



# Dilemmas of Desire

*Deborah L. Tolman*

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Be sexy but not sexual. Don't be a prude but don't be a slut. These are the cultural messages that barrage teenage girls. In movies and magazines, in music and advice columns, girls are portrayed as the object or the victim of someone else's desire--but virtually never as someone with acceptable sexual feelings of her own. What teenage girls make of these contradictory messages, and what they make of their awakening sexuality--so distant from and yet so susceptible to cultural stereotypes--emerges for the first time in frank and complex fashion in Deborah Tolman's *Dilemmas of Desire*.

A unique look into the world of adolescent sexuality, this book offers an intimate and often disturbing, sometimes inspiring, picture of how teenage girls experience, understand, and respond to their sexual feelings, and of how society mediates, shapes, and distorts this experience. In extensive interviews, we listen as actual adolescent girls--both urban and suburban--speak candidly of their curiosity and confusion, their pleasure and disappointment, their fears, defiance, or capitulation in the face of a seemingly imperishable double standard that smiles upon burgeoning sexuality in boys yet frowns, even panics, at its equivalent in girls.

As a vivid evocation of girls negotiating some of the most vexing issues of adolescence, and as a thoughtful, richly informed examination of the dilemmas these girls face, this readable and revealing book begins the critical work of understanding the sexuality of young women in all its personal, social, and emotional significance.

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