, wane, bellwether, foment, impede, cretinous, pilloried, pernicious, proletariat, supersede, visceral, etiolate, solicitude, nascent, putative, flippant, duress, feral, rectify

Chapter 16 - Postscript: Intervention

Summary

At the age of thirty-five, Caitlin faces the prospect of aging. Her body is not as spry as it once was. Her friends' parents begin to die and Caitlin is confronted with mortality. Yet at an awards ceremony Caitlin is horrified by the number of women just slightly older than herself who have had some form of plastic surgery in a bid to remain youthful: Botox, collagen injected lips, and more. Because of these procedures, all the women look the same. Caitlin senses fear in these women, fear at the prospect of become old, unattractive, and obsolete. Caitlin is further disturbed by how gendered the decision is: men are simply getting older without thinking about it, while the women are fighting it at every turn. The fact that they feel the need to fight indicates a social misogyny at work.

Caitlin thinks implicit in fighting age is the denial of death, which she believes should be an incentive to live life to the fullest. She disputes the idea of an afterlife and worries that people squander their lives thinking they'll get a chance to do it better "next time." Women are expected to look like they aren't ever going to die. Caitlin speculates that women behave this way because once they exit their fertile years, they lose their social status and value. Caitlin thinks a woman's thirties are when she starts to thrive, and her body shows the signs of that maturity which should inspire respect and awe. Yet rather than celebrating it, women try to cover it up, keeping their physicality in the phase when they were impressionable, incompetent, and in need of someone "older and wiser" to guide them. Caitlin would rather age raucously and gleefully. She wants to take pride in her wisdom and experience.

In addition, while people who have had bad plastic surgery are easy to spot and mock, even women who look "amazing" for their age are still disturbing. The rest of the world is aware of their age; a woman with a good plastic surgeon is simply the product of scientific meddling, and looks unnatural. Caitlin doesn't mind women experimenting with their looks and engaging in reinventing themselves. She simply thinks women should do it in the spirit of fun and self-expression, not out of fear and self-loathing. Caitlin equates plastic surgery to looking like a coward, and she does not believe women are cowards.

In her postscript, Caitlin analyzes if she knows how to be a woman, at the age of thirty-five. A typical feminine response of self-deprecation would be that no, she still has a lot to learn. Caitlin recognizes she does still have a lot to learn – about raising teenagers, dealing with elderly parents, going through menopause. But ultimately, Caitlin chafes at a woman's habit of pointing out her own flaws. She decides that at thirty-five, she is content with her own expression of womanhood, even if it doesn't look like what she was expecting at age thirteen. As a teenager she worried about what she should be rather than what she should do, which Caitlin points out is a common gender disparity: women have to "be," while men get to "do." Caitlin wanted to be a princess at thirteen, an objective that would happen through magic, as in fairy tales, rather than through hard work. Princess Diana was a cultural icon who influenced millions of girls, but her death

demonstrated that royal life is not as glamorous as it seems. In the last decade, fairy tale princesses have become more independent and capable of rescuing others.

While the power of princess lore has diminished in recent years, it has been replaced with girls dreaming of being a “WAG,” a wife or girlfriend of an English soccer player. WAGs have status and wealth but don’t have to behave discreetly as princesses do. Caitlin eventually realized all the ways she would never be able to be a princess (she can’t sing, she doesn’t taste like strawberries, she isn’t attracted to alpha males, she enjoys having a strong circle of female friends, while princesses are always solo) and found a new goal: to be a muse for a band to write music about. Though she begs all her musician friends to write about her, no one takes her up on it, and she realizes she is not muse material. At 18 she knew she had to stop focusing on what she was going to be and start deciding what she was going to do instead – and she found this liberating. She recognizes her good fortune at being born in the time and place that she was, which gave ample opportunity for her to do what she wanted, which was writing. She doesn’t believe it’s necessary for women to take over ruling the world form men – Caitlin is adamantly pro-man – she just hopes they will share the power.

Caitlin realizes that despite all her missteps and attempts at being a woman, what she really wants for herself, and for everyone on the planet, is to be one of “The Guys,” meaning simply a human being.

