

Hunger (Gay)

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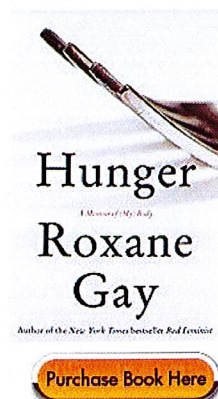
Hunger: *A Memoir of (My) Body*

Roxane Gay, 2017

HarperCollins

320 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780062747891



Summary

A searingly honest memoir of food, weight, self-image, and learning how to feed your hunger while taking care of yourself.

"I ate and ate and ate in the hopes that if I made myself big, my body would be safe. I buried the girl I was because she ran into all kinds of trouble. I tried to erase every memory of her, but she is still there, somewhere.... I was trapped in my body, one that I barely recognized or understood, but at least I was safe."

New York Times bestselling author Roxane Gay has written with intimacy and sensitivity about food and bodies, using her own emotional and psychological struggles as a means of exploring our shared anxieties over pleasure, consumption, appearance, and health.

As a woman who describes her own body as "wildly undisciplined," Roxane understands the tension between desire and denial, between self-comfort and self-care.

In *Hunger*, she casts an insightful and critical eye on her childhood, teens, and twenties—including the devastating act of violence that acted as a turning point in her young life—and brings readers into the present and the realities, pains, and joys of her daily life.

With the bracing candor, vulnerability, and authority that have made her one of the most admired voices of her generation, Roxane explores what it means to be overweight in a time when the bigger you are, the less you are seen. *Hunger* is a deeply personal memoir from one of our finest writers, and tells a story that hasn't yet been told but needs to be. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—October 26, 1974
- Where—Omaha, Nebraska, USA

- Education—Ph.D., Michigan Technological University
- Currently—lives in Lafayette, Indiana, and Los Angeles, California

Roxane Gay is an American feminist writer, professor, editor and commentator. She is an associate professor of English at Purdue University, contributing opinion writer at the *New York Times*, founder of Tiny Hardcore Press, essays editor for *The Rumpus*, and co-editor of PANK, a nonprofit literary arts collective.

Early life and education

Gay was born in Omaha, Nebraska, to a family of Haitian descent. She attended high school at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire.

Gay holds a doctoral degree in rhetoric and technical communication from Michigan Technological University. The title of her dissertation was, "Subverting the subject position: toward a new discourse about students as writers and engineering students as technical communicators."

Career

After completing her Ph.D., Gay began her academic teaching career in Fall 2010 at Eastern Illinois University, where she was assistant professor of English. While at EIU, in addition to her teaching duties she was a contributing editor for *Bluestem* magazine, and she also founded Tiny Hardcore Press. Gay worked at Eastern Illinois University until the end of the 2013-2014 academic year, taking a job in August 2014 at Purdue University as associate professor of creative writing.

Much of Gay's written work deals with the analysis and deconstruction of feminist and racial issues through the lens of her personal experiences with race, gender identity, and sexuality. She is the author of the short story collection *Ayiti* (2011), the novel *An Untamed State* (2014), the essay collection *Bad Feminist* (2014), the short story collection *Difficult Women* (2017), and *Hunger* (2017).

She also edited the book *Girl Crush: Women's Erotic Fantasies*. In addition to her regular contributions to *Salon* and the now defunct *HTMLGiant*, her writing has appeared in *Best American Mystery Stories 2014*, *Best American Short Stories 2012*, *Best Sex Writing 2012*, *A Public Space*, *McSweeney's*, *Tin House*, *Oxford American*, *American Short Fiction*, *West Branch*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *NOON*, *Bookforum*, *Time*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Nation* and *New York Times Book Review*.

In July 2016, Gay and poet Yona Harvey were announced as writers for Marvel Comics' *World of Wakanda*, a spin-off from the company's *Black Panther* title, making her the first black woman to be a lead writer for Marvel.

Reception

Gay's publication of the novel *An Untamed State* and essay collection *Bad Feminist* in the summer of 2014 led *Time Magazine* to declare, "Let this be the year of Roxane Gay." The magazine noted of her inclusive style: "Gay's writing is simple and direct,

but never cold or sterile. She directly confronts complex issues of identity and privilege, but it's always accessible and insightful."

