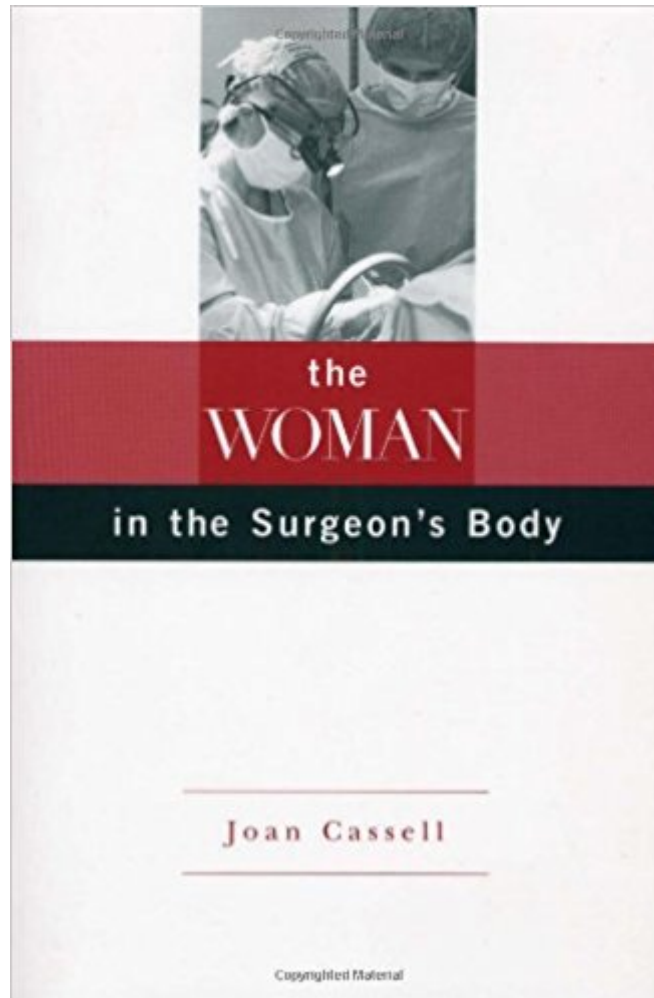


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# The Woman In The Surgeon's Body



## Synopsis

Surgery is the most martial and masculine of medical specialties. The combat with death is carried out in the operating room, where the intrepid surgeon challenges the forces of destruction and disease. What, then, if the surgeon is a woman? Anthropologist Joan Cassell enters this closely guarded arena to explore the work and lives of women practicing their craft in what is largely a man's world. Cassell observed thirty-three surgeons in five North American cities over the course of three years. We follow these women through their grueling days: racing through corridors to make rounds, perform operations, hold office hours, and teach residents. We hear them, in their own words, discuss their training and their relations with patients, nurses, colleagues, husbands, and children. Do these women differ from their male colleagues? And if so, do such differences affect patient care? The answers Cassell uncovers are as complex and fascinating as the issues she considers. A unique portrait of the day-to-day reality of these remarkable women, *The Woman in the Surgeon's Body* is an insightful account of how being female influences the way the surgeon is perceived by colleagues, nurses, patients, and superiors--and by herself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This [is a] riveting study on women surgeons in the United States...The author studied 33 women surgeons of differing ages practising in eastern and mid-western United States. There was a wide representation of career stages and surgical subspecialties. She spent five days spread over a two week period shadowing each surgeon and also conducted structured, tape recorded interviews. She