Analysis

In Chapter 16, Moran criticizes the societal pressure on women to get plastic surgery, a double standard as men are allowed to grow old as gracefully or ungracefully as they choose. Moran delineates all the reasons older women feel compelled to seek surgery to appear more youthful – essentially, the devaluation of women after they stop being fertile – but Moran’s argument seems to criticize the women who fall victim to cultural pressure rather than the culture itself. Readers may wonder if women who have had plastic surgery are still “women” by Moran’s standards. Moran only speaks of plastic surgery to fight aging, but what about women who get breast implants or nose jobs? These forms of reconstruction are purely aesthetic, but whose ideas of aesthetics are they catering to? Can a woman not want big breasts simply for herself? Is she less of a woman if she gets them to please a man? If she gets a nose job because people mock her nose her entire life, is she catering to social pressure, and does that make her less of a woman?

Moran tends to believe there are certain choices a woman can make about her appearance that have nothing to do with external forces but are a simple manifestation of her personality, while other choices are a submission to society for which women should be ashamed. She writes, “But this is all under the provision that how women look should be fun, and joyful, and creative, and say something amazing about us as human beings” (Page 288), but she does not acknowledge that separating out what women do for themselves versus what they do for others is incredibly difficult. Even Moran’s joking obsession with having great hair cannot be entirely for herself – she must care what

other people think she looks like, and want to please them by looking “good.” Moran’s blithe attitudes are humorous and engaging, yet they do not acknowledge the deep-rooted socialization that leads women to worry about everything from pubic hair to breast size to unaffordable handbags. Moran’s advice is just: stop. But she has failed to address the cause of these obsessions, and therefore it is unlikely that her book will manifest change in female behavior, no matter how much women may agree with her ideas.

In the Postscript, Moran makes an extended argument against princesses, a cultural zeitgeist representing the dream of millions of little girls around the world. One reason Moran herself stopped wanting to be a princess as a child is that “Princesses never run in gangs” (Postscript). Princesses are always alone, either waiting to be rescued or going on solitary adventures. Moran is marrying form to function simply by writing the book: she intends the book to remind women they are members in a community, and that they should feel free and open to speak to each other about the myriad issues they face. Moran claims to have been friendless as a teenager, and now as an adult she is more than making up for it, using the book as well as her Twitter feed to create a safe place for women to talk together.

Moran finally acknowledges the limitations of her feminist analysis, albeit obliquely. She writes, “And in the 21st century, being a woman who wants to do something is not hard. At any other point in time, Western women agitating for change would be at risk of imprisonment, social ostracizing, rape, and death. Now, however, women in the Western world can bring about pretty much whatever change we want by writing a series of slightly arsey letters, while listening to Radio 4 and drinking a cup of tea.” (Postscript). Women the world over do not have the luxuries of fighting their conditions from the comfort of their own home, and Moran clearly recognizes this. Though she frequently mentions the word “revolution” through the text, Moran does not seem intent on inciting one. She does not invoke her readership to find ways to help women living in other cultures who have less freedoms. Moran criticized Katie Price for being intensely navel-gazing, but in some respects Moran behaves the same way. Perhaps she hopes small changes in attitudes towards women in the West will result in a ripple effect for women in Third World countries. But ultimately, her desire for community only seems to extend to women like herself, and this is a significant limitation to the credibility of her book. She wanted to write a non-academic, humorous look at feminism, but runs the risk of simply seeming frivolous and self-centered. She even goes so far as to say so, writing, “Because if all the stories in this book add up to one single revelation, it is this: to just . . . not really give a shit about all that stuff. To not care about all those supposed “problems” of being a woman” (Postscript). Moran undermines herself in this statement, and makes her book seem pointless.

Moran’s final statement is, “But as the years went on, I realized that what I really want to be, all told, is a human. Just a productive , honest, courteously treated human. One of “the Guys.” But with really amazing hair” (Postscript). Here is her final subversion of traditional feminism. As previously discussed, Moran’s use of language is precise. For her to classify humanity as “The Guys” may seem to fall into the same patriarchal pitfalls of referring to humanity as “mankind” or writing that uses “he” in hypothetical scenarios.

But as Moran as made clear by the end of the book, she does not hate men unilaterally. She does not subscribe to a rigid, dour view of feminism. She earlier claims that she refers to her seven siblings as “the guys,” and now she extends the family to include all of humanity, everyone equal in a relaxed give-and-take life. By making feminism more informal, more “wearable,” she hopes to convert more women to actively pursuing the cause. Arguing over the semantics and gender of a slang word like “guys” would miss the point. In addition, she once again uses humor to celebrate what is unique about being a woman. It is acceptable to care about how one looks, as long as one is doing it out of a sense of joy, and for oneself. Moran does not think being equal to men means being more like men. She wants to enjoy being a woman, while also being treated fairly and politely, as men would treat each other.

