



The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls

By Joan Jacobs Brumberg

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A hundred years ago, women were lacing themselves into corsets and teaching their daughters to do the same. The ideal of the day, however, was inner beauty: a focus on good deeds and a pure heart. Today American women have more social choices and personal freedom than ever before. But fifty-three percent of our girls are dissatisfied with their bodies by the age of thirteen, and many begin a pattern of weight obsession and dieting as early as eight or nine. Why?

In *The Body Project*, historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg answers this question, drawing on diary excerpts and media images from 1830 to the present. Tracing girls' attitudes toward topics ranging from breast size and menstruation to hair, clothing, and cosmetics, she exposes the shift from the Victorian concern with character to our modern focus on outward appearance—in particular, the desire to be model-thin and sexy. Compassionate, insightful, and gracefully written, *The Body Project* explores the gains and losses adolescent girls have inherited since they shed the corset and the ideal of virginity for a new world of sexual freedom and consumerism—a world in which the body is their primary project.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Adolescent girls today face the issues girls have always faced: "Who am I?" and "Who do I want to be?" Unfortunately their answers, now more than ever before, revolve around the body rather than the mind, heart, or soul. "The body is at the heart of the crisis that [Carol] Gilligan, [Mary] Pipher, and others describe.... The fact that American girls now make the body their central project is not an accident or a curiosity," writes Brumberg, "it is a symptom of historical changes that are only now beginning to be understood." The historical photos, thorough research, and political even-handedness make this a book of worth and sincerity. *The Body Project* is also comforting for women, adolescents, parents, lesbians, and male lovers of women--helping us sort out the roots of female insecurities, obsessions, and angst.

From School Library Journal

YA?From the most private method of sanitary protection to the most intimate place to pierce one's body, this history of feminine hygiene and fashion records young women's obsession with looks and how society has channeled and manipulated them to reflect the values of the times. From diaries, journal articles, advertising, and doctor's records, the author has amassed information about mainly middle-class American girls of the 19th and 20th century that shows how they have been raised first by overprotective, repressive adults to play a submissive role in society and, more recently, to be consumers in an ever-widening marketplace. From skin cream to dieting to figure-altering garments and body piercing, physical enhancements in the last 200 years are reported. Beginning with an account of Abigail Adams's concern about the early maturation of her 11-year-old granddaughter in 1806 and progressing to descriptions of today's independent young women grappling with numerous options of dress and sexual conduct, a thought-provoking social history is revealed. The author begins and ends her treatise with a passionate argument for advocacy for today's girls who are preyed upon by the media and allowed dangerous sexual options without emotional maturity and are lacking the protective umbrella of moral guidelines and supervision provided by earlier generations. Young women will enjoy the numerous photos and will have a giggle about the corsets and belts of earlier times. A fine choice for mother-daughter book groups. ?Jackie Gropman, Kings Park Library, Burke, VA
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From Library Journal

Brumberg (women's studies, Cornell; *Fasting Girls*, LJ 3/1/89) notes in her present study that while girls today reach menarche at about age 12, several years earlier than a century ago, they do not mature emotionally or intellectually at the same early age. They are also extremely vulnerable to social and economic pressures to define themselves in terms of their bodies and to become sexually active, often with disastrous consequences. To counter such pressures, Brumberg calls for more societal support and nurturing of girls. This work complements such studies as Lyn Brown and Carol Gilligan's *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girl's Development* (Harvard Univ., 1992), Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (LJ 4/1/94), and Peggy Orenstein's *School Girls* (LJ 8/94). Appropriate for public, academic, and women's studies collections. ?Patricia A. Beaber, Coll. of New Jersey Lib., Trenton
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Users Review

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