



bodies

bodies

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Editors' Note

Bodies are our private vessels, and our public front to the world. Our bodies are our own, but they also shape how we interact with the things and people around us. They are how we experience and express pleasure, pain, gender, sexuality, joy, shame, and celebration. We chose to title our publication *Bodies* to begin talking about how it feels to live in our own bodies and connect with all the bodies around us.

In the process of exposing our complex relationships with our bodies and others' bodies, we are able to affirm all aspects of our identities. We can begin to interrogate the way treatment of bodies impacts ourselves, and establish a new standard of body sovereignty.

We would like to extend a special thank you to the Gender and Sexuality Center for the unerring support we had in creating this publication, as well as the Carleton Student Association. Also, thank you to the students who wrote, edited, designed, and supported this publication, making it possible. It is thanks to their enthusiasm and willingness to contribute and share their stories that you are holding this in your hands today.

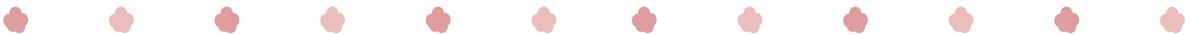
The goal of *Bodies* was to provide contributors and all members of the Carleton community with the opportunity and forum to talk about bodies in ways that otherwise may be taboo or unavailable. We understand that bodies cause us and help us to experience a whole medley of sensations, feelings, and complexities that can be difficult to discuss. Hopefully *Bodies* will help us to start talking about these issues, and come to understand and love our bodies more. Self-acceptance and body-acceptance is an on-going and difficult process, but it is also important in and of itself. We hope that, in reading these pieces, you will be able to start thinking about your body and others' bodies and what they mean to you and your experiences with the world and yourself.

Hair



by Isatu Kamara

I was probably 5 years old when I decided that the ultimate accessory for a perfect, pretty princess was a pendulous pony tail.



I also realized that my afro puff pig tails were not cutting it. They did not blow in the wind and I would only be left with a sore neck if I attempted to make them sway from side to side as I skipped down the sidewalk. How could I possibly compete with Thumbelina's long tresses or even with black Barbie's mane when it came time for the world's peasantry to select a beautiful 5 year old leader? Something had to change. In my little world, I knew that it hurt when Mommy or Grandma combed, parted, and corn rowed my hair. Adding insult to injury, I also knew that corn rows did not fit into pretty princess criteria.

At 7 years old, it seemed that my wildest dream was about to become reality. My mother judged that I was old enough to get a perm. I shall first state that a perm has nothing to do with the creation of curly hair; my genetics already had that down to a science. Rather, a perm (or a relaxer), in the African American community, is the chemical straightening of super-duper-intensely-curly curls. Some argue that getting a perm simply makes curly



Two hours later, I flounced
out of the salon. Isatu
Kamara was a different person.

hair easier to manage. Indeed, the process of washing, detangling, and brushing my hair into afro-puffs was a rather painful experience. I didn't cry if I fell down and scraped a knee because it was nothing compared to the horrors of a fine toothed comb. Yet, I knew in my heart of hearts that I wanted straight hair because I wanted my hair to blow in the wind. And that was that. I sat in the salon chair, nervous with anticipation, as the miracle cream was applied to my scalp. A few minutes of tingling set in before the fiery burning. For a superior description of the sensory reaction to relaxer, I highly recommend reading page 55 in my edition of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Ouch. All the same, the longer one let it burn, the straighter the hair, and I, at the time being of the shy variety, let it burn for quite some time.

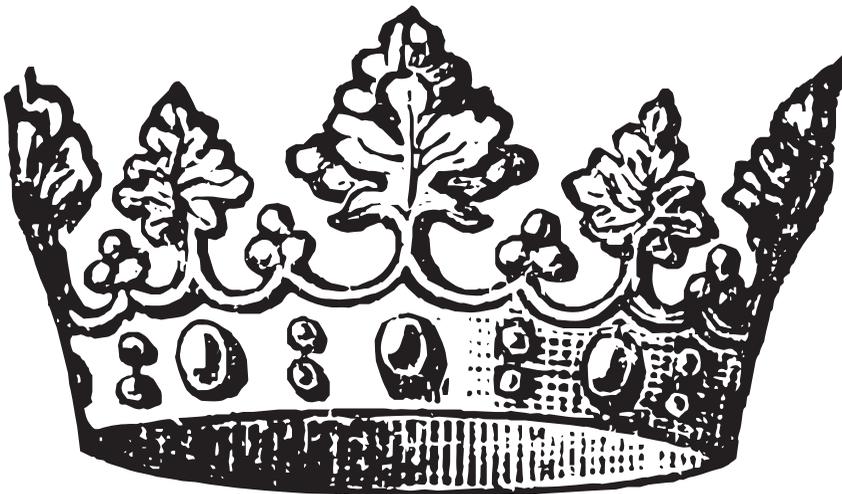
Two hours later, I flounced out of the salon. Isatu Kamara was a different person. I flipped my hair left. I flipped my hair right. I bent my torso down toward the ground and straightened myself up with vigor. My hair was weightless. The wind blew...and my hair blew with it. I WAS BEAUTIFUL! That day was one of the vainest days of my life. At home, I periodically went to the bathroom and observed how my hair lay straight upon my shoulders, dangling like the leaves upon a willow tree. Thumbelina could shove it and black Barbie had better watch out.

What I did not know was that, like all good things, my hair's fluttery weightlessness would not last forever. Who knew that relaxer had to be reapplied every four to six weeks to prevent damage? Who knew that taking swimming lessons was a huge no-no? Who knew that water was inherently evil? I eventually learned all of these things the hard way. It became increasingly difficult to replicate the feeling that I had the day of my first perm. Seven years later, at 14, my hair was doing more breaking than the hippest B-boys on the

card board covered streets of 1980 Brooklyn. I probably had 2 inches of hair at the very back of my head of which hair stylists tried to remedy by giving me "cute bobs." Not. I no longer felt like a perfect, pretty princess. The Sodium Hydroxide had wrought its havoc on my scalp and on my soul.

Two weeks after 8th grade graduation, I went to the salon. This time, the mood was somber. I was about to follow in the hair steps of my mother and sister. I was going to cut off my processed, damaged, stiff, cranky, crotchety locks. As rough as I had looked the last year, a small 5 year old's voice protested my impending action. "Perfect, pretty princesses are NOT bald-headed." "Good luck getting your scalp to blow in the wind!" Snip Snip Snip. Chop Chop. Buzz. I had half an inch of hair, maybe $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. Yet, as I walked out of the salon, 5 year old Isatu fell silent. I couldn't do a hair flip, and I didn't want to.

This summer will be my six year anniversary of having "natural" hair. I still have days when it looks a hot mess - then I bust out my trusty brown hat. Truth be told, it's the only hat that fits my big hair and big head. I respect Thumbelina and her hair. I really do. Furthermore, I will never call black Barbie out on her weave; it looks really nice on her. What I've learned in the last few years is that my natural hair should be respected too. I've learned that I am happy to be nappy. In my world, the perfect, pretty princesses come in all shapes and sizes, some with long blonde hair and others with long blonde dread locks. My grandmother always said that a woman's hair is her crown and glory. And indeed, the crowns of many little perfect princesses have afro puffs in the place of rubies. ■



My Body and the Bathhouse,
or

BAM:

Reclamation!

by Norma Nyhoff

Me and my body have been on-again, off-again for years now.