In the United Kingdom's *The Guardian*, critic Kira Cochrane offered a similar assessment:

While online discourse is often characterised by extreme, polarised opinions, her writing is distinct for being subtle and discursive, with an ability to see around corners, to recognise other points of view while carefully advancing her own. In print, on Twitter and in person, Gay has the voice of the friend you call first for advice, calm and sane as well as funny, someone who has seen a lot and takes no prisoners.

A group of feminist scholars and activists analyzed Gay's *Bad Feminist* for "Short Takes: Provocations on Public Feminism," an initiative of the feminist journal *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*.

Personal

Gay began writing essays as a teenager; her work has been greatly influenced by a sexual assault she experienced at age 12. She is also a competitive Scrabble player in the U.S. Gay is bisexual. (*From Wikipedia. Retrieved 2/2/2017 .*)

Book Reviews

Gay turns to memoir in this powerful reflection on her childhood traumas.... Timely and resonant, you can be sure that *Hunger* will touch a nerve, as so much of Roxane Gay's writing does.

Newsday

Wrenching, deeply moving...a memoir that's so brave, so raw, it feels as if [Gay]'s entrusting you with her soul.

Seattle Times

(*Starred review.*) This raw and graceful memoir digs deeply into what it means to be comfortable in one's body. Gay denies that hers is a story of "triumph," but readers will be hard pressed to find a better word.

Publishers Weekly

(*Starred review.*) Displays bravery, resilience, and naked honesty from the first to last page.... Stunning...essential reading.

Library Journal

(*Starred review.*) A heart-rending debut memoir from the outspoken feminist and

essayist.... An intense, unsparingly honest portrait of childhood crisis and its enduring aftermath.

Booklist

(*Starred review.*) A heart-rending debut memoir from the outspoken feminist and essayist.... An intense, unsparingly honest portrait of childhood crisis and its enduring aftermath.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

We'll add publisher questions if and when they're available; in the meantime, use our LitLovers talking points to help start a discussion for Hunger...then take off on your own:

1. Probably the best place to begin a discussion for Roxane Gay's *Hunger* is to talk about your own battle with body image: weight gains and losses, sense of shame, and whatever other emotional rollercoasters you've found yourself on.

2. Next up: In what ways does this book resonate with you? Think back to your early life, your upbringing, and how those years might have set you on the path you're on today.

3. Gay was the victim of rape when she was younger. How does that trauma play into her overeating?

4. Consider the views of other people. As Gay writes, "People see bodies like mine and make their assumptions. They think they know the why of my body. They do not."

What assumptions do you make of overweight people? What assumptions do you think people make (or might make) of you?

5. Talk about the paradox Gay points to: wanting acceptance for her body shape...yet wanting to change it. Can that tension ever be resolved — not just for overweight people but for anyone who doesn't fit the image of physical perfection our society worships?

6. Speaking of society: in what way does our cultural obsession with body shape contribute to Gay's (or, really, almost anyone's) sense of shame regarding the body?

7. Gay writes: "I do not know why I turned to food. Or I do" and "I do not have an answer to that question, or I do." What does Gay know...or not know about why she eats? What about you? Do you have answers for your own body weight?

8. Why does Gay denounce shows like *The Biggest Loser* and *Extreme Makeover*:

Weight Loss Edition?

9. Care to tackle this passage from the book?

When you're overweight, your body becomes a matter of public record in many respects. Your body is constantly and prominently on display.... Fat, much like skin color, is something you cannot hide, no matter how dark the clothing you wear, or how diligently you avoid horizontal stripes.... People are quick to offer statistics and information about the dangers of obesity, as if you are not only fat but incredibly stupid, unaware, and delusional about your body and a world that is vigorously inhospitable to that body.... You are your body, nothing more, and your body should damn well become less.

10. How familiar are you with the latest science regarding body weight, particularly the part that genetics and "hunger hormones" (Ghrelin and Leptin) play? If some bodies are hard-wired to gain weight ...well, then what?

11. If Roxane Gay were sitting with you right now, what you you say to her?

(Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)

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8 questions for Roxane Gay on her new book, *Hunger*

The popular feminist cultural critic and novelist writes her most personal book yet

BY TESS MALONE - JUNE 19, 2017

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Shares

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"This is the story of my body. The story of my body is not a story of triumph," Roxane Gay writes in the second chapter of her new memoir, *Hunger*. It's the feminist writer's fourth book and second released just this year, but it's also her most vulnerable, recounting the story of how she put on weight to cope with the trauma of being gang raped at age 12. Gay discusses her personal struggle with gaining and trying to lose weight through personal narrative and the cultural criticism she became known for in her 2014 breakout *Bad Feminist*. Gay will read from her book at Athens's [40 Watt Club](#) on Wednesday, June 21, and at [Agnes Scott's Gaines Chapel on Thursday, June 22](#). We spoke to her about being vulnerable, being a public figure, and who this book is for.

