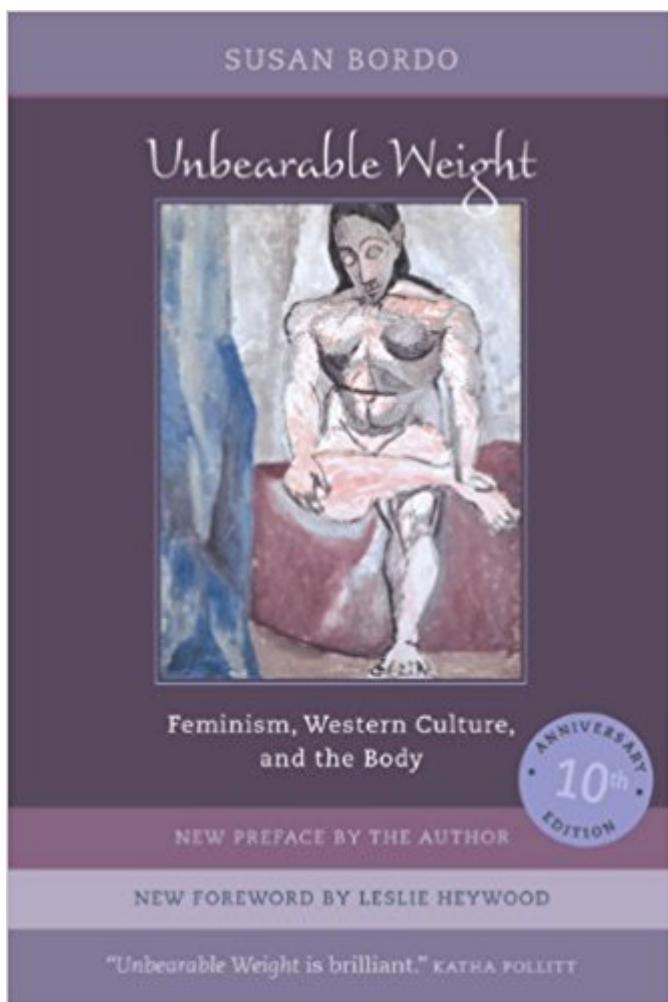


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# Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, And The Body, Tenth Anniversary Edition



## **Synopsis**

"Unbearable Weight is brilliant. From an immensely knowledgeable feminist perspective, in engaging, jargonless (!) prose, Bordo analyzes a whole range of issues connected to the body&#151;weight and weight loss, exercise, media images, movies, advertising, anorexia and bulimia, and much more&#151;in a way that makes sense of our current social landscape&#151;finally! This is a great book for anyone who wonders why women's magazines are always describing delicious food as 'sinful' and why there is a cake called Death by Chocolate. Loved it!"&#151;Katha Pollitt, Nation columnist and author of *Subject to Debate: Sense and Dissents on Women, Politics, and Culture* (2001)

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Bordo argues that anorexia nervosa and bulimia are logical, if extreme, manifestations of anxieties and fantasies fostered by a culture that worships the slender, fit body as a symbol of "virile" mastery over bodily desires. In her diagnosis, hysteria, anorexia and agoraphobia "develop out of the practice of femininity itself

In dense, challenging, subtly argued philosophical essays, Bordo (Philosophy/LeMoyne College; *The Flight to Objectivity*, 1987- -not reviewed) offers a postmodern, poststructuralist feminist interpretation of the female body as a cultural construction in Western society, emphasizing eating disorders, reproductive issues, and the philosophical background. Many of the problems and ideas of contemporary Western society, says Bordo, derive from the ineluctable mind/body dualism of

Plato, restated by Descartes. From the viewpoint of feminist theory (of which the author offers a useful history and critique), women have been identified with the body, which itself has been characterized as an alien, instinctual, threatening, passive, and false self in which the true self--the active and manly mind/soul- -is confined. In occasionally repetitive pieces--some a decade old, some revised from lectures--carrying titles like ``Are Mothers Persons?," ``Reading the Slender Body," and ``Material Girl," Bordo demonstrates how this identification is deployed in law, medicine, literature, art, popular culture, and, especially, advertising, which she perceptively decodes by showing how the most trivial detail (men eating hearty meals, women consuming bite-size candies) reveal cultural values and even pathologies. Following Foucault's archaeological technique, Bordo shows how the female body has migrated from nature to culture, where it can be controlled through dieting and altered through surgery--and where women are perpetually at war with it. A cerebral introduction to liberal feminist thinking that's humanized by the author's anecdotes of her own experience as a female body (e.g., confessing to the delights of making stuffed cabbage) and that demonstrates what it advocates: ``What the body does is immaterial, so long as the imagination is free." (Fifty- five b&w illustrations) -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

for one of my college classes.

I've never taken classes in feminism and this author has a really interesting take on body image and culture/media. I know this is a classic and I can see why. Very eye opening.

An excellent text for younger adult women. As an older feminist, I found the book repeated what earlier writers have provided with greater intelligence and complexity. More appealing to less theoretical people.

This is my absolute favorite book on weight. It really opens your eyes and is so worth the read. I want to give it to everyone I know! It's theoretical but easy to understand and applicable to EVERYONE. Very much worth the read.

Although a challenging read for me at times, this book was full of "aha!" moments. I think Bordo nails it when it comes to how the issues women's size and appearance are portrayed in the media. I recommend this book highly to other feminists and those interested in media literacy.

An interesting read for those interested in gender and the body. I'm glad I read it but it is not in my core area of interests so not a particularly memorable read.

Half stellar, half obscure writing. It can be classic feminist or it can be abstruse academics. Simple enough, the female body as a projection screen for male culture--but Bordo doesn't exactly call it "male" culture, and perhaps in so failing, opens the door to all the obfuscation. Bordo's Foucault filter is supposed to shape her analysis, but I doubt it does. It seems that whenever she cites him, she invokes a dense, sophist, and pretentious language which is foreign to her effective and lucid prose, and certainly alien to the vast majority of her readers who, if anything like me, begin to experience rather intense frustration. This dissonance must be more than compliance to academic writing. What I think is at stake here is Bordo's difficulty with radical feminism. She says she invokes Foucault for the complexity of his thought, something both he and she fine lacking in Second-wave feminism. At points in her essays and lectures (which constitute this book), she even directly instructs feminism via Foucault. The question is: what feminism is she instructing, what feminism does she find simplistic? It must be the very feminism that she herself chiefly adopts--liberal feminism. Radical feminism, with its deeper analysis and political stances, are what she avoids. Thus her need for and reliance on the academic star, Michael Foucault (as in Freud of old) But what Foucault acknowledges is that same liberal feminism, one which either rejects or compartmentalizes feminist issues. How can it begin to address the female body as a projection screen if it denies that culture is male, or that the powerfully projective male sexual institutions of pornography, prostitution, and rape exist-- or, if at all, exists outside of mainstream culture. Or how about the skirting of broadly influential cultural phenomena like the rise of sexology, the sexual revolution, and the onslaught of new reproductive technology. This said, when Bordo speaks from herself, she often cannot help crossing the liberal-radical divide. And when she does, "Unbearable Weight" soars from brilliance and courage. And her partial exposes of post-modernism, in that same voice, are lucid and accurate. But reader, as soon as you sport that Fou word, or maybe the phrase "the male gaze" you're smack in the middle of liberal murk, so skip this verbiage--or run for the hills, where there are maple trees that make far more sense.

VERY dull reading. I can not think of seventeen more words to say about this dull book. It was not

worth the money.

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