Childhood was good for us—bare feet 24/7, lots of exploring the bamboo forest past the creek, baths and showers shared with friends. All of this without shame or apprehension. I loved my body, naked or clothed, as an expression of myself.

Things got rocky around 4th grade—my body said, “Puberty!” and I said, “Oh, hell no!” We disagreed, is what I’m saying, and then everyone and everything started telling me that my body and I should be breaking it off anyway. We were too close, and that was shameful and obscene. We weren’t right for each other, didn’t belong to each other—at best, I was a chaperone for my own body. After one incident involving biking and a seriously bruised pelvis, I tried to break off the affair for good.

Middle school was more of the same. My body and I were not on good terms and locker room changes were furtively performed in the corner. I resented my body for betraying me, for changing in unfamiliar ways that left me achy and uncertain, for making me into an object rather than the agent of my own life. I hated feeling scared to walk alone at night, hated my body for making me vulnerable and fleshy and strange.

It was an asshole, and I was over it.

Enter high school, an exchange abroad:

Flash to a bathhouse filled with girls I knew and women I didn't. Towel ripped away, I had to wait shamefully naked to wash before entering. It was terrifying. An old woman washed herself on a low bench, legs spread, and didn't even have the decency to be ashamed like a Good Woman should. It was overwhelming, alien, and I initially tried to blank it all out. I knew that I didn't belong there, but my body dragged me kicking and screaming into the immediacy of the moment. I lived that experience through and with my entire body. For all its seeming strangeness, I loved that bathhouse. It was the first time since childhood that my body and I were in sync, that my skin wasn't a shameful secret to be hidden. In that bathhouse, my body was me.

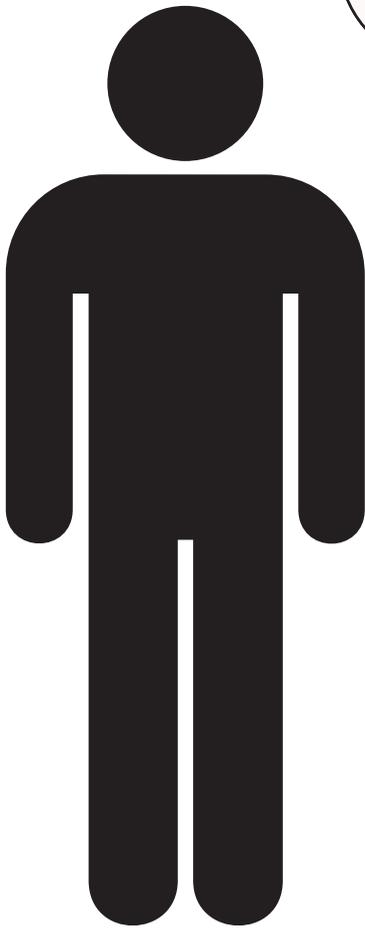
I've since come to reclaim my body in a major way, to appreciate it as my home, my partner, and an expression of my self. Naturally, we still have the occasional spat—when I'm crazy-hungry, when I'm sick, when I'm lonely or shopping for pants. But when we're going through a rough patch I remember the cool air of that bathhouse, the connection I felt then, and breathe deep.

My body is not the enemy. It never was. My thighs, my soft stomach, the soles of my feet were all tragically misunderstood, and I didn't stand up in their defense. But I know better now, for the most part, and am constantly working to keep our relationship strong. It's a challenging process at times, but developing a respectful, loving relationship with my own body has been rewarding in ways that I can't fully express. And why not try to love my body? After all, we're in this for the long haul. ■

It was terrifying.

An old woman washed herself on a low bench, legs spread, and didn't even have the decency to be ashamed like a Good Woman should. It was overwhelming, alien, and I initially tried to blank it all out.

Who's Hot, and What Does That Make You?



A funny thing happens when I like someone. Physically, I mean. Or maybe it's more accurate to say, when I don't *let* myself like someone, or when I feel guilty about liking them. I compare them to me. Impulsively. I size up our stature, our shoulders, our arms, legs, teeth, hair. I should probably tell you that most of

the time, I'm attracted to people with bodies that are kinda like mine—male ones. This means there are more points of comparison in the first place: more likely than not, the same basic architecture, the same “average” proportions, and usually, just about the same cultural standards of beauty. Attractiveness. Hotness.

I learn what it means to be attractive—or “hot” (or maybe we'd settle for “cute”)—from the media, sure. But more importantly, I learn it from conversations with people around me. It's not just the movies, it's not just advertising, it's not just art, it's not just porn. It's everyday conversation. It's hearing what others think is hot/attractive/cute. And it's a process of agreeing with some of what you hear, maybe unconsciously. Advertising works best not just when you believe *other* people think something is great, but when you start echoing them, when *you* tell people something is great, or hot ... maybe because you've started to believe it, too. Strongly, even.

It's a big deal to call something hot. “Hot” means desirable. Worthy of our attention. It's my way of telling you I desire this, and



others' desires are expected to line up this way, too. Beauty may lie in the eye of the beholder and all that, but we also assume eyes will look in certain directions. And from my perspective, the more that people evaluate some "hot" person based on things you can compare to your own body, the more resonance it has for you. If this person (or their legs, maybe, or chest) is "hot," it becomes a subtle reminder that maybe ... you're not. After all, just look for yourself.

But instead, let's try looking at this desirability issue from a different angle: that of the body positivity movement. Body positivity efforts, like Happy Bodies at Carleton, bring together a lot of people who have been told day in, day out that they need to change their bodies. Your body just isn't good enough to "please your man," or, all you need to do to look good is lift this many times a week, or maybe run two hours a day, and get surgery, and develop some kind of eating disorder while you're at it. People are sick of this. They're sick of being told they're not desirable because of their weight, or their proportions, composition, race, or disability. They want to love their bodies the way they are. And this newfound positivity—this rejection of all those messages—is really great.

However, I think there's a really important tension here between how we evaluate our own desirability and *what we desire*. Unlike the former, we still see the latter as totally "natural," whether we're talking about the sex of the people we're attracted to or their cheekbones or, I dunno, ankles. But for me, and probably many others who desire people the same sex, these two things are wound very tightly together. I can't shake a basic question: *How can we say body idealizations don't matter, when some of us contribute to them through our desire for and fantasies about people who*

You're beautiful. You
and that body of
yours. Okay? Good.
Now dance with it.

represent them? And if you're wondering which cultural ideals I mean, that brings up another reason I feel isolated from the body positivity movement: my body issues have always felt like queer

male issues, and I think they need to be addressed within—and throughout—that community. Of course, I realize there's no single "ideal man" for all queer men, but the ideals we see and hear everyday (pecs, glutes, 7+-inch cock, six-pack, etc.) are nonetheless powerful influences on our own (self-)perceptions.

I'm also not saying this is just a queer male problem or oppression or anything like that. I'll bet plenty of people of different bodies and orientations can relate to what I'm saying, and I know a number of queer

male-bodied men who live in their bodies with a comfort and an uninhibited grace that's really inspiring. But what I'm left with at the end of the day is my own story. And what I see in my body has so much to do with what I've been socialized to see in others'.