Vocabulary

stasis, gait, exude, homogeneity, incentive, apathetic, sentient, nullify, gullible, venal, nebulous, complacent, inimical, abject, berate, median, misnomer, amalgam, arcane, paragon

Important People

Caitlin Moran

Caitlin Moran is a thirty-five year old English writer who has been a minor celebrity since age eighteen, when she hosted a late night music show called Naked City. Her career began at sixteen when she wrote for a magazine called Melody Maker. Moran grew up as a working class child in Wolverhampton, where she struggled with weight and poverty as the eldest of eight children, finding escape and solace in forms of art ranging from music to television to books. Moran doesn't explain how her leap from a poor background to celebrity status occurred (an anomalous circumstance some might argue puts her out of touch with reality), but she uses her working class roots to establish a "street cred" with her readers so they won't view her solely as a privileged, navel-gazing celebrity. Moran is a feminist, but tries to treat feminism with a sense of humor, maintaining a cheerful and optimistic tone and demeanor even as she struggles to fight millennia of patriarchal oppression. Her aesthetic does not involve diminishing men or raging angrily at them, but rather raising women up to an equal starting position as men, from which they can create, act, and do as easily as men have for millennia.

Moran represents a perspective shared by many woman: being simultaneously obsessed with ensuring her hair, body, and wardrobe look "good" by society's norms and realizing how detrimental it is to live according to arbitrary outside standards. Moran presents herself as raw and honest, refusing to shy away from discussing the word "cunt," which she would like to embrace as empowering, and her own abortion, a subject often taboo even among those who have experienced it. Moran tries to be inclusive of a range of attitudes, although she often acts as if her opinions are facts. She generally will include an aside admitting that people who disagree with her have valid opinions to. Her ethos is mainly that everyone – both men and women – should be acting out of a sense of their own personal joy and desire, and not because they are being forced, either explicitly or implicitly, into any particular behavior to appear normal, or worse, to survive.

Caz Moran

Caz Moran is Caitlin's sister, younger by two years. As children and teenagers they bicker; Caz is the yin to Caitlin's yang, as sarcastic and aloof as Caitlin is naive and flirty. Yet Caz becomes Caitlin's main sounding board for all Caitlin's early struggles to understand what it is to be a woman, and they occasionally even bond as they try to grow up, debating what is the best term for their own genitals. Caz represents all the experiences Caitlin doesn't have, allowing Caitlin to speak with some authority on topics she hasn't directly lived through. Caz, at thirty-three, is still single, living a creative life as a playwright, and getting roped into attending everyone's elaborate and ostentatious wedding. She is more cynical than Caitlin, but offers a counterpoint to Caitlin's unbridled optimism.

Pete Paphides

Pete Paphides is Caitlin's husband, whom she first meets at age sixteen when she goes to work for Melody Maker. Pete came from a Greek family which owned a chip shop in Birmingham, and despite working for an alternative music magazine, he had a passion for 70s disco like ABBA and the Bee Gees. Pete was Caitlin's best friend before they fell in love, and she constantly turned to him to lament and laugh about her failed dating attempts. He is sensitive and liberal, and Caitlin describes him as a feminist. He splits child rearing with Caitlin evenly, weeps over the pain she experiences in childbirth, and supports Caitlin's decision to have an abortion unconditionally.

Caitlin's Mother

Caitlin's mother is Caitlin's first model of how to be a woman. She gives birth to eight children, despite how arduous her recovery often is, and she doesn't believe in privacy or medicine. She comes from a generation that had trouble speaking about matters related to sex, so she doesn't explain to Caitlin what menstruation is, leaving her to fend for herself when she gets her period, and referring to the genitals of both genders as "bot bot." Mrs. Moran teaches Caitlin resourcefulness, making do with what is available and maintaining a positive attitude.

Lizzie and Nancy

Lizzie and Nancy are Caitlin's two daughters, born about two years apart, and for whom she is so concerned about feminism. She wants them to grow up to do what they want without being constantly forced to encounter misogyny. Experiencing the pain of birthing them gave Caitlin a new perspective on life and made everything else seem easy in comparison.

Vicky

Vicky is Caitlin's friend, a fellow journalist, who invites her to visit a strip club in order to ascertain why they have undergone a popular resurgence right around the millennium.

Matthew Vale

Matthew Vale is a 19-year-old boy Caitlin meets at age sixteen in a film making class. Matthew is toned and attractive, and in a bid at sensitivity, addresses Caitlin's weight in a way that forces her to acknowledge she is fat. Caitlin had been deluding herself that Matthew might be sexually attracted to her, but instead they become good friends, and Matthew inadvertently helps her lose weight by taking her dancing a few nights a week and introducing her to cigarettes.