observed relationships with colleagues, patients, nurses, and trainees as well as aspects of family life. The aim of her study was to examine differences between male and female surgeons and the internal and external forces affecting these differences. Each chapter examines a key area and is vividly illustrated with extracts from the taped interviews as well as descriptions and analysis provided by the author. The frantic, fast paced, almost hysterical way of life in an American department of surgery provides an enthralling background. The author sensibly lets the interviewees speak for themselves when she wishes to make a point...I hope that this excellent book is widely read. (Sarah Creighton British Medical Journal)[An] exploration of the world of women surgeons, a world we are drawn into through skillful storytelling...Comfortable with the first person and drawing on 14 years of experiences as an anthropologist reflecting and writing on surgeons, Cassell provides the non-anthropological reader access to the practice of her craft...The author successfully permits our entry into the fascinating, gritty, complex world of women surgeons. The book is well organized and immensely readable. Social scientists will appreciate this exploration of women's place in a male-dominated profession. The structuralists among us will be heartened by the call to refocus our energies from women's 'choices' or coping strategies to the structure of the institution itself. (Susan W. Hinze Health)Dr. Cassell has conducted an ethnographic study of 33 women surgeons, following them through their workdays, meeting their families, and interviewing them and others in their lives. Her insights focus on surgery generally and the experience of women surgeons specifically...The author's narrative succeeds in raising essential questions while she recounts the lives and experiences of the women surgeons she has studied with respect, empathy, and admiration. (Carol C. Nadelson Psychiatric Services)I identified closely with many of the women profiled in *The Woman In The Surgeon's Body*. All of the feelings and emotions I have had regarding my surgical training and practice were so articulately crystalized in Cassell's accounts. It was thrilling for me to read how other women's experiences paralleled my own. This is a wonderfully researched work. (Beth Ann Ditkoff, M.D.)Joan Cassell asks whether a feminine body can be embodied in a surgeon's identity and ethos, and whether there is a difference between the work worlds of male and female surgeons. She studied 33 surgeons in five North American cities, women of varying age, rank, matrimonial and parental status, and from a number of surgical specialties. The result is a lively presentation of professional, dedicated women operating in a world that is not quite sure where and if they really fit. This book should appeal to a readership beyond the anthropologists for whom it is intended. (Frances K. Conley, M.D., Stanford University)[N]ew and provocative...This book should be of interest to women who are surgeons, any woman interested in becoming a surgeon, anyone involved in advising medical students, especially women students,

about careers in surgery, and anyone in charge of a surgery training program. (Sylvia Ramos, M.D. Journal of the American Medical Association) This anthropologist's perspective on the development of women surgeons will ring true in different degrees to all women physicians, and it will add a dimension of understanding and, one hopes, empathy from their male peers. (Psychiatric Services) In this enjoyable, fast-paced ethnography of women surgeons, Cassell emphasizes gender analysis and the anthropological concept of habitus in order to get at the social construction of the experience and the place in that experience of 'difference.' She uses her impressive interview transcripts to round out an effective portrait of women surgeons. (Arthur Kleinman, M.D., Harvard University)

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Joan Cassell PhD was trained by Margaret Mead, famed anthropologist, and was chosen by the American College of Surgeons, the most respected surgical association of US surgeons, to research and write this book. There is no fluff in her: She is as qualified to write this as any can be. She spent 24/7 with these women and dug into every dirty detail of their personal and professional lives. She lived with some during their interview periods. Although only a short 20 years ago, the US had virtually no female surgery mentors, no handbooks, no blogs or accessible networking to guide these young women through this bed of coals. Honorable loyal male mentors comfortable with the role of simply nurturing talented women protege were rare or evanescent. She presents her position in classic anthropological fashion. There is something more simple, more animal, more evolutionarily-based than the game-playing male-female antics of a bad soap opera going on here. She tables it carefully and tastefully. The hierarchies of behavior in this small closed society have similarities to early tribal cultures rather than large open-thinking democracies. Read "Guns, Germs, & Steel" by Jared Diamond for more support of human behavior based on subculture size. She is seeing these women in a 'point in time' and she does not overstep those boundaries. One of the most important conclusions she makes is the need for strong mentoring of women surgeons. I would be so interested to see a follow-up book on this a generation later with the same focus on anthropology, since the total number of US surgeons has not changed much, but the gender and

level of international diversity within training programs has. Thank you Joan Cassell. Margaret A Walter MD FACS, aka Kath, "A Worst Case Scenario"

As a female surgeon, I am (of course) very interested in the subject matter. So many of the descriptions and explanations, of both the wonderful and awful aspects of being a surgeon, rang true to me. Along with Charles Bosk's "Forgive & Remember", I would highly recommend this book not only to any medical student, male or female, interested in a career in surgery, but also to any family member, loved one, or significant other of a surgeon. It will give you tremendous insight into our (rather singular) worldview, and how and why we "embody" it.

As a third year medical student I found a lot of answers to my own strange attraction to this traditionally all male field. Her basic thesis is very much from a sociological point of view, which may have been a bit over my head. Still, she pinpoints many of the issues women in the surgical field face on a daily basis. Insightful, interesting, and well written.

Ms Cassell has written a very readable book about women who practice surgery. In spite of the approachability, the book concerns an academic study, not a journalistic expose'. This study follows a previous anthropological study of male surgeons, and a dissertation in women's studies. This book will be of interest to people who are in the medical fields, those who study social behaviour, and those interested in women practicing 'nontraditional' careers. I think it would be of particular value for both men and women who are considering a career as a surgeon.

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