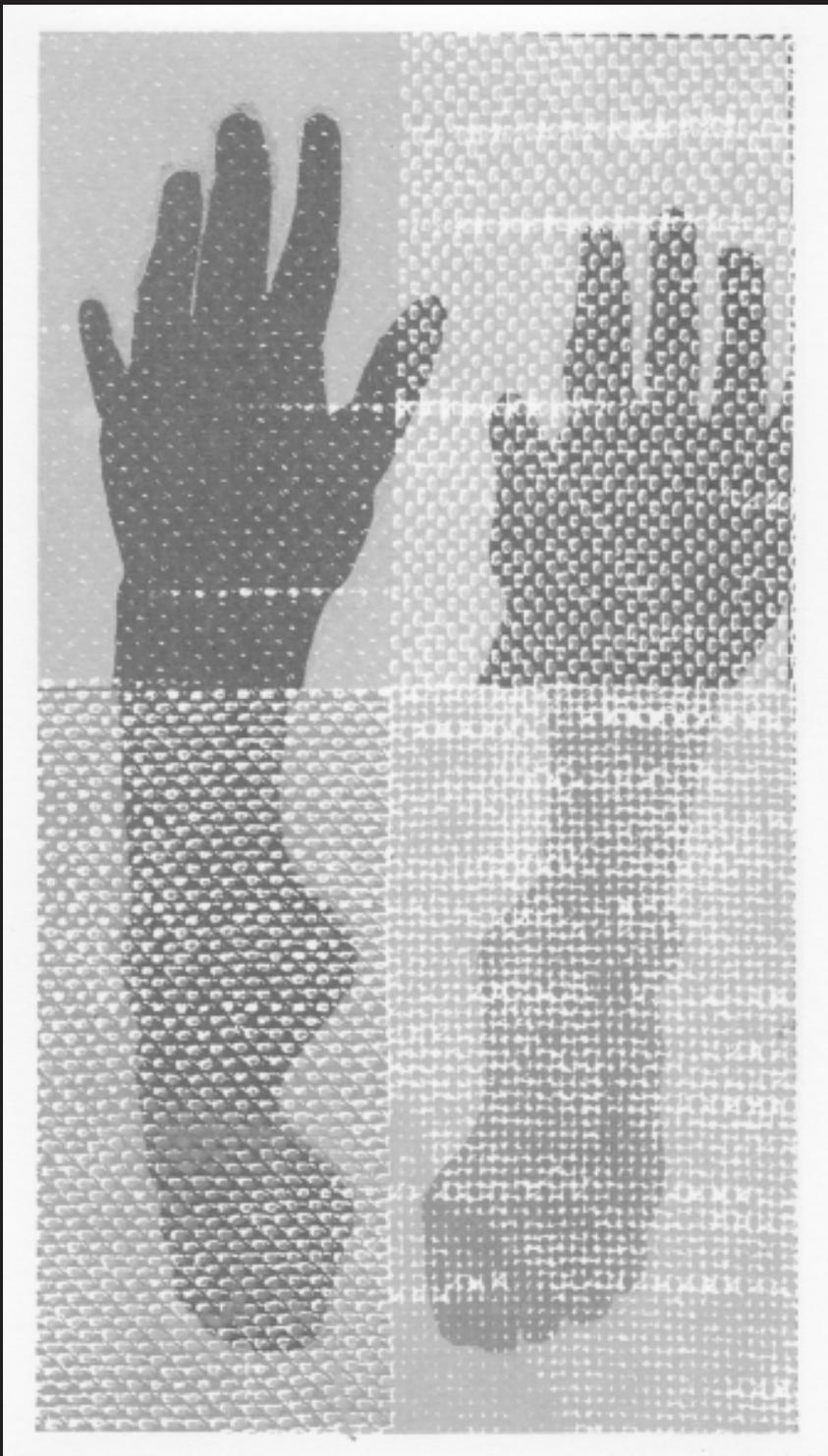
Truth is, body positivity means a lot to me. I'm aware just about every day, every waking hour, every moment of self-reflection of the unhealthy relationship I have with my body. Basically, I have pretty horrible self-image. When I'm on, I'm on, but that positivity is a tenuous thing, always awaiting this tide of doubt to swallow it up. I think about these things all the time—these standards I've internalized, and my inability to consistently see myself as attractive. I think about them when I look in the mirror, every chance I get. I think about them when I look at my forearms (or yours, fyi), or my calves, or my gut. I think about them when I fantasize. I think about them when I watch porn. I think about them when I have sex. And the thing about this endless body calculus is, somehow, I'm always going to lose.

We can't tell each other to find comfort in our own skin, to see ourselves as desirable, while we desire in others the same qualities we have to coach ourselves to stop wanting for our own bodies. These things are all interconnected. They go hand in hand. There's a disconnect between glorifying this person over that one because they're

not as skinny, or they're more muscular, or they have less fat, and telling yourself it's okay to be skinny, or less muscular, or to have more fat. I'm asking us to start thinking about the connections.

I'd like to return to talking about the queer male community, because that's where I get messages about worth and desire that impact me the most. Maybe a lot of queer men believe mainstream gay culture has a destructive (and expensive) relationship with bodies. But maybe we still need some kind of shift throughout our community—an end to the idealization of certain bodies, and in its place, the acknowledgment of something that's very private right now: our own bodies' needs. We need to feel desired and worthwhile, and in turn we need to both love and desire bodies that are nothing like the ideals we've been raised on. We need to condition ourselves to recognize what comparisons we make and why. We need to be aware of and open about the harms of body negativity. We need to know—with reasonable humility, sure, but know nonetheless—what's *great* about our bodies. And in the process, we, I, need to give up the idea that "awareness" means "fault"-finding, in ourselves and in others.

Just remember something I'm trying to learn for myself. You're beautiful. You and that body of yours. Okay? Good. Now dance with it. ■



Self Portrait by Shannon Finnegan

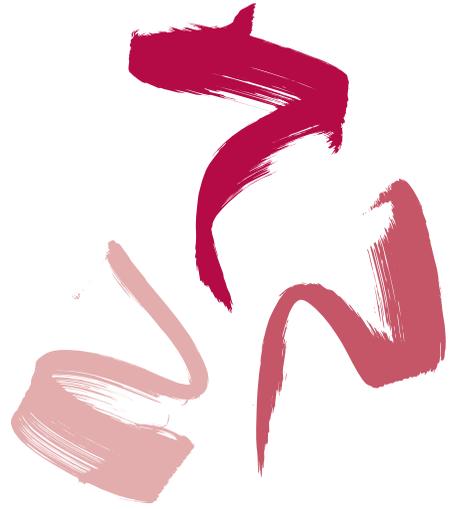
Observational Drawing

by Isabel Gregersen

Until now no one knew my nakedness and I,
who we were in the simple days that passed.
The friendship we shared in the gestures of the morning
as we chatted over sleep lines and soreness.
The secrets spilt in bathwater
as I confided to my nakedness
the controversy of its rises and falls
of breast and stomach and thigh.
No one knew the things
my nakedness told me from beneath my clothes
as we traveled the world all day
and then lay together, slept together
contemplating our form
of rise and fall under quilts of darkness.

All this
until the day my robe slipped off
and I stepped up to the platform.
Until the day the circle of students,
tensed and poised,
recorded my rises and my falls
on sheets of waiting space.
My nakedness and I
saw our secrets spilt
glistening with meaning
on our clavicle shelf and backbones
on our breast-curves and belly creases
and on the jutting of our buttocks
into the cool still air.

