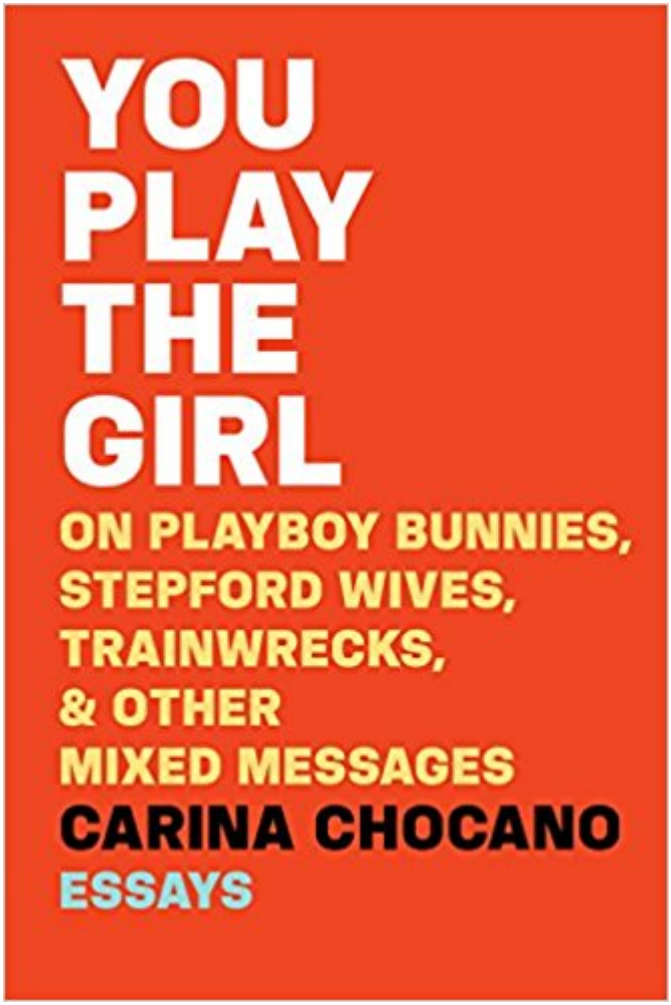
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You Play The Girl: On Playboy Bunnies, Stepford Wives, Train Wrecks, & Other Mixed Messages



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Synopsis

In this smart, funny, impassioned call to arms, a pop culture critic merges memoir and commentary to explore how our culture shapes ideas about who women are, what they are meant to be, and where they belong.Who is "the girl"? Look to movies, TV shows, magazines, and ads and the message is both clear and not: she is a sexed up sidekick, a princess waiting to be saved, a morally infallible angel with no opinions of her own. She's whatever the hero needs her to be in order to become himself. She's an abstraction, an ideal, a standard, a mercurial phantom.Ã Â From the moment weÃ¢â ¬â„¢re born, we're told stories about what girls are and they arenÃ¢â ¬â„¢t, what girls want and what they donÃ¢â ¬â„¢t, what girls can be and what they canÃ¢â ¬â„¢t. "The girl" looms over us like a toxic cloud, permeating everything and confusing our sense of reality.Ã Â In You Play the Girl, Carina Chocano shows how we metabolize the subtle, fragmented messages embedded in our everyday experience and how ourÃ Â identity is shaped by them. Ã Â From Bugs Bunny to Playboy Bunnies, fromÃ Â FlashdanceÃ Â toÃ Â Frozen,Ã Â from the progressive Ã¢â ¬â„¢70s through the backlash Ã¢â ¬â„¢80s, the glib Ã¢â ¬â„¢90s, and the pornifiedÃ Â aughtsÃ¢â ¬â •and at stops in betweenÃ¢â ¬â •Chocano blends formative personal stories with insightful and emotionally powerful analysis. She explains how growing up in the shadow of Ã¢â ¬Å“the girlÃ¢â ¬Â• taught her to think about herself and the world and what it means to raise a daughter in the face of these contorted reflections. In the tradition of Roxane Gay, Rebecca Solnit, and Susan Sontag,Ã Â Chocano brilliantly shows that our identities are more fluid than we think, and certainly more complex than anything we see on any kind of screen.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

