



# Working Out in Japan: Shaping the Female Body in Tokyo Fitness Clubs

*Laura Spielvogel*

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Beer, ice cream, and socializing; thighs, abs, and pecs—Japanese fitness clubs combine entertainment and exercise, reflecting the Japanese concept of fitness as encompassing a zest for life as well as physical health. Through an engaging account of these clubs, *Working Out in Japan* reveals how beauty, bodies, health, and leisure are understood and experienced in Japan today. An aerobics instructor in two of Tokyo's most popular fitness club chains from 1995 to 1997, Laura Spielvogel captures the diverse voices of club members, workers, and managers; women and men; young and old.

Fitness clubs have proliferated in Japanese cities over the past decade. Yet, despite the pervasive influence of a beauty industry that values thinness above all else, they have met with only mixed success. Exploring this paradox, Spielvogel focuses on the tensions and contradictions within the world of Japanese fitness clubs and on the significance of differences between Japanese and North American philosophies of mind and body.

*Working Out in Japan* explores the ways spaces and bodies are organized and regulated within the clubs, the frustrations of female instructors who face various gender inequities, and the difficult demands that the ideal of slimness places on Japanese women. Spielvogel's vivid investigation illuminates not only the fitness clubs themselves, but also broader cultural developments including the growth of the service industry and the changing character of work and leisure in Japan.

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