And no one even noticed
when my nakedness and I
were separated in the crowd.
Just nakedness now posed smoothly on a stool
and I, from far away,
could barely see
through the thicket of gazes
the pieces of us scattered round the room.
I willed the circle of sketching students
to forget their blank sheets
and undress, spill their secrets,
and leave my nakedness and I alone together.
Next time, I will tell my nakedness,
hold tightly to my hand in a crowd. ■



“Untitled” by Sylvie Mei-Cheong Lam

The Sacrifice

by Phil Blue

I love my body. Everything from the juxtaposition of my blonde hair and brown eyebrows to my small penis. And I have felt the need to sacrifice my body for my manhood: high school football, college football, club lacrosse (not so serious, I know), running with bulls (very serious), el Camino de Santiago (500 mile pilgrimage). In high school, I found it necessary to run up hills and lift weights until I vomited on far-too-many occasions. And currently, I cannot sit still for more than a half hour without the pain in my hamstring becoming unbearable.

Last year, my father, “UC-Berkeley Rugby Star,” had to get his hip replaced. Within a couple of months, he lost his father as well. Neither of these occurrences is that big of a deal in the grand scheme of things, but they were for my father. The surgery pierced his impenetrable and intimidating mass of muscle and athleticism. He realized that it was not only his hip that was cracked out of his body, but also his subjective physical superiority over other men. With the death of his father, he also had to face the probability that he was next in line. My father sacrificed his body to purchase manhood and as a result, I felt I needed to as well.

But seeing my father go through a major existential crisis was frightening. Helping my Superman put on his socks and shoes, made me realize that all of my strivings to demonstrate my own physical prowess (whether it be sexually, athletically, etc.) were in vain—that no matter how fast I ran, I could not escape that ghost chasing me into the unconscious “race” to physical affirmation so constrained by self-imposed and impermeable boundaries.

I am just beginning to see what are beyond these boundaries behind which I have been my entire life. Slowly, I am becoming conscious. My value as a man is not still confined to my ability please a woman or to run a football; instead, this value is found in some other facet of life that I cannot yet understand. Maybe it’s in my connection with others, maybe it’s in my soul, but I don’t know. ■



“I used to be a morning person and now I have narcolepsy”

Allie Schwartz

Intaglio print
2008

My Body, My Soul, My Arm, My Heart

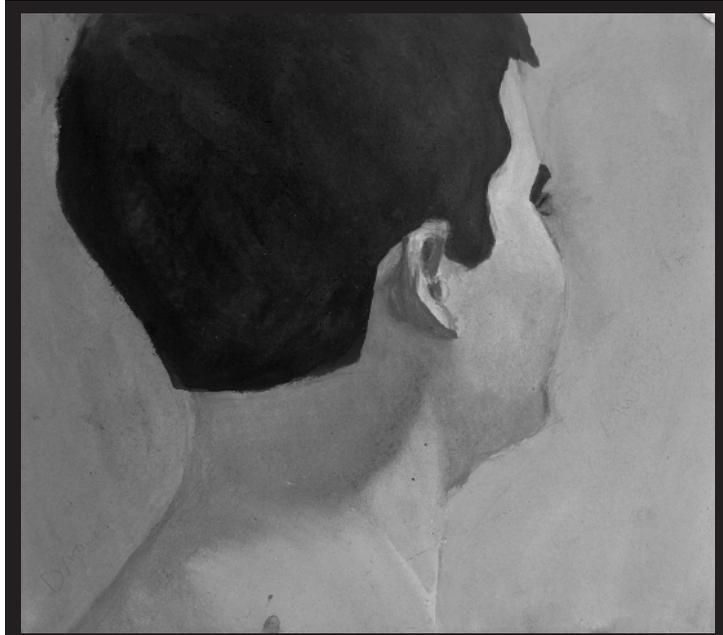
Anonymous

I have a scar on my left arm. It is an inch and a half long and rests between my wrist and my elbow. It is faded and easy to miss if you don't look carefully. I gave this scar to myself by running the blade of a scissor across my flesh. It is the only one of its kind that remains and I'm really glad it does.

Let me explain. I first knew that something was wrong when, in 3rd grade, I cried every day for a week after school. There was no discernable reason for my tears, I was just sad. Nothing made me feel better, and my parents' desperate attempts to get me to explain what was wrong only seemed to deepen my pain and panic. Since then, I have experienced varying degrees of depression, which at times has reached nearly unbearable pitches. Sometimes I understand the origin of the despair, but much of the time I do not. This is usually confusing and always makes me feel completely out of control.

In an effort to find answers and reclaim

some semblance of agency, I have tried to physically manifest my pain. I attempted to distract myself from my emotional grief by causing other types of hurt. I developed an eating disorder. In this way, I channeled my anguish. I convinced myself that if I could control every ounce of food that went into my mouth, I wouldn't have to engage my other issues. Obviously, this



was not sustainable. Other times, when the intensity of my despair literally brought me to my knees, I would cause myself physical

pain. I cut and hit myself, threw my arms against hard objects and pulled out my hair. I would do pretty much anything to escape the mind-numbing emotional turmoil. Clearly, this was not healthy.

In retrospect, I have come to understand that the worst mistake (and there were many) in my logic was to separate my physical self from the rest of my being. I took out my emotional pain on my body as if my inner and physical selves were different entities. In my mind, my body was more real than my emotions and damaging my body was somehow different than harming my true being. I know now

that this is simply not true. I know now that everything I do to my body, I do to my entire self. When I starve my body, I starve my soul. When I bruise my arm, I bruise my heart.

I have experienced transcendent happiness as well as debilitating sadness; my body has been there with and has stood by me for both. My scar is a reminder that any attempt to deny this fact is futile. And I challenge myself, right now, to never let myself disassociate my being from my body again. And I challenge all of you, whomever you are and wherever you may be, to do the same. ■



Mike Stevens





The history of a body loved

by Susan Chambers

I began with my sister.
My father loved my mom
& touched my sister into being
with that thought that sweated out of him
& into her.

It is only from that point
that they continued loving me
into each other.

I was born from death
nurtured by the 4 other 'tachlings
who were wished away with needles.
I was born as a question
a swollen purple question
that couldn't cry or assert
a pronoun into a room awaiting
my crotch to say 'boy' &
instead whispered swollen sounds
that formed narrow-lippedly into me.

Is that when I became?
Wrapping fistfuls of admiring
flesh into the pink strings that
willowed viny from my hands
I may have known the sensation of love then
cradled tenderly in arms
barely weaned off childhood.
His chest rose & rocked me forward
sunk & pulled me back
as I rolled in this oscillating adoration.
He kept a hand beneath my head
(I have a photo, surprisingly fresh in time,
that proves that he loved me like this
even then) & looked at the
milk-pocked lids of my baby eyes.

& he holds me there to his chest
limp neck cradled in his adultling hands
as a fast-motion moves me into
hair that rises growing like a cloud
and limbs and hips and hands and breasts
that lengthen slender rise and swell
as I unfurl into a being no older than
the man who holds me with more sureness
than I am sure that I could feel.

& imagine wrapping your arms back around
that neck that's no longer his neck
but that holds the head of them you love
& pulling your own head forward
upward for that first time into a kiss
that is unlike any kiss
& that blooms like a red drop into a
tub of waiting water that has been ready
in your chest
for all this time.

& imagine a love that you sweat
that makes you grow and shrink
& breathe into your body
perfect stillness instead.

& even in the perfect stillness
in those leaps of time that feel frozen
but are not
I fear that I can fall & shatter into pieces
that are made of bone
& maybe sadness too
& be plastered back together into
the right shape again (approximately)

& then age away into
something weak and strong and stronger until it is
weak again & fighting to remember
the sensation of touch &
a properly beating heart
that does not fight against
the clogs that happen in our
veins & on our brains & that
make our legs turn blue so that running
is something we can only remember
if we have the memory for it at all.

