



Breasts: A Natural and Unnatural History

By Florence Williams

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Breasts: A Natural and Unnatural History By Florence Williams

An engaging narrative about an incredible, life-giving organ and its imperiled modern fate.

Did you know that breast milk contains substances similar to cannabis? Or that it's sold on the Internet for 262 times the price of oil? Feted and fetishized, the breast is an evolutionary masterpiece. But in the modern world, the breast is changing. Breasts are getting bigger, arriving earlier, and attracting newfangled chemicals. Increasingly, the odds are stacked against us in the struggle with breast cancer, even among men. What makes breasts so mercurial?and so vulnerable?

In this informative and highly entertaining account, intrepid science reporter Florence Williams sets out to uncover the latest scientific findings from the fields of anthropology, biology, and medicine. Her investigation follows the life cycle of the breast from puberty to pregnancy to menopause, taking her from a plastic surgeon's office where she learns about the importance of cup size in Texas to the laboratory where she discovers the presence of environmental toxins in her own breast milk. The result is a fascinating exploration of where breasts came from, where they have ended up, and what we can do to save them. 12 illustrations

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Breasts: A Natural and Unnatural History By Florence Williams Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review In her exceptional history, science journalist Williams does more to enlighten us on the virtues of, workings of, and perils to women's breasts than anyone ever has before, notwithstanding the efforts of the three H's: Hooters, Hefner, and Hughes (Howard, inventor of the cantilever bra). And she does it with smarts, sass, and intent. Her book can be characterized as an exposé because it unveils the scandalously scanty amount of research devoted to those that define the very essence of the human race. To be sure, Williams covers all the cultural and anthropological information that the mostly male scientific—and not-so-scientific—community has gathered about what is euphemistically referred to as second base. And she goes much further, elucidating the primary purpose of the female breast and how breasts alter at each stage of a woman's life, then venturing into breast enlargements, the chemistry of breast milk, how breasts are evolving, and how little we know about the effects of environmental toxins and the rise in breast cancer. Meant to nurture the next generation for life on planet earth, breasts are also humanity's first responders to environmental changes. And what have modern-day chemical exposures wrought? The answers to this question and many more are found in Williams' remarkably informative and compelling work of discovery. --Donna Chavez

Review

Florence Williams's double-D talents as a reporter and writer lift this book high above the genre and separate it from the ranks of ordinary science writing. *Breasts* is illuminating, surprising, clever, important. Williams is an author to savor and look forward to. --Mary Roach

Be brave, buy this book, and withstand the giggles and sniggers of your friends. For here is a wonderful history, stretching across hundreds of millions of years, of an astonishingly complex part of the human body. Williams weaves together research on nutrition, cancer, psychology, and even structural engineering to create a fascinating portrait of the breast: that singular gland that gave us, as mammals, our very name. --Carl Zimmer, author of *Parasite Rex* and *Evolution: The Triumph of an Idea*

Akin to Rachel Carson's 1962 classic *Silent Spring*. --M. G. Lord

In her comprehensive 'environmental history' of the only human body part without its own medical specialty, ...Williams focuses on the importance of understanding breasts as more than sex objects...Williams puts hard data and personal history together with humor, creating an evenhanded cautionary tale that will both amuse and appall.

Exceptional.

Starred Review. ...exceptional history... with smarts, sass, and intent.... Meant to nurture the next generation for life on planet Earth, breasts are also humanity's first responders to environmental changes. And what have modern-day chemical exposures wrought? The answers to this question and many more are found in Williams' remarkably informative and compelling work of discovery.

Williams has done us all--men and women--an enormous favor.

With a scientist's mind, a journalist's eye, and a mother's heart, Williams has produced a wide-ranging environmental history of the breast...Williams delineates one of the most consequential dramas at the

intersection of human evolution and environmental change.

Much like [Mary Roach's] *Stiff*, *Breasts* benefits from its author's field trips...Seen this way--the breast as a canary in a toxic coal mine--[Williams's] call to protect them feels both timely and urgent.

A smart, wry synthesis of evolution, physiology, microbiology, environmental science, and even biomechanics. --Carl Zimmer"

Akin to Rachel Carson's 1962 classic *Silent Spring*. --M. G. Lord"

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Highly informative and remarkably entertaining. . . . [Williams's] inquisitive tone deftly melds careful reportage and a witty streak of lay skepticism. "

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A wonderful and entertaining tour through the evolution, biology and cultural aspects of the organ that defines us as mammals! --Susan Love, M.D., M.B.A., President of Dr. Susan L"

About the Author

Florence Williams is a journalist and contributing editor to *Outside* magazine. Her work has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and *National Geographic* among others. Her first book, *Breasts: A Natural and Unnatural History*, was a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2012 and the winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in Science and Technology. Williams lives in Washington, DC.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Brian Wilson:

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encyclopedia or other folks. So , how do you think about this book?

Patricia Kirby:

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