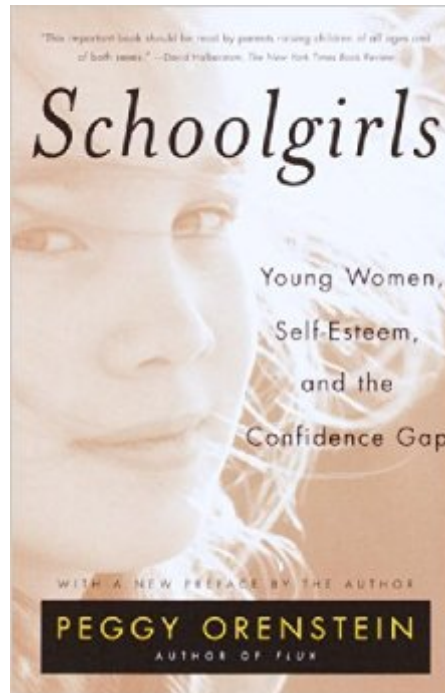


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Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self Esteem, And The Confidence Gap



Synopsis

A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK OF THE YEAR The classic account of the hurdles facing adolescent girls in America--now reissued with a new Foreword, to coincide with the award-winning author's new book on women and identity. Inspired by a study by the American Association of University Women that showed girls' self-esteem plummeting as they reach adolescence, Peggy Orenstein spent months observing, interviewing, and getting know dozens of girls both inside and outside the classroom at two very different schools in northern California. The result was a groundbreaking book in which she brought the disturbing statistics to life with skill and flair of an experienced journalist. Orenstein plumbs the minds of both boys and girls who have learned to equate masculinity with opportunity and assertiveness, and femininity with reserve and restraint. She demonstrates the cost of this insidious lesson, by taking us into the lives of real young women who are struggling with eating disorders, sexual harassment, and declining academic achievement, especially in math and science. Peggy Orenstein's *SchoolGirls* is a classic that belongs on the shelf with the work of Carol Gilligan, Joan Jacobs Brumberg, and Mary Pipher. It continues to be read by all who care about how our schools and our society teach girls to shortchange themselves.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

To read Peggy Orenstein's *SchoolGirls* is to take a journey into a world 1) that any man with a conscience is ashamed to remember (because of the way boys treated girls) and 2) that for high school girls and women to remember, is to recall the pain of being punished, physically abused,

humiliated and emotionally beaten down for simply being born female. But before going into the book in depth, one important point must be made: While Orenstein's portrayal of girls and boys is accurate, it should not be taken as a message that all middle school girls are good but get shortchanged, or that all boys engage in destructive behavior when it comes to girls. There are wonderful adolescent boys and nightmarish middle school girls. And some girls do have a very positive experience. Unfortunately, Orenstein's portrayal is the norm and it is accurate. What Orenstein did was to go into two vastly different schools, one in a solidly white middle class community and the other located in an urban black and Hispanic neighborhood. Both schools were located in Northern California. She observed and interviewed the girls (as she gained their trust) for an academic school year to see what they were experiencing with regard to their academic, home and social lives. Although the cultural environments were vastly different, the dynamics of both groups' experiences turned out to be strikingly similar in many respects. I remember all too well what went on in junior high school in the 60s.

It's heartbreaking to read this book and realise that things haven't much changed in the decade since it's been published, and how too many young women in America act, think, and believe, not because it's their integral nature but rather because they've been pushed to it by messages from the media, Hollywood, teachers, parents, male classmates. The girls Ms. Orenstein interviewed are all around my age (I was also in seventh grade during the 1992-93 schoolyear), so it was easy to relate to them and what they were going through, what things were like when they were in junior high and sixth grade. The girls at Weston, the largely white school, had problems with teachers calling on boys who hogged and demanded attention, to the exclusion of girls in the class, body image, sexual harassment, teachers who had a double standard when it came to boys and girls (boys who call out answers before being called on or who loudly whine to be called on are rewarded with attention, while girls are ridiculed if they have a wrong answer or not called on at all; there was also the teacher who called a boy disruptive, with a friendly laugh, while making the same remark to a female student in a very cold negative disparaging voice), parents who reinforce this double standard, the sexual double standard, and messages that you have to fit in and be perfect. These girls even pretended to be afraid of spiders so that boys would think they were feminine and desirable as girlfriends, not pariahs who wouldn't run screaming from a spider but instead act like a boy and ask to hold it because it looks so neat. It's sad to read that in this day and age many young women think that a woman isn't allowed to be assertive, pushy, or aggressive, or that a girl can't be a lawyer because she's too "cute."

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