But for all of that remembering
& all of that withering
I will always have that hand that I held
all the way back when & all the way
up through now. & the sensation of pain
will be less thought of than that of
sex & love
no matter how faint any of it becomes.

& my body will wear many scars
when I leave at last
but I hope that most of them will be scars like
stretch marks & fat hips
& happy wrinkles &
the tattoo that I might regret but will always
have loved getting &
all the wounds of childhood that I got
in play that hurt but were
worth it in some way.

(Imagine how you kissed each of those scars
& didn't think about wishing any of them away
but loved them for being themselves instead) ■



Lonely, Hungry, and Afraid

Anonymous

Anorexia has never been about my body. It has always been about fear and loneliness and how those emotions caused me to abuse my body. Destructive as it was, I clung to my eating disorder for years because it was the only way I knew how to cope.

As an adolescent, I saw my peers forming close relationships, caring deeply about each other in a way they didn't seem to care for me. I was ashamed and terrified that I would be alone forever. For a while I distracted myself with academics, but even mountains of homework could not hide my loneliness and sense of failure. I believed there was a flaw deep in the core of myself, and I wished for a way to exorcise it.

For a while, I didn't even realize I was losing weight. I never wanted to lose weight, but over time I became increasingly obsessed with micro-managing and restricting my food. I don't know if I was more compelled by the alluring power of self-denial or by the physiological numbing of emotions that accompanies malnourishment. Whatever the reason, my eating disorder became my refuge, my addiction, my companion. The more I clung to my disorder, the more lonely and terrified I became, driving me further into the disease.

As my obsession morphed into irrational paranoia, pieces of my life slowly began to slip away – the activities I enjoyed, the people I loved, and eventually school itself. I took a medical leave, spent a couple months in a hospital, left the hospital, and within a few months, I needed to be rehospitalized. Having run out of insurance coverage, I went to a state psychiatric hospital. Some of my fellow patients had eating disorders, but others were drug addicts, young mothers, an aspiring author, and an Auschwitz survivor. They were amazing people and while our situations were different, we had all resorted to self-destructive behavior when we couldn't cope with life.

I never wanted to be anorexic. I admitted myself to the hospital three times, each time determined to make it the last, but it is a difficult addiction to break. Since then, I have come a long way and, while I still struggle to maintain a healthy life, each day gets a little

bit easier. In the end, I had lost too much and finally realized that it was time to move on. It was only when I got to that point that I fully appreciated the loving family and friends who had been there for me the whole time, never giving up, even when my actions hurt them beyond belief.

As I rebuild relationships, repair trust, and mourn the things that I will never get back, I am finding more hope than I have had in a long time. The most loving affirmation I have gotten during my recovery was from my grandfather. I never thought that an 83 year old man could understand anorexia, and he doesn't – but he understands me – and that is what really matters. ■

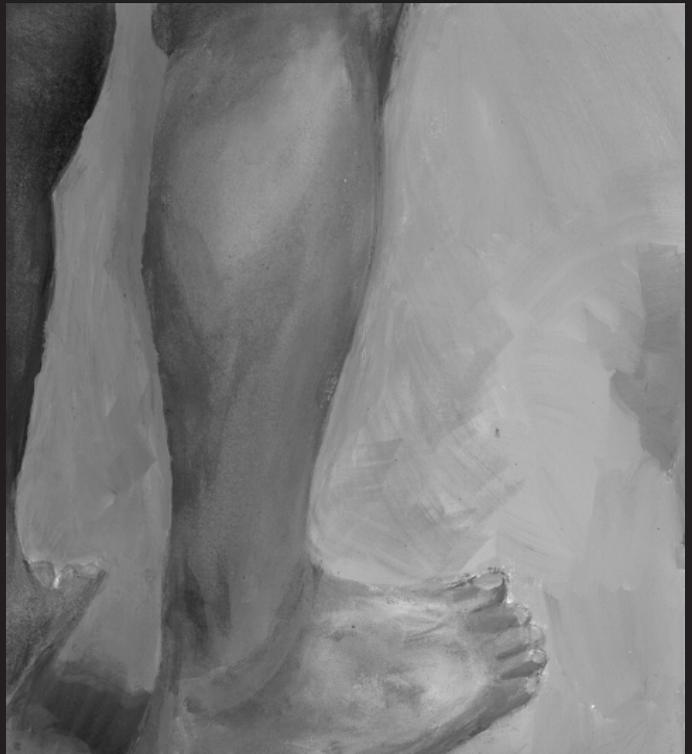


While I was growing up, I never thought of myself as “disabled.” I was aware I had a medical problem. I had to wear braces and do other things I did not want to. But the attitude around this problem was very optimistic. I was always improving, becoming more like any other kid. I always found a way to do what I wanted from gymnastics to soccer to hiking. I was encouraged to do anything I could think of. I remember winning an award for being the best junior lifeguard. I don’t think I was the best (I can’t run, I can’t swim very well), but I was trying. What they were really saying was “Good for you.” I was doing things despite of limitations. I was overcoming this problem.

Now I am in a different phase of understanding my relationship with my body. I am no longer getting better at walking; I can no longer think that someday I will walk normally. I can now clearly see the things I can’t do and will never do. And I am noticing more of the ways my walking negatively influences other parts of my life. But I still don’t know if I have a “disability.” A lot of times my disability seems small especially in comparison with other disabilities. I am part of a gray area. Mostly people just think I am injured or intentionally walking strangely. In high school a boy once told me “I like that you do a funny walk everyday when you come into school.” Usually when I correct people I say I have a slight disability or “this is how I have always walked.” I don’t know if I qualify for a blue parking pass or discounted bus fair. I don’t know where I stand in the eyes of official policy or what categories I personally think I fit. Sometimes I can buy into the fact that everyone has things they can’t do. Other times I feel like the things I can’t do are huge and unfair.

I am always balancing between being disabled and not. I try to minimize and ignore the things I can’t do (I don’t want to be a burden, I don’t want to be upset), but I also have to make sure that I am properly accommodated. I don’t want to be underestimated; I don’t want pity. But I also don’t want to be overestimated; I may need your help or your sympathy. ■

-Anonymous



Mike Stevens



facial hair woes

by Eric Naeseth

I grow the worst facial hair I have ever seen. Some people have bad facial hair because they choose questionable ways to groom it, and others have growth in undesirable places (the neckbeard is one well-known example), but my hair is the worst because it only grows in tiny, ridiculous patches. I didn't have any facial hair at all until I was about eighteen, when one day in the bathroom mirror, I noticed a few random black hairs starting to protrude from my chin. Closer inspection revealed some shorter ones sprouting from the space above my upper lips, apparently trying to form some sort of mustache.

"Huh," I thought, "I was wondering when that was going to happen. God, this looks ugly. I guess I should shave this off." So, I found my dad's old electric shaver, which had been kicking around my bathroom for years, waiting for me to need its services, and got rid of these first few exploratory

hairs. I spent some time running it over different parts of my face, practicing with it, acting on the assumption that soon, I would need to be using it more often, to shave off the many, many more hairs that were about to follow.

But I was wrong. No flood of hair ever came. Four years after that first day I picked up a shaver, a few random other hairs have appeared on my cheeks and neck, but my routine hasn't really changed. I can still take care of all of them in less than fifteen seconds each morning.