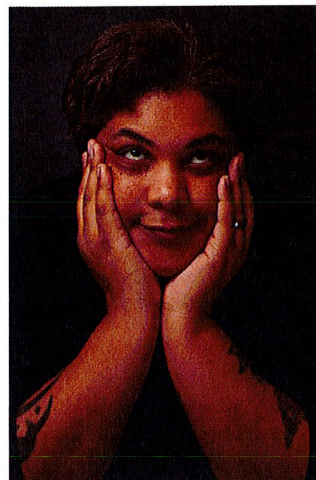


Photo by Jay Grabiec

Tell me about the writing process for this book. Which section was most difficult?

It took me a long time to start. I procrastinated quite a lot. When the book was supposed to come out, I knew there was no way to get it done in time, so I asked for an extension. It was difficult just getting started and wrapping my head around the topic, just facing the level of vulnerability that it demanded.

You are now seen as a voice of feminism, but this book is incredibly vulnerable. How do you balance that?

I don't think the two things are contradictory. I respect that people see me as someone to go to on certain topics and someone who is an authority, but that's not me—it's how other people see me. Writing that vulnerability is something I did not enjoy, but the book needed it.

Many people ask you for your opinion on everything from politics to pop culture. How do you handle being seen as an authority?

I take it in stride. I ask myself, "When is it time to say something on an issue?" or "When is it a good time for me to read about it or listen to others?" I use that rubric to weigh in. [For example,] often times with international affairs I try to learn and listen because I'm not an expert in those areas. I stay informed and care deeply, but I listen.

Why write about your body now?

I was thinking about what my next nonfiction book should be. I had been avoiding a book on fatness, so that's how I knew it was probably the book I needed to write most.

What would say the goal of *Hunger* is?

To write about a different kind of body experience than what we normally see written about.
To encourage people to think more carefully about bodies other than their own.

Was *Hunger* always the title?

It was always the natural title. “Hunger” means so many different things. It’s physical, emotional. It’s about desire and needs.

Who do you see as the audience for this book?

I generally don’t think about audience, but I think many women are going to relate to it, women who have felt uncomfortable in their bodies or felt like they didn’t conform to cultural rules about how bodies should be. Probably most women, unfortunately, will get something very valuable from the book.

What are you working on next?

A YA novel, an adult novel, two nonfiction projects, an essay collection, and some screenwriting stuff. I tend to work across projects, but there is usually one project at a given time that has most of my focus. I’m pretty good at compartmentalizing, but given my [teaching and travel] schedule, it’s difficult to find time for writing.

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The Guardian



Interview

Roxane Gay: 'No one is guaranteed love or affection'

Laura Snapes

The author of *Bad Feminist* and *Hunger* has strong words for 'incels', harassers in publishing and diet gurus

Sat 2 Jun 2018 13.00 EDT

Born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1974, Roxane Gay is an author, essayist, *New York Times* opinion writer and associate professor of English at Indiana's Purdue University. She has published a novel, *An Untamed State*, two short story collections, *Ayiti* and *Difficult Women*, the *New York Times* bestseller *Bad Feminist* (which *Time* magazine described as "a manual on how to be human"), and a memoir, *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* (Corsair, £8.99), released in paperback on 7 June. It deals with Gay's rape at the age of 12 and the lifelong consequences of her decision to make her body as big as possible as a form of self-protection. She is also the author of Marvel's *Black Panther: World of Wakanda* and will publish her first YA work, *The Year I Learned Everything*, later this year. She lives between Indiana and LA.

From your early forays on to internet messageboards to writing this book, it seems as though language was a key part of processing the trauma of your childhood rape. Did writing offer control?

Definitely. I think writing always gives us control over the things that we can't actually control in our lives, so taking control of the narrative of my body as a public space was absolutely helpful in terms of thinking about my relationship to my body.

Did you encounter personal revelations as you were writing?

It started as a process of writing what I know to be true and it became a process of revelation. I was able to make some realisations about myself that previously I hadn't made and it really forced me to confront my relationship not only with my body, but with food. I mostly saw how unkind I had been to myself when my body has actually gotten me through quite a lot in life. And recognising that, in many ways, I was holding on to the weight for the wrong reasons and the only one that was really hurting was myself.