Charlie

Charlie is Caitlin's first homosexual friend in London, with whom she bonds about being marginalized and oppressed by the male patriarchy.

Courtney

Courtney is Caitlin's first boyfriend, a musician in a band. He is short and worries about balding, and Caitlin feels physically too big when with him, giving her body dysmorphia. Courtney only dates Caitlin to use her to make music industry connections. He erodes her sense of self-worth by constantly criticizing her, demonstrating an extreme sense of his own insecurity as Caitlin has more success than he does, and he is unwilling to work hard to get noticed in the music scene. Caitlin tries to make things work with Courtney because she thinks one has to suffer for love, and she has low self-esteem despite her earl successes in life. Eventually she realizes she deserves better, and breaks it off with Courtney.

Objects/Places

Baguette

A baguette with cream cheese is what Moran's mother serves to Moran in lieu of birthday cake for her thirteenth birthday. Ever positive, Moran doesn't lament the fact that her family can't afford cake, but enjoys her baguette thoroughly.

Diary

Moran's diary is the jumping off point for Moran's memories, giving her access to her thoughts and activities as a teenager. The adult Moran, rereading the diary, engages with her younger self and offers commentary on what she was feeling at the time that she never would have been able to articulate as a thirteen-year-old.

Underwear

Underwear is "the specialist clothes of being a woman," according to Moran. She includes bras, panties, hosiery, slips, and all forms of lingerie in this category. Moran believes looking good in underwear is a requirement for women, but because there is such good quality underwear out there, this task is not too difficult. She worries about the trend in underwear to be smaller and cover less of a women's private parts, because flattering, comfortable underwear can make a woman feel beautiful, even after years of breastfeeding and aging.

High Heels

High heels are a part of a woman's wardrobe that Moran denounces. Women spend money they don't have purchasing designer shoes that they wear once but never again because they are unfailingly uncomfortable. Few women can actually walk in heels, and a stylist tells Moran that even models fall in them. Shoes, like underwear, should be comfortable and functional, which heels never are. Moran recommends a pair of yellow shoes, heels if they are comfortable, because they have surprising versatility.

Handbags

Handbags are a status symbol purchased by women for exorbitant sums as an "investment." Moran finds this trend unfathomable. She believes expensive handbags create a false sense of inadequacy in women, who should use their limited funds more wisely. Moran's one foray into the handbag world results in a GBP225 silver purse being stolen.

Sanitary Pads

Sanitary pads are what Moran uses when she first gets her period at age thirteen. They are cheap, bulky, and uncomfortable, and easily fall part; Moran's family is too poor to afford anything better. They represent a rite of passage for Moran, who implicitly knows she needs to use them despite her mother's reticence surrounding the entire subject.

Library Card

A library card is Moran's ticket to other worlds as a poor, lonely teenager. Through books, Moran learned about sex and feminism and began to put together her own view of society and culture. Music and television, as well as reading, helped Moran feel connected to the world despite her isolation in a small town and working class family. Ultimately, Moran's immersion in reading propelled her into an interest in writing, and her entire career.

Wolverhampton

Wolverhampton is the small city in the West Midlands of England where Moran grew up. Wolverhampton is in the central area of England. Despite its relative size, Moran equates it with small town living, a place without opportunity or intellectual stimulation for a working class girl with ambition. It symbolizes "country" in the classic dichotomy between "town" and "country." It is a counterpoint to London, where Caitlin's career, and adult live begins.

London

London is the capital city of England, an enormous metropolis where Moran moves when she is sixteen to pursue a career as a music writer, and later, a television host for a music show. Moran skyrockets out of the working class, despite several years of continued bohemian poverty in London. London represents the opposite of Wolverhampton, a thriving community of artists and intellectuals and misfits, where Moran feels much more at home. Her writing only glosses over London as a backdrop for her anecdotes, remaining aloof from a true sense of place.

England

England is the nation in which Moran lives, and her views and opinions are directly influenced by the fact that she is a white woman living a comfortable middle class life in a First World country. Moran's ideas on feminism are steeped in her own cultural history, and do not necessarily speak to a global view of feminism.