What my facial hair lacks, I think, is a belief in manifest destiny. I assume that most men's facial hair started the same way that mine did, with some brave hairs stepping up to form initial colonies; to see if faces could sustain life. Once established, they immediately had visions of their kin stretching across vast expanses of face

(and possibly neck), and called upon their neighboring follicles to join in and populate the land. My initial hairs, on the other hand, apparently arrived and said, "Hmm. This is OK, but I don't think we really need to expand. Let's just chill and produce awkward stubble indefinitely."

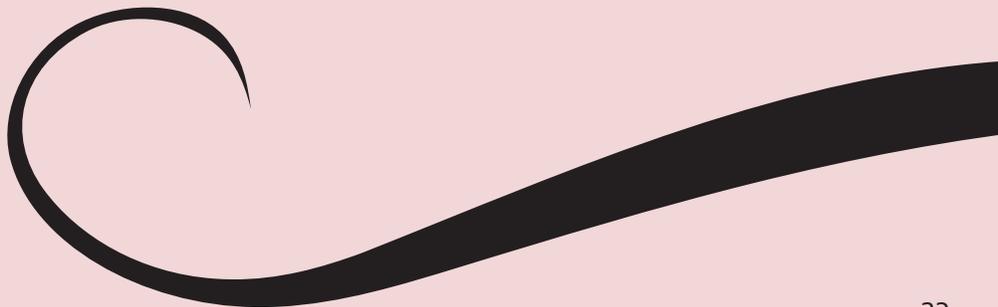
Most of the time, I don't mind that my facial hair seems to lack the drive to colonize. It's rather convenient; I have never wanted to grow a beard, and my required grooming to stop that from happening is significantly easier and faster than most. Far from having to think about a five o'clock shadow, the only thing I have to worry about is the 48-hour bristles that appear on my chin if I have a few disastrous mornings in a row. And that rarely happens, even at Carleton.

But I'm a little weirded out by the refusal of my facial follicles to do anything. For lack of a better term, the lack of hair actually seems so appropriate for me. I associate having facial hair (or at least being able

to grow it) with being masculine, and masculine is something I've never really been. When I was little, I was just as likely to be playing house with my friend Emily as I was to be engaging in a water balloon fight with my friend Jennings. When my mom asked me once if I wanted to join the

Boy Scouts, I excitedly asked her if I would get to sell cookies. My mom (wisely, I think) decided that Scouting wasn't for me, and I feel like my face has decided that a beard isn't for me, either. I kind of agree with it, but... how the hell does it know? ■

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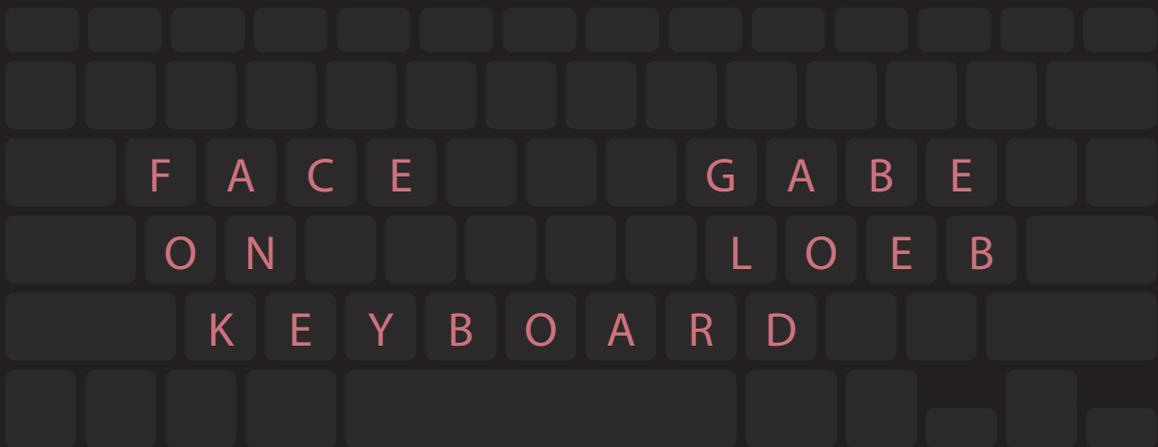
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Too Much

by Becky Canary-King

Gawker, April 8, 2010: "13 Things Not to Do on a Plane":
9. Occupy more space than your seat.

Earlier this year the feminist blogosphere broke into an enormous controversy: Kevin Smith, director of *Dogma* and *Clerks* had been kicked off Southwest Airlines because he did not properly fit into his seat. While Fat Acceptance bloggers were in an outrage, many more wrote about their own rights to not have to sit next to someone who was too big for their seat. They wrote horror stories about that time they had to sit next to a fat person once and it was just awful. How dare Kevin Smith take up more space than his body was allotted on the plane?

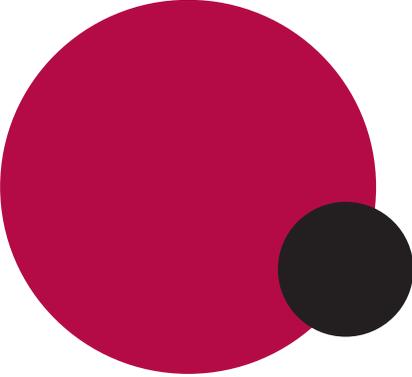
I hung onto every word of this controversy, as if I myself were on trial. It spoke to my twenty two years of insecurity about my body. Gawker sums it up precisely: never take up more space than you are allotted.

And that's just it. I've always been innately afraid of being too much.

Particularly as a woman, I'm told to be small; to diet and workout and contort until I can fit into the tiniest amount of space possible. (Control-top tights help.) Otherwise, I might take up too much space on airline seats, not fit into the size 12 jeans, not curl up perfectly in a man's arms, might just take up too much space.

I used to take inventory of my body: if I could only change one part what would it be? Maybe just removing that pooch of fat that can slip out over the side of my bra would be the key to body satisfaction and acceptance. I tried to pick practical, even achievable goals in a society that invalidated my body.

But in the end, the solution was never cellulite-free thighs or slenderized hips, but attacking the system was trying to force my body to be less that it is. It is about believing that my body is allowed to be the size that it is. That it has the right to take up space. **That I can never be Too Much. ■**



Beauty

by Rebekah Frumkin

I think there are a lot of young girls who step out into the world in full glory, do something crazy, occupy space, and then get handed a message from Belle/Cinderella or a painted doll in a magazine who's fallen down on some sand and wearing Versace, and the message goes something like this: "Do you see how I am? I am beautiful. Look at yourself now. You are not me. Therefore you are not beautiful."

What seven-year-old thinks she's fat? I was very tall in kindergarten and had a weird penchant for pants and shirts that matched. My first grade teacher used to poke me in the stomach and say "Pop N' Fresh." I was never large or even chubby, nor was I gangly – I was just much taller than the other children, and therefore more massive. But I learned that occupying space in any capacity is a bad thing. It is distasteful and must not be done.

