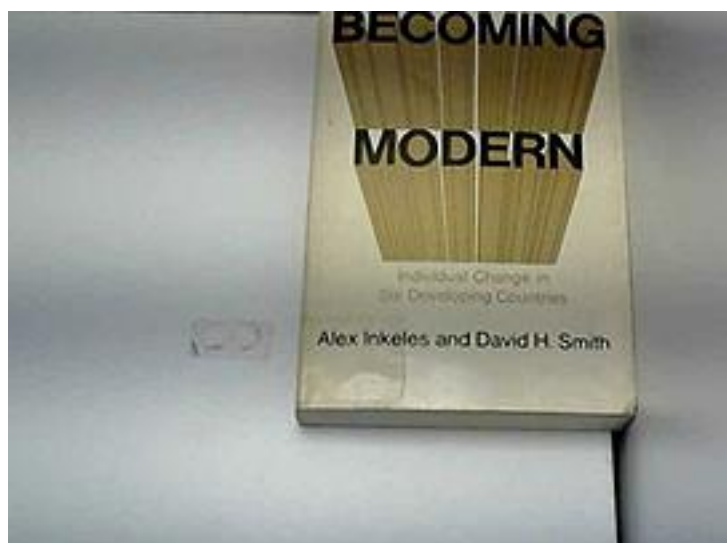


Becoming Modern



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In the decade following World War I, nineteenth-century womanhood came under attack not only from feminists but also from innumerable "ordinary" young women determined to create "modern" lives for themselves. These young women cut their hair, wore short skirts, worked for wages, sought entertainment outside the home, and developed new attitudes toward domesticity, sexuality, and their bodies. Historians have generally located the origins of this shift in women's lives in the upheavals of World War I. Birgitte Soland's exquisite social and cultural history suggests, however, that they are to be found not in the war itself, but in much broader social and economic changes. Soland's engrossing chronicle draws on a rich variety of sources--including popular media and medical works as well as archival records and oral histories--to examine how notions of femininity and womanhood were reshaped in Denmark, a small, largely agrarian country that remained neutral during the war. It explores changes in the female body and personality, the forays of young women into the public sphere, the redefinition of female respectability, and new understandings of

married life as evidenced in both cultural discourses and social practices. Though specific in its focus, the book raises broad comparative questions as it challenges common assumptions about the social and sexual upheavals that characterized the Western world in the postwar decade. In a remarkably engaging fashion, it shows why the end of World War I did not lead to the return of "normal" life in the 1920s.

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目录:

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