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THE BODY IS NOT AN APOLOGY: THE POWER OF RADICAL SELF-LOVE, SECOND EDITION

Sonya Renee Taylor
Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2021

REVIEWED BY MACKENZIE EDWARDS

In the second edition of *The Body Is Not an Apology*, Sonya Renee Taylor continues the first edition's naturalization of radical self-love, holding the reader's hand as she guides them through practical steps towards transformative justice. The book has been updated and expanded throughout, making it even more relevant for today. Through straightforward writing, carefully crafted pauses, and nature-oriented imagery, Taylor goes beyond "self-help" and "body positivity" and toward a blueprint for genuine change. A line is drawn in the book between self-love and self-like—you do not have to like yourself to enact radical self-love. Self-acceptance is not positioned as the goal; instead, the goal is societal transformation (Taylor 3), involving the individual, our communities, and our worlds (10).

Despite body positivity being a phrase in vogue on platforms like Instagram, Taylor locates it as a potential source of further shame (41), which in turn serves to generate capitalist profit (44). Capitalism and the falsehood of buying your way into self-love are critiqued at length (46),

adding layers that distinguish the book from body positivity's frequent commercial co-optations. What Taylor shows us in this book is that there is more to be sought than "liking my thighs" (64), adding crucial nuance and depth to the self-love mission. Later in the book, she expands on the structural and institutional changes that need to occur for radical self-love to truly take root more broadly, with an intersectional roadmap for transformation.

At the same time, this depth is conveyed while being easily understandable. The book is punctuated with "Radical Reflections" and "Unapologetic Inquiries" that generate meditations and questions about unapologetic embodiment. These peppered pauses get to the core of the subject matter and encourage readers to dig deeper. Sometimes these breaks can feel a bit like they are straying toward "self-help" territory—something the book openly disavows. Although these breaks do not feel like interruptions, they can lend to a sense that the book is more targeted at body liberation beginners than those who have longer histories of being activists, scholars, or otherwise engaged with body justice. This beginner-friendliness is buoyed by the foreword from Ijeoma Oluo, the author of *So You Want to Talk About Race*, another book that appeals to social justice novices.

This is not a negative; in many ways, it is a positive. The book eschews complicated academic jargon, and it is accessible to most who are open to its message. Any quotes or outside examples used are contextualized, without assuming a certain level of knowledge on behalf of the reader. The book also follows a very practical format sure to please those who find more theoretical books lacking. The book's various numbered sub-divisions make its words immediately actionable, which include "The

Three Peaces" and the "Four Pillars of Practice." The fifth chapter, "How To Fight With Love," further excels at bringing praxis to the forefront.

This accessibility and practicality are rooted in the use of nature imagery. In Taylor's words, "[r]adical self-love is indeed our inherent natural state" (12). Taylor uses a diverse array of natural language, from "stars" (22) and "black holes" (22) to "diving" (65) and "fog" (66). Radical self-love is itself described as an "oak tree" (2). Contextualizing self-love and the body in nature creates a powerful portrait of embodiment as a state of "vast magnificence" (26). This allows for the embrace of a radical self-love that is grounded in something deeper, older, and more universal than the human structures that shape us.

A final note: natural language may have been better suited than using a phrase like "body terrorism." This is not because body-oriented injustice is somehow inherently less harmful than acts that have been deemed "terrorism." Instead, it is important to remember the painful history of the word "terrorism" for Black and brown bodies—especially for Muslims—that makes the term difficult to reclaim in the spirit of intersectional liberation. It may be time to divest from the terminology of "terrorism" and try instead to find newer and less fraught ways to discuss the mechanics of hate, shame, and policing that occur around marginalized embodiments. That said, this barely detracts from the actionable beauty that is *The Body Is Not an Apology*.