The message was there, but I never really acted on it (thank God!) for the rest of my childhood. I continued to go nuts and paint my face and dress as Charlie Chaplin and Groucho Marx for Halloween. By seventh grade, I was no longer the tallest in my

class – far from it, actually – but I was well-proportioned for my height. My diabetic grandmother would come to our house and make cookies with me and then hit herself in the stomach and call herself Fats. I'd tell her not to be so negative, and then she'd come back with, "That's what happens when you get to be my age, Punkin." My father revealed to me that he'd had this previous incarnation as a runner, and that he'd run marathons when I was a baby. I asked him why I'd never heard about it before. He shrugged and told me he wanted to run again. My mother, meanwhile, continued to wear the exotic dresses and boot-cut jeans that complemented her full and healthy figure. She's always looked beautiful. She (and perhaps my eternally sunny border collie who didn't even flinch when the vet talked about the "flab" on her stomach) stood at the prow of our family's sinking ship. Those buoyed by self-love are the ones who sink last, if at all. One afternoon, for whatever reason, I came into my parents' bedroom crying about how I felt fat. My mom told me I sounded ridiculous. Ever the analyst, she asked me to sit on the couch and talk about my feelings. What thirteen-year-old thinks

she's fat? I told her that I'd seen other girls at school who were much thinner than me. I talked about kindergarten and summer camp and the tanned, tiny kids who could get through small spaces and move quickly. I'd always felt tall and clumsy trying to keep up with them. I'd always felt obtrusive. I wanted to take up less space. My mother told me what she always told me (and what she still tells me to this day): that she would give anything to have my beautiful skin and my height and my long legs. Then she asked if I'd like to start exercising, since she'd always felt better about herself when her body was in motion.

I was still crying. We went downstairs to my dad's treadmill on which he'd resumed his training. I ran. I ran an eight minute mile, which my mom thought was impressive for someone who'd never run a mile before (what she didn't know was that I'd already run the mile once at school and nearly thrown up afterward from the distance and stress). She told me I was a born runner. Just like Dad.

So I could run. I could train. My father had become an ER doctor-cum-marathoner, and he had little time for anything else. He bought a scale for the bathroom and began

weighing himself. He told me that every five pounds lost shaved a minute off his mile time. This made enough sense to me. I ran a 5K every day after school. I was never an athletic girl – I'm still not – but I strove to make myself one. I watched my mom go for quiet walks in the forest preserve with our dog or lift weights and do some light jogging. "How cute," I thought, and continued running. I'd subverted my mom's message. I'd become a machine.

I'd get home from school, nearly crushed, and go downstairs on the treadmill. I'd run for the span of 1 ½ Simpsons episodes. I'd come back upstairs and eat a full meal. I started not to eat dessert. I was a bit fanatical about it. No sweets at

"I'd always felt tall and clumsy trying to keep up with them. I'd always felt obtrusive. I wanted to take up less space."

all. Then I definitely couldn't eat empty carbs. Only protein and vegetables and fruit for me. That's where it stopped; I never counted calories or skipped meals. But I wouldn't budge when it came to indulgence. I didn't crave anything, but then I didn't have much of a gastronomical life. The more miles I lost, the faster my pounds would get. The other way around, I mean.

Soon father and daughter had cultivated a unique and special bond. We'd started



“Unnamed” by Gabe Loeb

to hate the “undisciplined.” We’d walk through a grocery store and estimate the weights of other shoppers who looked “fat” to us. It was a bizarre game, begun partly out of boredom. My father had lost fifteen pounds, putting him at 175. According to his medically precise diagnoses, almost every man we encountered outweighed him. I asked him if 180 pounds was a good weight for a man. He told me it wasn’t – a really slim man weighed 160. Slim like skinny? I asked. Yes. Was I skinny? I asked. My dad said yes, and then, cognizant of the

territory he was in, backtracked and told me he’d always found me beautiful.

But I was skinny. I was obsessive. I weighed 117 pounds when it would’ve been ideal for me to weigh 130. I went to thrift stores and fit into all the pants. I sat without readjusting the waist of my jeans. This is how it feels to be free and small, I thought. It felt good. I was no longer tall and unwieldy. I was also naive. I looked at grown, mature women and insulted their curves. At least I’ll never have your problem, you cow. I saw all

mothers except my own as undisciplined mountains of flesh. I saw twenty-year-old girls as strange and detestably curvaceous. I guessed at their weights in my head. You weigh 135 pounds. You weigh 160. My god you're fat. How could you let yourself go like that?

I had a boyfriend when I was fifteen. We played at sex – talked about it, read about it, never did it. He lived in New York but stayed in Chicago every summer. My boyfriend came from an overbearing Jewish family with a mother who recited bruchas in a throaty voice and wanted him to be a lawyer. My boyfriend wanted to be a writer, and he was good at it. He had a very large mother – when he was six or seven, she'd been obese – and she'd only recently lost the weight. My boyfriend was convinced he'd inherited "the fat" from his mother. This was what he actually thought and said. He complained often of being too unattractive for me. He once said, "You're too skinny for me." He became anorexic over the course of our relationship and lost thirty pounds. His mother didn't notice. She actually thought it was a good thing. She'd been prodding him to lose weight.

I bounced between 115 and 125 for a few years. My ribs were visible when I laid down. I was a size 4-6. I thought this was

a miracle. No one thought this was as miraculous as I did, but people seemed to like it. My father the marathoner told me I'd always been beautiful, but I could tell he was a little proud of my new weight. My grandma said something like, "You were a cute girl when you were little and now you're a tall, slender beauty." My mother, by contrast, was worried. She wanted me to eat more and have a little more fun. Like hell I was going to eat more. I looked hot.

I led a small life. But I was supposedly "hot."

Luckily I was still trying to be myself this whole time. Even though I'd become obsessed with and proud of the small amount of space my body occupied, I'd still found some time in which to write. But that was basically it. 1) Obsess about your body, 2) Write, 3) Call boyfriend/do homework. I led a small life. But I was supposedly "hot."

Sometimes, however, I was not hot. I still felt like I was the massive, awkward kindergartner I'd been ten years ago. What sixteen-year-old thinks she's fat? I bought a book of short stories called "Fat." It was written by authors (some of them obese) about body image in America and fat acceptance. Andre Dubus had a story in there about a woman who lives a typical suburban-American life while adjusting her body to fit peoples' expectations of her. She is in college – a foreign concept

to me then – and having sex (an even more foreign concept to me at sixteen), and she keeps on gaining weight. She has always been a “big girl” – she was overweight in high school and entered college at 180 lbs. I chalk this up to her lack of discipline and keep reading. She decides she must lose weight because the man she’s screwing insists upon it. She drops down to my sixteen-year-old weight (122 lbs) and is complimented endlessly about how beautiful she is. Her parents love her for it. She gets married to the douchebag and they have a baby. She begins to gain weight again. This is a disaster, as she has had some major gains and losses between leaving college and getting married. She ends the story at 150 lbs (what I would someday weigh after a growth spurt – but I would’ve died if you’d told me that then), holding her baby in her arms while her husband’s out fishing or something with his friends. The story ends by describing the soft light on her face and her little vengeful smile as she rocks the baby to sleep. She is taking up space. She’s created something beautiful and she’s damn proud of it. You’d think she’d been shut out – Diane Keaton on the other side of Al Pacino’s door in *The Godfather* – but she’s actually the Al Pacino in this situation. The douchebag is out frolicking, insisting that she slim down,

while she’s done something he cannot possibly do. She’s a mother, a creator.