Themes

Female Agency

Throughout her book Moran beats the drum of female pleasure. Almost nothing is off limits to her, and no act is inherently sexist. Sexism only arises when women are unable to act from a self-willed position of seeking their own joy. For example, Moran doesn't believe pornography itself is immoral or sexist, but the current popular narrative that revolves around bored looking women receiving ejaculate in their faces, is sexist. Porn that showed both partners having orgasms, for example, would not be sexist. Strip clubs are inherently sexist because they are joyless and make desire a financial transaction rather than a pleasurable one, yet women who take pole dancing classes and do private strip teases for their partners are acceptable to Moran. People, both men and women, who eat out of a sense of sensory pleasure and desire to enjoy the riches life has to offer are chasing their joy, while people (often women) who eat as compulsion and escape are not. Burkas are only acceptable in Moran's mind if a woman would wear it while sitting around watching television, not just when she leaves the house – if wearing a burka is a woman's specific choice, Moran doesn't argue with it. If women wear burkas out of fear and capitulation to a man's demands, Moran finds it problematic.

Intention and choice are keys to Moran's conception of feminism. As long as women are choosing for themselves, and choosing what makes them happy, then there are no wrong decisions. Moran believes men have had this kind of agency for millennia, and all they have ever done is seek their own pleasure. Moran simply wants women to have the same opportunities and the same choices. Women having their own joy does not diminish men, so men should not feel the need to stand in the way of women achieving their goals.

Moran is similarly trying to reframe sexism as impoliteness. No act is inherently sexist or misogynist, it depends on a man's intentions. Men can compliment women and help women in myriad ways that are simple civility. If men consider the intention of their actions towards women as courtesy or discourtesy, Moran believes sexism can be weeded out.

Women and Humor

Moran returns frequently to the idea of women and humor – she takes personal umbrage at an implicit universal belief that women can't be funny. She mentions that from the time Dorothy Parker wrote in the 1920s until the 1990s, there were no funny women working in the public sphere – a sweeping generalization, but clearly something that frustrates Moran. She laments the lack of women creating great art in general since earning the right to vote, with only a handful of musical women geniuses, but comedy in particular seems to lack female voices. Women on TV and in film, as written by men, are good and loving sidekicks for male protagonists to bounce off of, rather than

complicated and goofy in their own right. She distinguishes between stripping and burlesque in large part because burlesque performers tell jokes. Burlesque is acceptable because it revolves around a sly sense of joy and self-deprecation. She sarcastically lists one of the “Skills of Women” as “not really minding that men are considered to be funnier” (Page 203).

This explains Moran’s entire narrative approach. She dislikes the sour, academic tone of most feminist writing, and she swings as far as she can in the opposite direction. Perhaps Moran hopes that a light touch will get more accomplished for women as a whole, following the adage that one catches more flies with honey than vinegar. In addition, treating issues of sexism and misogyny from an academic perspective makes them abstract, removed from the reality of women who deal with such issues on a daily basis. Moran’s jocular tone grounds feminism in a world of real women struggling to navigate oppressive social mores and customs.

Furthermore, Moran wants to bolster the relationship between men and women, not drive a further wedge between the sexes by blaming men for women’s problems, or arguing that women are genuinely superior. Moran seems to believe that laughter can bring people together, and a shared sense of humor can help people see the absurdity of certain unequal scenarios. Moran simply seems determined to prove that women can be funny, writing with raw honesty but also a twinkling hyperbole to express a female perspective. She plays into certain stereotypes (women’s inability to change light bulbs, fear of spiders, desire for good hair) in order to build easy laughs. Feminists have a reputation as serious to the point of militancy, and Moran seems determined to shatter that stereotype by gently teasing other stereotypes. Moran’s style is a manifestation of her theme: women can be funny, and they should be allowed to be.

Female Community

When Moran considers the self-destructive tendencies of feminist icons like Dorothy Parker, Sylvia Plath, Bessie Smith, and Janis Joplin, she wonders if they were simply born in the wrong century, isolated in time and space from a community of like-minded, intelligent women. This isolation causes them to despair because “They are surrounded by men, without a team or a den mother to cheer them on. They are the sole pair of high heels clacking through a room of brogues. They are loaded with all the wearisomeness of being a novelty. They are furious and exhausted from having to explain to the men what the women have known all along” (Page 71). Pioneering women burned out and frequently committed suicide because they didn’t have support from other women who could tell them what they were experiencing was not unusual. Moran claims her youthful desire to be a princess waned because princesses are always solitary, and never have a group of female friends to be silly with. Moran considers it a mark of good (and necessary) friendship to visit a friend and ask to take your bra off to be more comfortable.

