

# Bioethics Book Club



## **Hunger - A Memoir of (My) Body**

**By Roxane Gay**

*HarperCollins Publishers, 2017*

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### **Summary<sup>1</sup>**

Roxane Gay has lived with obesity since her early teenage years. In her book “Hunger – A Memoir of (My) Body,” she tells what it is like for her to live in what she describes as a “wildly undisciplined” body. Gay describe how she was raped as a young teenager and how it made her eat herself big because she was convinced that it would make her body safe. In this memoir of her body Gay reflects on what it is like to live with obesity and the challenges she has and still does encounter due to her weight issues.

### **Ethical Issues**

Obesity and Stigma

Eating Disorder

Sexual Abuse

Family relationships

Body Image

### **Discussion questions:**

- How does being a victim of rape play into Roxanne Gay’s problems with overeating?
- Roxane Gay is very aware of her body size and writes about what she thinks other people assume about her. In your opinion, what do you think are the most common assumptions that people may have around overweight or obesity?
- Members of Roxane Gay’s nearest family have tried multiple times to “control and fix [her]” (page 233). It makes her feel ashamed. In your opinion, how should family and friends support a person who is experiencing problems with overeating?
  - Do you think Roxane’s family members are doing anything wrong in their attempts to encourage Roxane to lose weight?
- What was your initial reaction to the following statement: “There is the humiliation of simply being in the doctor’s office, which is, all too often, ill-equipped for the obese body, despite the public hysteria about obesity and health.” (page 273)?
- Can you give some other examples of weight bias that a person with obesity may experience in a health care setting?
- In your opinion, what can health care providers do to help eliminate weight or size-based discrimination in the health care setting?

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from publisher’s summary.

- Roxanne Gay writes “I am highly visible, but I am regularly treated like I am invisible. My body receives no respect or consideration or care in public spaces. My body is treated like a public space” (page 208).
  - What is your initial reaction to this statement?
  - Do you agree with Roxane Gay’s reasoning around body image and invisibility? Why/why not?

**Discuss the following passages from the book:**

Page 209-210: “When you are fat and travelling, the staring starts from the moment you enter the airport. At the gate, there are so many uncomfortable looks as people make it plain they do not want to be sitting next to you, having any part of your obese body touching theirs. During boarding process when they realize that they have lucked out in this particular game of Russian roulette and will not be seated next to you, their relief is visible, palpable, shameless.

Page 120: “When you’re overweight, your body becomes a matter of public record in many respects. Your body is constantly and prominently on display. People project assumed narratives onto your body and are not at all interested in the truth of your body, whatever that truth might be. 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.”

Page 300: “Does anyone feel comfortable in their bodies? Glossy magazines lead me to believe that this is a rare experience indeed. The way my friends talk about their bodies also leads me to that same conclusion.”

Page 201: Sometimes, people who, I think, mean well like to tell me I am not fat. They will say things like, “Don’t say that about yourself,” because they understand “fat” as something shameful, something insulting, while I understand “fat” as a reality of my body. When I use the word, I am not insulting myself. I am describing myself.” [...] “It’s hard for thin people to know how to talk to fat people about their bodies, whether their opinions are solicited or not. I get that, but it’s insulting to pretend I am not fat or to deny my body and its reality.”