View larger A Conversation with Carina Chocano We asked the author of YOU PLAY THE GIRL about feeling like Alice in Wonderland and more How did your daughterÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s fascination with Sleeping Beauty inspire you to write YOU PLAY THE GIRL? I first thought about writing You Play the Girl a decade ago when I was working as a movie critic. I was watching too many mainstream movies about guys and their adventures, in which the female characters only seemed to be there to cheer them on or scold them. After a couple of years, I started to feel like a lab rat, ingesting toxic doses of this dominant fiction. I read an interview in which Isla Fisher complained that in Hollywood, all the comedic parts are written for men and 'you play the girl.' I wanted to write about all of this, but I became pregnant with my daughter, and it felt too bleak to take on then. Then when she was about three or four, she became obsessed with Sleeping Beauty. Reading it again and again, I started to see the princess character as a pawn in a battle between the prince and the evil fairy, witch or queen. The fact that the princess was always unconscious, trapped or victimized in some way made me want to take a closer look at what popular stories teach girls about agency, power, and desire. It made me want to shake Sleeping Beauty awake. What are the parallels between your experiences as a critic of pop culture and Alice in Wonderland? I don't remember reading Alice when I was little, but I do remember disliking certain things about her. She seemed pushy, arrogant, critical, emotional, too much in the way girls are warned against being. But when I finally read it, I recognized myself. I'd spent the better part of a decade in darkened screening rooms immersed in stories that didn't just fail to reflect my experience, they denied it. Spending hours and hours down the rabbit hole of pop culture made me feel gaslighted, dismissed, and discounted by all these strange, mad, illogical creaturesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •just like AliceÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •and that it was stories like these that had taught me to dislike curious, outspoken, uninhibited girls like her.

What can films (both highbrow and lowbrow) tell us about our cultureÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s perception of gender roles? Movies (and TV and most media narratives) tell us what the culture thinks about gender at a given time, but they also help shape it, which is why it's important to pay attention to who is telling the stories and why. But movies are so collaborative that sometimes you get conflicting voices. Sometimes, an old movie that feels conservative on the surface can actually be quite subversive, while a movie that feels irreverent on the surface can be ideologically very

conservative. What do you hope readers take away from YOU PLAY THE GIRL? I hope it validates their own experiences and that they recognize themselves. We are bombarded with stories made by corporations from the time we're born, but we don't spend a lot of time thinking about thinking about them critically.

One of 's "Best Books of the Month: Nonfiction" One of iBook's "Best Books of August" One of Publishers Weekly's "Books of the Week" "Carina Chocano's You Play the Girl reads like a war cry. With dazzling clarity, her commentary exposes the subliminal sexism on our pages and screens."Ã¢â ¬â •O, THE OPRAH MAGAZINEÃ Â "If Hollywood's treatment of women leaves you wanting, you'll find good, heady company in Carina Chocano's essay collection, You Play the Girl. Why, Chocano asks, does the ingenue have to choose between marriage and death?" Ã¢â ¬â •ELLE "In Carina ChocanoÃ¢â ¬â„¢s whip-smart new bookÃ Â You Play The Girl: On Playboy Bunnies, Stepford Wives, Train Wrecks, & Other Mixed Messages,Ã Â she analyzes the 'girls' of pop culture across the decades, from BewitchedÃ Â to contestants on The Bachelor (and its fictional counterpart, UnREAL)Ã Â to the princesses of Frozen.Ã Â Through cultural commentary mixed with personal reflections, Chocano explores the ways on-screen women have influenced her life and the way she sees the world. A-."Ã¢â ¬â •ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY, "Best New Books" "Brilliant and insightful...You Play the Girl stands apart from others in the genre [...] by dissecting pop culture through the lens of a mother watching her young girl try to make sense of the world. The result is a heartfelt look at the complicated messages women receive, and argues that gut feelings about these messages should be carefully examined. Chocano persuades the reader that the media we absorb around us does matter, and shapes how we feel about ourselves. And she deftly shows how books, TV, and film that have been labeled Ã¢â ¬Å“empoweringÃ¢â ¬Â• for women [...] often have hidden agendas."Ã¢â ¬â •PLAYBOY "Chocano's book is funny and exasperating and full of revelations and epiphanies...If being a woman means being obligated to play a game you can't win because the rules keep changing (andÃ Â notÃ Â arbitrarily), Chocano's book is something you'd be behooved to read while you catch your breath between rounds of disorienting blows to the head."Ã¢â ¬â •LA WEEKLYÃ Â "Pop-culture critic Carina ChocanoÃ¢â ¬â„¢s smart, colorful, and compelling collection of essays,Ã Â You Play the Girl, unpacks the ways movies, TV, and advertising sculpt perceptions of who and what women can and cannot be. Chocano achieves the right mix between personal essay and clear-eyed criticism, between high culture and low (discussion of Virginia Woolf leads into the 'Ghostbusters'