Community is clearly an idea that is important to Moran, and she writes the book partially as a way of counteracting that sense of isolation women can fall into all too

easily. Moran believes, “An old-fashioned feminist “consciousness-raising” still has enormous value. When the subject turns to abortion, cosmetic intervention, birth, motherhood, sex, love, work, misogyny, fear, or just how you feel in your own skin, women still won’t often tell the truth to each other unless they are very, very drunk” (Page 11). Moran’s style and tone work together to draw readers into this community, as she uses direct address – “Lovely readers” (Page 91) – and pronouns like “you” and “we” that give the book an inclusive air. Moran wants women to particularly feel like part of the community of feminists – every woman who wants to be treated fairly and have agency over her vagina, must by necessity be a feminist. Moran hopes to reclaim the term with her humorous, light tone, making it palatable to fifty percent of women who don’t identify themselves as feminists. This is the ultimate female community, and while it doesn’t automatically mean women can’t criticize or disagree with each other, it does mean collectively women can work toward the goal of equality and opportunity for everyone.

Styles

Structure

Moran divides her memoir into sixteen chapters, a prologue, and a postscript. Each chapter ranges from fourteen to twenty-four pages, and they are arranged thematically around topics that women are constantly thinking about – or are forced to think about by media, culture, and society – from the age when a girl first becomes a woman with her first menstrual cycle until she is faced with the thought of plastic surgery in order to stay youthful and appealing. Moran discusses underwear and fashion, body image (body hair, weight, etc.), relationship with men, career ambition and sexism, relationships with men, weddings, and motherhood.

Each chapter begins with a vignette of Moran's personal experience that launches her into an extended rant about the more abstract topic the anecdote represents. It is not a straightforward memoir which builds a traditional narrative arc of storytelling; there is no particular beginning, middle, and end. Moran's structure reflects her vocation as a journalist, creating essays and articles that are easily digestible in a newspaper or magazine. Though Moran encounters many hardships, the memoir is not a specific quest or journey to overcome an obstacle. Moran prefers to riff on topics she thinks face a modern woman living in the early twenty-first century. However, despite some broad generalizations, Moran does not necessarily pretend her own story mirrors the experiences of all women. She is a white, upper middle class woman (despite working class roots) living in the First World nation of England. She rarely considers seriously the day-to-day problems faced by poor women, minority women, or women from cultures different from her own.

Moran's structure is a conscious choice. She dislikes the academic discourse that discussions of feminism have been reduced to, so she purposefully engages in a less formal style, with a healthy dose of humor. She structures her book for a broad readership; though she is not trying to "dumb down" the topic (she is a smart woman with a wide ranging vocabulary and knowledge of the world), she wants to infuse feminism with a more day-to-day feeling, broadening its appeal rather than letting it fester in its pejorative relationship. She frequently references social media like Twitter as a means she used to conduct informal research, and the structure reflects a world with a dwindling attention span, each chapter moving breezily from anecdote to commentary and back, basically self-contained for readers who dip in and out over breakfast or on their commute. There is nothing to compel a reader to keep turning the page to find out "what happens next," but Moran's cheerful narrative personal and direct address style keep readers engaged in the conversation Moran is trying to start about feminism.

Perspective

Tone

Quotes

For throughout history, you can read the stories of women who— against all the odds— got being a woman right, but ended up being compromised, unhappy, hobbled, or ruined, because all around them society was still wrong…Your hard-won triumphs can be wholly negated if you live in a climate where your victories are seen as threatening, incorrect, distasteful, or— most crucially of all, for a teenage girl— simply uncool. Few girls would choose to be right—right, down into their clever, brilliant bones— but lonely.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: In this quote, Moran describes the importance of a vocal community of support for women. Women in the past who were smart and ambitious were isolated, and therefore destroyed by a society who couldn't accept them. Moran thinks a space where women can tell their stories and share their dreams will allow them to pursue those ambitions more easily, knowing they have the backing of other women.

Traditional feminism would tell you that these are not the important issues: that we should concentrate on the big stuff like pay inequality, female circumcision in the Third World, and domestic abuse. And they are, obviously, pressing and disgusting and wrong, and the world cannot look itself squarely in the eye until they're stopped. But all those littler, stupider, more obvious day-to-day problems with being a woman are, in many ways, just as deleterious to women's peace of mind.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran presents her case for her book, which discusses all the ways women encounter sexism on a daily basis. Moran believes things like Brazilian waxes, weddings, and fashion, are insidious because society pressures all women to be a certain way, and a woman trying to express her individuality as a human being will often have an eroded sense of self because she is constantly bombarded with a certain (often misogynist) ideal of womanhood.

