

# The body project: my reaction essay sample

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## The Book's Perspective

*The Body Project* is a book that shows the change from focusing on inner beauty to outer beauty. The main point is how the body of young women is an all consuming "project." The quest to be beautiful, thin and perfect has replaced the need to be virtuous and good hearted. Brumburg compares the discomfort that women across time and social classes felt about their maturing bodies. As they became women awkwardness was a feeling they encountered on a daily basis.

Each generation seems to focus on certain body parts and standards of beauty. In Queen Victoria's time, tiny hands, feet and waist were necessary parts to maintain. Today's ideal is small everything except breasts.

However in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, character was more important than waist size or personal adornment. How strange that sexual enlightenment has changed that idea. According to Brumberg, "Like many adults in American society, girls today are concerned with the shape and appearance of their bodies as a primary expression of their individual identity." (Brumberg)

It was also surprising to me that puberty caused girls to actually become weaker rather than stronger. They begin to focus on this idea of the perfect body and lose sight of who they are as a person. They also are at greater risk for eating disorders, substance abuse and dropping out of school.

Brumberg focuses on young women's attitude toward sex and how that affects their body image. Using diary excerpts, she shows how language and

frankness towards sex has changed. It seems, the freer women have become with sexual experimentation, the more they hate their bodies.

This book offers an insight into the female experience and how it has changed. It is surprising that liberation has simply offered women a new set of constraints that are just as painful as the corset was to their great grandmothers.

### My Habits and Values

As a male, reading this book saddened me. I thought of the women and girls I know in my life, even my mother and it made me worried for their well being. I guess I never realized what they have to go through on a daily basis and how consuming these feelings can become. I wish I could tell each one of them how beautiful and perfect they are but I wonder, would they even believe me?

This book also made me consider my own body project. Are there areas I am sensitive about? What are my priorities? Is inner greater than outer? The book made me think about how I talked about my body and sex. Who do I feel comfortable talking about these things to?

To answer some of questions, I have to start by saying, this subject makes me uncomfortable. It's one thing to say, I feel sorry for the women in my life, it's another thing to start asking myself these questions. There are areas of my body that make me uncomfortable. I think men today are supposed to be strong, both emotionally and physically. We are not allowed to have feelings, still. When a man is skinny, he is thought of as weak.

When a man is fat, he is thought of as lazy. However, skinny men can also be sleek and fast and overweight men can be prosperous and well-fed. I ask myself, when I see a skinny woman what do I think? Do I think she is sexy or anorexic? When I see an overweight woman do I think she is lazy and eats more than she should? Do I doubt her self control? Do I see her as weak?

American culture does make one judge others by their appearance. As a foreign student, I have to admit, that I notice how people look first. In fact, it is hard for me to get beyond that. I had a woman friend who wanted to have a romantic relationship but I just wasn't attracted to her. Even though she was a beautiful woman on the inside, I couldn't see myself with her. When I told her how I felt, she said she could no longer be my friend. I see her now with a " boyfriend" and to be honest she's beautiful because she seems so happy and content. So does he. It makes me wonder what I missed.

I know my own body is far from perfect and at times I am a shallow person. I look in the mirror and there are always things I wish were different. I have to ask myself, do I spend as much time thinking about the kind of person I am? Every time I look in the mirror and make a comment about my appearance, I am also trying to reflect on how I treated people that day, how hard I worked and what intentions I set for myself. It's strange how differently I look at others and myself. I've even noticed I have started to treat others differently.

As I admitted earlier, this book made me uncomfortable and I felt like at times it was hard to relate to my own experiences. The more I asked myself

the hard questions that the book leads one to ask, the more I realized that I was not that different than the women in the book. Today's society has made the outside the most important thing. As such, we are losing out on the beauty that remains hidden inside.