reboot and the attendant trolls). We get a sense of her formative pop-culture experiences ('The Philadelphia Story'; 'Bewitched'; 'Flashdance') as well as dips into feminist history and the tension between being yourself and being a person people are comfortable with. 'You could choose to be a person or you could choose to be loved,' Chocano writes. It is not a pessimistic collection, but it shows that the myths and narratives of female identity are still in place and largely shaped by men."Ã¢â ¬â •THE BOSTON GLOBE "If you're ever at a party with author and former BUST columnist Carina Chocano, sit down next to her. In her first book of essays, the pop-culture critic tells her story of girlhood through the lens of the films and TV shows that made her realize she never actually wanted to play 'the girl'...Chocano's life advice doubles as a recommendations list....What makes Chocano so enjoyable to read is that, for better or worse, she revels in what she watched as a kid, and she'd like other women to do the same."Ã¢â ¬â •BUST "Pop culture critic Carina Chocano understands that how women are represented in movies, TV shows, books, memes, and music is reflective of how theyÃ¢â ¬â„¢re treated in real life. ThatÃ¢â ¬â„¢s the driving force of her witty essay collection...InÃ Â You Play the Girl, Chocano examines everything fromÃ Â Pretty WomanÃ Â toÃ Â FrozenÃ Â toÃ Â I Dream of Jeannie, and makes it clear that although women are bombarded with imagery that may be warped, we have the fortitude to dictate who we are outside of who weÃ¢â ¬â„¢re told to be."Ã¢â ¬â •BITCH MAGAZINE, "10 Books You Must Read in August" "Chocano brings to bear her experience as a widely published journalist and critic (of books and film) in this collection of essays examining what it has meant to be the 'girl' through decades of pop culture, from Playboy magazine to Thelma and Louise to Frozen. It's not exactly news that women are most often relegated to secondary character status - reactors rather than actors - but Chocano's mix of memoir, humor, and insight nevertheless strikes chords."Ã¢â ¬â •OMNIVORACIOUS (The Book Review), "The Best Nonfiction of August" "'The girl' is not something that Chocano will abide without a fight, which is exactly why she's written the book on why it's time for the trope to retire.Ã Â You Play The GirlÃ Â rattles the cage of how female characters have long been typecast within inherently sexist plot lines. Over the pages of Chocano's essay collection, she digs into the stories weÃ¢â ¬â„¢re used to seeing Hollywood produce, year after ear, and applies a critical lens to the subject matter that will make you, dear reader, see it in a way that you never have before."Ã¢â ¬â •REFINERY 29 "InÃ Â You Play the Girl: On Playboy Bunnies, Stepford Wives, Train Wrecks, & Other Mixed Messages, Carina Chocano expertly dissects the identity of 'the girl.' Chocano shows us how from the second weÃ¢â ¬â„¢re born, weÃ¢â ¬â„¢re told what girls are and arenÃ¢â ¬â„¢t Ã¢â ¬â • and how those messages shape our identity whether we want