There is some difficult material in the book regarding the effect the attack had on your sex life, particularly when you write that you have to think about your attacker if you want to experience pleasure during sex. What kind of responses have you had to that section?

I actually haven't heard anything about that specific part. I wasn't thinking about the reader when I wrote that. I was simply writing my truth.

That revelation felt connected to the chapter about quitting Yale to move to Arizona, which alluded to some complicated sexual encounters. Could that be the kernel for another memoir?

No, that will not [laughs]. As long as my parents are around that will not become part of another memoir. I never thought I would write one memoir, so I can't say I'm never gonna write another, but I have no plans to. I don't know that I have anything more to say about myself.

You do lots of different kinds of writing - fiction, memoir, essays, columns, graphic novels, television. Is there any you do and keep private?

No. I think that sharing the work with the world brings closure to the process of any given book or piece.

When you published *Hunger* in June 2017, nobody could have foreseen the conversation about rape culture that would arise following the Harvey Weinstein allegations. Has that changed the tenor of discussion around the book?

No - I toured this book before all of that came out. I think it's definitely going to shift the tenor when I tour the paperback in June, though.

Have you been encouraged by this conversation?

I have. It has been also frustrating to see the ways in which people are dismissive of what has come out, but in general I am encouraged to see women and men coming forward about their experiences with sexual violence. And we're starting to see at least some public reckoning. I don't know that the justice system has caught up yet, because unfortunately in the US there's a statute of limitations. But it's been a long time coming. It's up to us to make sure that this conversation does not leave the public sphere any time soon.

You've said there are Weinsteins in publishing. Have you seen this reckoning hit your field?

No, we've got a long way to go in publishing - frankly, in all realms. With [the allegations against] Junot Diaz, that door is starting to open and it'll be interesting to see what more comes out, if anything. I'm not even interested in this happening publicly. It just needs to happen.

You recently tweeted about the so-called “incels”, the internet subculture whose members refer to their inability to find a romantic or sexual partner as “involuntary celibacy”. Girls are taught that men will lay claim to their bodies. Why are we culturally resistant to teaching boys that they don’t deserve sex?

That’s just the way it is. We have to change that and we have to teach both young men and young women about enthusiastic consent. And that a woman can say “no” at any time and it may suck, but you still have to listen to that “no”. Until we get there, we’re gonna continue to see things like in Santa Fe, where a young woman rejected a man and he went to school and killed her and nine others. No one is guaranteed love or affection and I don’t say that callously, because I think that love and affection and sex are important and that everyone should have their shot. But the men that can’t get laid, there’s a reason. It’s because they’re sociopaths and nobody wants them, and I’m not gonna cry for them.

Who’s your literary hero?

I love Zadie Smith. She’s incredible and the chances she takes in both her fiction and nonfiction are just superlative - especially *NW*.

What’s on your bedside table?

I’m reading *The Stand* by Stephen King and *Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi, a fantasy book grounded in African tradition about three young people on a quest to restore magic to the nation of Orisha.

I’m in the middle of *Family Trust* by Kathy Wang, *Ivy vs. Dogg: With a Cast of Thousands!* by Brian Leung, about this small town that elects a youth mayor and things go awry, and *America Is Not the Heart* by Elaine Castillo.

Are there any genres you avoid?

Oddly enough, I don’t read a lot of nonfiction or much self-help. There’s nothing wrong with it - it’s just not for me.

You wrote an essay about getting weight-loss surgery to reduce the size of your stomach in January. How are you feeling?

I feel fine. I’ve definitely settled into a routine. It’s been four months so I’m still learning a lot and there are still a lot of changes, but I have definitely adapted to those changes.

Are they the changes you hoped for?

I just hoped for a change.

You often discuss the pernicious influence of diet culture, which publishing perpetuates. Should there be more regulation on the messaging and medical integrity behind books about diets, food and bodies?

Absolutely, but I couldn’t begin to know how to begin to implement that. The diet industry is predicated on the notion that fatness is unhealthy and that everybody’s fat. And these things are untrue. And I think people need to recognise that a lot of the so-called “medical studies” about fatness are actually paid for by diet companies and weight-loss drug manufacturers. We have to follow the money more carefully and look at context. Until we do that I think a lot of people are going to continue to buy into these damaging notions that are perpetuated by diet books and diet programmes.