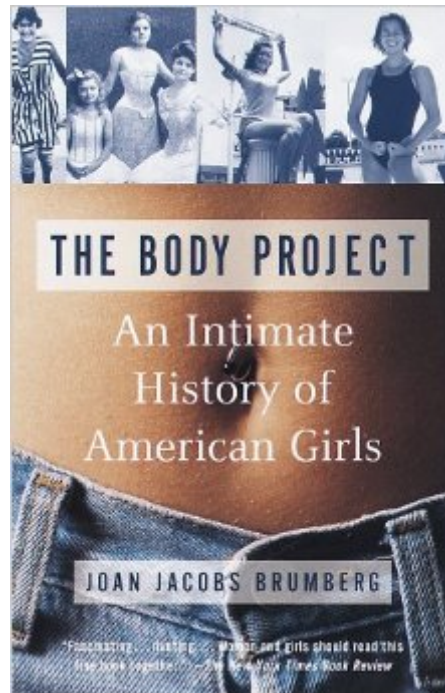


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The Body Project: An Intimate History Of American Girls



Synopsis

"Timely and sympathetic . . . a work of impassioned advocacy." --People
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 inner beauty 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. Joan Brumberg's book offers us an insightful and entertaining history behind the destructive mantra of the '90s--"I hate my body!" --Katie Couric

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Joan Jacobs Brumberg has attracted her share of controversy for this book and her earlier work in the field of "body history". The criticism lies largely in the fact that Brumberg does not fit easily into the pro-sex feminist/anti-sex traditionalist dichotomy that characterizes far too much of the

discussion about young women's sexuality and body identity these days. Using diary excerpts as her core sources of evidence, Brumberg charts the changing relationship between young women and their bodies over the past century and a half. Though the material on the 19th and early 20th century is fascinating, useful, and accessible for a general audience, the high point of the book comes over the final two chapters, which cover the period from the 1960s to the 1990s. Unlike cultural conservatives in the feminist world (think Christina Hoff Summers or Gertrude Himmelfarb), Brumberg is deeply appreciative of the enormous benefits of the sexual revolution, especially in terms of the availability of sexual information and the growing willingness of our society to see women as active sexual agents. On the other hand (unlike a Naomi Wolf), she is troubled (and rightly so, in my opinion) by the eagerness of our culture to sexualize and exploit the bodies of adolescent women who are simply not prepared to cope with the emotional, social, and physical impact of early sexual experience. In her final chapter, Brumberg writes: "Although I applaud the social freedom and economic opportunities enjoyed by the current cohort of high school and college girls, their "autonomy" seems to be oversold, if not illusory."

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