them to or not. Come for the pop culture references, stay for the deep discussion about how complex women actually are IRL vs. on the screen."Ã¢â ¬â •HELLO GIGGLES, "8 new memoirs that you need on your nightstand" "Longtime arts critic Carina Chocano's incisive, hilarious, and timely take on the depiction of women and girls in pop culture manages to be both deeply personal and universally relevant. With keen insight and biting humor, Chocano assesses the relative impact of various female archetypesÃ¢â ¬â •and delivers an explosive critique of sexism and the power of mass media. You Play the Girl: On Playboy Bunnies, Stepford Wives, Train Wrecks & Other Mixed Messages Ã Â is like a long talk with your smartest, most impassioned friend."Ã¢â ¬â •iBOOKS, Best Books of AugustÃ Â "Chocano draws out brilliant insights from across the decades...witty and sharp...[Chocano]Ã Â weaves her observations into a fascinating history of womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s economic and social progress."Ã¢â ¬â •THE SUNDAY TIMES (UK) "Whip-smart...Remarkably comprehensive and enjoyably associative, the essays move quickly from the haunting performances of French actress Isabelle Adjani toÃ Â The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,Ã Â Bewitched, andÃ Â I Dream of JeannieÃ Â as allegories for the potential of powerful women to 'wreck civilization'...Incisive and witty...these essays will appeal to anyone interested in how womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s stories are told."Ã¢â ¬â •PUBLISHERS WEEKLY,Ã Â starred review "[Chocano] interweaves relevant personal stories from her childhood and adult experiences with and entertaining and insightful review of female characters from the last 50 years of pop culture, including television, film and literature. Chocano not only looks back at her own experiences, she also writes emotionally about the realities of the world that her young daughter faces today. Each piece combines numerous, well-connected examples from the authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s extensive knowledge of pop culture, with an analysis of a theme related to the various aspects of womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s lives: work, relationships, marriage, sexuality, motherhood, and even math. As a result, the essays have a sound research foundation and are well documented. VERDICT: This entertaining, engaging, enlightening tour of the portrayal of women in pop culture will appeal to general readers and researchers in a variety of cross-disciplinary fields." Ã¢â ¬â •LIBRARY JOURNAL, starred review "A sharply perceptive look at the myths that constrain women." Ã¢â ¬â •KIRKUS REVIEWS "You Play the Girl by Carina Chocano blew my mind. Like a goldfish realizing that water existed, I instantly came alive to the air and the atmosphere of how my Otherness informed my girlhood. Each and every message of being asked to stand still so that I could be seen by the cultural product of male-made entertainment made me scream with recognition. In particular, the Flashdance chapter time-travelled me back to my youth, but holding hands with a clear-eyed, brilliant, hilarious friend. Re-looking at Stepford Wives, I Dream of Jeannie,

Bewitched and all of the other hypnotic suggestions about my supposed woman-hood made me feel alive and energized and ready to topple the patriarchy. The world is changing for women and girls and here is one of the first stepsÃ¢â ¬â •going back to do archaeology about what the heck happened to us, how we got colonized. If information is power,Ã Â You Play the Girl is a superpower."Ã¢â ¬â •JILL SOLOWAY, writer, director, and creator of "Transparent" "Carina Chocano is a brilliant thinker, a dazzling stylist and an intellectual in the truest sense of the word. An important critical work as well as an entertaining personal story, You Play the Girl looks at old archetypes in new and often astonishingly insightful ways and establishes Chocano as a unique talent and crucial voice in the cultural conversation."Ã¢â ¬â •MEGHAN DAUM, author of The Unspeakable: And Other Subjects of Discussion "Carina Chocano unearths the little horrors of our culture's pervasive, insidious sexism in essays so brilliant and witty you'll wish her book would never end. Chocano is one of our sharpest, most original cultural observers, andÃ Â You Play the GirlÃ Â is as engrossing as it is unforgettable."Ã¢â ¬â •HEATHER HAVRILESKY, author of How to Be a Person in the World

CARINA CHOCANO is a frequent contributor to the New York Times Magazine and Elle, and her writing has appeared in The New Yorker, Vulture, Rolling Stone, and others. She worked as a staff film and TV critic at the Los Angeles Times, a TV and book critic at Entertainment Weekly, and a staff writer at Salon. Her humor book, Do You Love Me, or Am I Just Paranoid?, was published in 2004. She lives in Los Angeles.

If this gets lost in the back shelves of feminist anthropology, I will be angry. This is a must-read for all women, a mainstream book where a smart mom (does that make it sound more palatable? okay, good) connects the dots between everything she’s seen in the movies and then highlights them in fear for her own little girl. It’s smart, funny and dense with good information. Read a chapter a day, but remember your highlighter. You’ll want to quote it.