This is the first thing that feels like a crude but true sensor into adulthood: Sex. Desire. Wanting to come. Something that will lead me in the right direction. It feels like it will— eventually— somehow— I don't know how— and only if I attend to its lessons carefully — make me dress right, say the correct things, give me the impetus to leave the house and find whatever it is that's out there for me.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran's experiments with masturbation lead her to conclude that sex is a healthy and natural pursuit for women. Moran presents a sex-positive message for women, refusing to allow a sense of shame (often foisted on sexual women by society) to undermine her desire, equal to a man's, for pleasure.

By and large, I just think we're all 'the guys,' trying to get on as best we can.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran's view on feminism is not militantly anti-man, and in this quote she demonstrates her non-pedantic style by neutralizing the male-associated "guys" and using it to refer to humanity as a whole. Moran's views are informal but based essentially around the idea of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" – everyone should work hard and be polite to each other.

The more women argue, loudly, against feminism, the more they both prove it exists and that they enjoy its hard-won privileges.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran argues that all women should consider themselves feminists, and is frustrated by the half of British and American women who don't. She points out that not considering oneself a feminist is simply proof of how valuable feminism has been to all women.

The purpose of feminism isn't to make a particular type of woman. The idea that there are inherently wrong and inherently right "types" of women is what's screwed feminism for so long— this belief that "we" wouldn't accept slaggy birds, dim birds, birds that bitch, birds that hire cleaners, birds that stay at home with their kids, birds that have pink Mini Metros with POWERED BY FAIRY DUST! bumper stickers, birds in burkas… You know what? Feminism will have all of you.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran believes feminism should be inclusive, and particularly more inclusive than it has been in the past. However, throughout her text she makes judgement calls on a variety of topics that indicate she herself thinks certain women are the "wrong" type and do a disservice to all women by their actions.

Overeating is the addiction of choice of carers, and that's why it's come to be regarded as the lowest-ranking of all the addictions. It's a way of fucking yourself up while still remaining fully functional, because you have to. Fat people aren't indulging in the "luxury" of their addiction making them useless, chaotic, or a burden. Instead, they are slowly self-destructing in a way that doesn't inconvenience anyone. And that's why it's so often a woman's addiction.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran argues that fat women are marginalized because their issue with food is seen as self-indulgent, while additions to drugs and alcohol are glamorized. Because women still function in society, their problem is not seen as a real problem; it is simply a lack of will power in society's eyes, and thus these women have a harder time getting real help.

These days, a plethora of shitty attitudes to women have become diffuse, indistinct, or almost entirely concealed. Fighting them feels like trying to combat a moldy mildew smell in the hallway, using only a bread knife. Because—like racism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia— modern sexism has become cunning. Sly. Codified… a closet misogynist has a vast array of words, comments, phrases, and attitudes that he can employ to

subtly put a woman down or disconcert her, but without it being immediately apparent that that is what he is actually doing.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran points out that sexism is much subtler since feminism pointed out the gross injustices perpetrated against women. In the present day, comments and behavior by men can be insidious, putting a woman down while pretending to compliment or joke with her.

So to the powerful came education, discussion, and the conception of “normality.” Being a man and men’s experiences were considered “normal”: everything else was other. And as “other”— without cities, philosophers, empires, armies, politicians, explorers, scientists, and engineers— women were the losers. I don’t think that women being seen as inferior is a prejudice based on male hatred of women. When you look at history, it’s a prejudice based on simple fact.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran makes an argument that history is written by the winners, and women have unfortunately been constrained by physical weakness (compared to men) and constant pregnancies. Moran is against arguing that women are equal to men and their great works have simply been hidden or destroyed. She believes women haven’t had their chance to shine, but because of industrialization and birth control, women can seize the moment to prove they are just as smart and creative as men.

Women know clothes are important. It’s not just because our brains are full of ribbons and bustles and cocktail frocks— although I believe brain scans will finally prove that at some future point. It’s because when a woman walks into a room, her outfit is the first thing she says, before she even opens her mouth. Women are judged on what they wear in a way men would find incomprehensible— they have never felt that uncomfortable moment when someone assesses what you’re wearing and then starts talking down to you, or starts perving you, or presumes you won’t “understand” the conversation— be it about work, parenting, or culture— simply because of what you put on that day
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran argues that women’s obsession with clothes isn’t just an inherently “girlie” or frivolous thing. Women are judged on their outfits much more harshly than men, affecting their ability to succeed or even be taken seriously. Moran doesn’t necessarily argue that this should change, just that women have more pressure than men even when leaving the house.