This was a thought-provoking collection of essays, especially on the subject of women in movies...in my lifetime, I’ve seen the quality/quantity of female representation in movies go from semi-okay (in my mind) to woeful and pandering and condescending...and it’s no wonder so many good actresses have gone to television. Carina Chocano’s takedown of movies like "Knocked Up" and the related attacks on Katherine Heigl are infuriating and accurate. The same is true for her take on Amy Schumer’s "Trainwreck" and other films.I was hoping to find some essays in this collection I could

use in a first-year college writing class, to show how to develop and argue ideas - but also to generate discussion. But, I don’t think I have the nerve. This collection probably assumes more knowledge of pop culture/movies/etc than students generally have, and she is writing at a high level. So, upperclassmen and grad students? Absolutely. First-year students, maybe not.I think any reader who is ambivalent about pop culture will like this. Reader’s who want to be challenged about how movies impact our beliefs *should* read this. Will they? I don’t know. I guess that’s the problem - I was totally on board with Chocano right from the start, but I’m not the one she needed to convince. But when I try to argue some of these points with my students, I can use the basics of her arguments as my starting point, even if I don’t use the essays. I especially liked her criticism of the word "journey," which I hear a lot and can’t stand.Well-written, thought provoking and interesting.

This is a true 5 star book. I expected more ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“same old sameÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• criticism of how the media portrays women. I was delighted to find a well written book that is a combination of ChocanoÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s personal insight and her research. For those of us who grew up in the 1970s and 80s, as Chocano did, the references will really strike a chord.One reason You Play The Girl is unique is in the way it takes a detailed look at specific TV shows, movies, etc. rather than painting in broad brushstrokes. By looking at the details, we can see the whole picture; but the details let us feel the impact on more of a gut level. This made the book a delight to read and increased its impact.The overriding theme, as Chocano writes in the intro, is that in so many media stories ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•The girlÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t act, though ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ she behaves. She has no cause, but a plight. She doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t want anything, she is wanted. She isnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t a winner, sheÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s won. She doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t self-actualize. She doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t become herself. She symbolizes something: the thing the hero wants, the thing the old witch tries to keep him from getting.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Chocano looks at media examples in which this occurs and at those that provide exceptions. It is very interesting to see the way such portrayal has waxed and waned since about 1900. At least in the media, women were more empowered early in the 20th century than in the middle of it.You Play The GirlÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s insightful look at Bewitched and I Dream of Jeannie is exceptional, as is the look at the movie The Philadelphia Story.Since, at least at the time I write this, there is no ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“look insideÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• feature, here is the table of contents:PART 1: Down the Rabbit Hole1: Bunnies2: Can This Marriage Be Saved?3: The Bronze Statue of the Virgin Slut Ice Queen: Queen Bitch Goddess4: What a Feeling5: The Eternal Allure of the Basket CasePART 2:

The Pool of Tears6: The Ingenue Chooses Marriage or Death7: Thoroughly Modern Lily8: Bad Girlfriend9: The Kick-AssPART 3: You WouldnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t Have Come Here10: Surreal Housewives11: Real Girls12: Celebrity Gothic13: Big Mouth Strikes Again14: The Redemptive Journey15: A Modest Proposal for More Backstabbing in PreschoolPART 4: A Mad Tea Party16: Let It Go17: All the Bad Guys Are Girls18: Girls Love Math19: Train Wreck20: Look at Yourself21) Phantombusters; or, I Want a Feminist Dance NumberHighly recommended for women and men. Great gift for women who grew up in the 1970s and 80s and for todayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s young women, especially.I'm hoping becomes available on Audible, as I would love to listen to this.

Carina Chocano is the essay writer I wish I was. She examines how pop culture treats women and girls- and how it affects us. From Katherine Hepburn and how her image had to be toned down for people to accept her movies; ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœI Dream of JeannieÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ and ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœBewitchedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ (how two insanely powerful women constantly deferred to men); to the huge Disney princess phenomena wherein a princess is someone to be saved by a man or presented to a man. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœDesperate HousewivesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœReal HousewivesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœDesperately Seeking SusanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœFlashdanceÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢, the misogyny in ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœCan This Marriage Be SavedÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢- in a womenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s magazine, no less, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœThelma and LouiseÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœPretty WomanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢, Disney, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœMad MenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ and a lot more all come under her feminist microscope. And while you can tell sheÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s very frustrated by the way the media presents women, she is always entertaining and easy to read. IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢d love to read what she thinks about ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœWonder WomanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ and the new Dr. Who! Five stars out of five.

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