Women, it is presumed, will always end up having babies. They might go through silly, adolescent phases of pretending that it’s something that they have no interest in— but, when push comes to shove, womanhood is a cul-de-sac that ends in Babies “R” Us, and that’s the end of that. All women love babies— just like all women love Manolo Blahnik shoes and George Clooney.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran works to debunk the myth that women have to want children in order to be proper women. She doesn't believe a maternal instinct is genetic, nor that women who don't have children are somehow less "women" than those who become mothers.

For women, finding a sympathetic, nonjudgmental arena is just as important as getting the right to vote. We needed not just the right legislation, but the right atmosphere, too, before we could finally start to found our canons— then, eventually, cities and empires.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran argues that earning the vote was not enough to make women "equal." Women have needed almost a century to process millennia of being treated as inferior. Through feminism, women have gained an arena in which to talk to each other about their feelings and reactions, and are finally getting to the point where they can prove their equality with action.

But this is all under the provision that how women look should be fun, and joyful, and creative, and say something amazing about us as human beings…But women living in fear of aging, and pulling painful and expensive tricks to hide it from the world, does not say something amazing about us as human beings. Oh, it makes women look like we were made to do it, by big boys. It makes us look like losers. It makes us look like cowards. And that's the last thing we are.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran argues against anything a women does to her appearance that isn't strictly part of her own self-exploration, sense of self, and in the spirit of joy. Things like plastic surgery, Brazilian waxes, and $600 shoes, are society's and/or men's idea of how a woman "should" look, and Moran pushes back against them. She does not want women to be fearful of being judged, but to relish each stage of her life for what it is, and express herself accordingly.

Simply being honest about who we really are is half the battle.
-- Caitlin Moran

Importance: Moran sums up her theory that if women actually were honest with themselves and their community of women, maybe they would learn that all these cultural ideas about "how to be a woman" would be collectively refuted and women can rewrite their own story on how to speak, dress, behave, and succeed.

Topics for Discussion

Ideal Woman

Describe Caitlin Moran's ideal woman. What qualities, personality traits, and attitudes should she have? Do you think Moran's ideas about womanhood are realistic? Is she too critical of other woman? Does she ignore any marginalized groups? What are Caitlin's biases? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Sexism

List some daily interactions that might occur between men and women and decide whether or not they are sexist (for example, a man holding a door open for a woman, a man complimenting a woman's dress). Try to define sexism. What makes an action sexist? Can women be sexist? Do you think misogyny is as big a problem in today's world as racism? Why or why not?

Female Stereotypes

Does Moran's use of humor and playing into certain female stereotypes (women's concern about hair, or being afraid of spiders, for example) help or hurt the cause of feminism? Does she succeed in making feminism palatable? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Criticism

In Chapter 4, Moran decides women should be allowed to criticize other women without fear of being called unfeminist. Do you agree or disagree with her? Do catty women undermine each other? Should women be held to a different standard than men, who are never criticized for criticizing other men? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Social Class

Despite her working class roots, Moran has obviously risen to the upper-middle class and modest celebrity. Does her memoir speak to impoverished women? Would they identify with her issues? Does Moran make enough effort to consider the extra hardships faced by poor women? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Weight

In Chapter 6, Moran discusses women's issues with weight. Do you think she argues that women should be accepting of their bodies no matter what, or does she seem as obsessed with thinness and beauty as society dictates? Is her discussion of weight helpful or harmful for women? Why? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Offense

Does Moran seem concerned whether she offends people? Does she try too hard to be inclusive (for example, claiming both having children and not having children are equally valid choices)? Does inclusiveness water down her arguments, or bolster them? Why? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Consumer Culture

Discuss Moran's relationship to consumer culture. In what ways does Moran support the idea that material possessions can bolster a woman's sense of self? In what ways does she refute this idea? Which side of the line do you think Moran ultimately falls on? Why? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Masculinity

Discuss Moran's attitudes towards men. Is she positive or negative about masculinity? Does she broadly generalize about men in the same way she does about women? Does she think men are superior in any way? What about women? Try to sum up in one sentence how Moran thinks men and women should treat one another.

Feminism

What issues related to women or feminism does Moran avoid? She purposefully claims to skip the bigger problems in favor of day-to-day sexism and female existence. Do you think this is a successful strategy? Does it make her book fresh and unique, or petty? Why? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.