It took me a few years to understand this story. When I first read it, I was unknowingly on the side of the douchebag. Oh no! She’s back up to 150? What’s she going to do? Then I grew up and realized that a woman in full glory and beauty must occupy space. One day, I paused *The Simpsons* mid-episode and went upstairs and ate a bowl of rice pudding. I stopped running altogether. My dad asked me what was wrong and I told him I was tired. I began biking; he joined me. I gained weight. I liked it at first. I had breasts and some semblance of thighs.¹ Then I started hating myself for it. My mom was happy. My grandma continued to reassure me that I was slender and beautiful, but when I crept past 5’6” and 130 lbs, she began telling me to exercise a little more, since, and I quote, “You’re supposed to be your thinnest in your twenties.”

When I came to Carleton, I began using my body as I never had before. I used it to rock climb and bike. I used it sexually. I dragged it up onstage sometimes. I turned cartwheels with it. I deprived it of sleep. I put some excellent things in it and some not-so-excellent things. I began

¹It should be noted that, at my thinnest, I was regularly confused for a boy. During a Model UN conference, I was called “sir” twice: once by a waiter and another time by a hotel porter. I remember telling people my name was Rebekah Frumkin and having them flinch at the femininity of the “kah.”

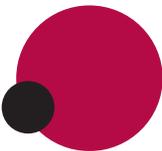
to understand what adult life might start to look like for me. If I was going to be a novelist or a world traveler or any kind of a real woman, I wasn't going to weigh 120 lbs. I wasn't going to be some obsessive, space-abhorrent teenager. I'd have to occupy space. This realization frustrated me, especially since I was still something of the girl in the grocery store who couldn't stand to look at people with actual flesh. That is, until I became one of those people with actual flesh. That was the scariest and strangest part of my post-pubescent life. I actually began looking like an adult human being. My body expanded and my mind eventually caught up.

Over this past spring break, I told my grandma that she had to stop hitting herself in the stomach. I told her to not be so negative: You're damaging yourself, grandma. You're also hurting everyone who has any emotional stake in how you feel, which is just about everyone in this room. I told her she looked beautiful. My mom seconded my opinion: my grandma has the lushest hair and the most beautiful skin we've ever seen on anyone over 50, let alone 80. I didn't run or even go biking – I lazed around the entire time. It felt good. I sometimes complained to my mom, who smiled and told me again what I'd already realized: there's no going back. You've grown and you've got to accept it.

My father still weighs himself. He also still maintains that I'm beautiful. I think he's

always felt that way – he's just an awkward guy who didn't have the guts to speak as my mom did. But the extremely negative parts of the weight obsession have stopped on his part: no more complaints about "overweight" nurses in the ER, no more estimations in grocery stores. My grandma thinks twice before hitting herself. My dog is happy as always. I am slowly falling in love with my body, and this time it isn't that suck-your-cheeks-into-look-gaunt, mirror-gaze love; it's real love. As in: this is my vessel – if I don't love this thing, I'm fucked.

A really miraculous thing has happened to me recently. I've started seeing everyone I look at as beautiful. And I don't mean that in a weird way – not "You're all so jaw-droppingly stunning that I could kiss you right now." Rather, since I'm now a card-carrying adult human, I've started to appreciate the various, Rubenesque facets of humanity in a way I could never have appreciated them when I was a child looking at pictures of Versace models. I've lived at least a little more than I had five or six years ago, and I've gained a newfound appreciation for the human body as a means of transport through life. Now I can look at other people and celebrate our parallel journeys instead of reeling from them in ignorance. Appearance is a miraculous indicator of the many things that have gone on inside. Aren't we lucky to have lived at all? The beauty of the body is to thank for that. ■



My Body

by Jake Alcorn

I want to start by thanking my girlfriend **Robin**, because she is the first person to make me feel truly comfortable with the way I look.



My body has been something I disliked since childhood. This mainly came from sports and the comparisons I made between me and my friends while we were playing them. I played football, basketball, soccer and all manner of invented sports with my friends, but it was obvious I was much less fit than they were. I couldn't run as fast or as long and spent lots of time on the bench resting.

As I grew older, my self-consciousness grew. Once I started being attracted to girls, my feelings about my body got exponentially worse. I stopped playing sports because I didn't want to wear jerseys which showed how "fat" I was. In retrospect I realize I wasn't that overweight, but it felt like I was. During middle school, I was very awkward. I asked out a girl I'd liked for a long time, and she agreed on the condition that it was kept secret. I later learned it was because she was embarrassed to be seen with me.

That relationship didn't go anywhere. It was on and off throughout middle school, but we mostly just passed notes. She wanted to kiss, and later even expressed sexual desires (yeah, in middle school) but in a somewhat forceful, complaining way. When I was completely uncomfortable with this, she found an excuse to dump me. At the time, I blamed myself. I became aware that while I was considered "nice," I was also "a dork," and I disliked my body and personality more and more.

Between middle and high school, I thought I got my break. I grew at least 2 feet and my weight transferred across my body so I looked leaner. On top of that, in my freshman year, I met a girl who seemed genuinely interested, making me think I was finally past my awkward stage. However, that girl decided she was only interested in me as a friend, because I was "cute" – but in the way a child is cute, not in the way a guy you date is cute.

I was really fixated on getting a girlfriend, resulting in me chasing various girls throughout high school. There were so many nice, pretty girls. I figured one would like me. Each

time I found someone I was attracted to, I tried to “be a gentleman” and take my time, becoming friends first. I always succeeded in making a friend, but never a girlfriend. By the time I felt courageous enough to ask, I’d get that “sorry, I just want to be friends” line. While I have no problem with girl friends, what I wanted was a significant other. Even worse, many of these girls immediately started dating someone else. No one seemed to find fault with my personality, so I reasoned that my body must have been to blame. I tried working out, but I never did it consistently enough to see results and eventually gave up.

One of the most ironic parts of this is all my friends who were girls (and I had accumulated a lot by now) assured me that it would be different in college. At the time, I was sure they were just saying it to comfort me, and I was convinced I’d never find someone who liked me. Yeah, I had that stage where I moped a lot and listened to bad romance songs. Unhealthy. However, it turns out they were right.

I met Robin on the very first day of college and I’m still not sure what happened between us. We just hit it off and were dating by the end of the week. It took awhile to sink in that someone not only liked my personality but actually found me attractive. She said outright that I was handsome. I checked myself out in a mirror. My face had a little less baby fat, but I didn’t look so different from high school. Other girls had passed me by, but Robin felt differently. The two kisses I’d had before Robin were on my initiative. Robin, on the other hand, wanted to kiss me.

Being with Robin has made me feel so much better about myself. When we hug, I feel like she actually wants to hold ME closely. She makes me feel attractive. I want to work out and eat healthy to continue to impress her, and she supports my healthy habits but doesn’t force them. She doesn’t complain that I could be trimmer, even though we both know I could be if I went to the gym marginally more than I do (which is almost never). She accepts me as I am and doesn’t ask for more, and that just makes me want to try even harder.

Before I met Robin, I wouldn’t have written this. I wouldn’t be as social as I am. I wouldn’t feel as comfortable in my own skin as I do. Being with her has changed my outlook in a lot of ways. This gift she has given me, of being able to appreciate myself, is one of the greatest that I’ve ever gotten. That’s why I love her: on top of everything that she is, she loves me, and she’s helped me like myself. ■



No one seemed to find fault with my personality, so I reasoned that my body must have been to blame.

Questions for Bodies

What is a body? What is this body? What is a breath?
What is breathing? What do I feel? How do I feel?
What is a touch? What are those touches? A scent?
These sensations? Thoughts? Where is this body? What
bodies are nearby? How is this body expected to be?
generally? In response to a loud noise? Before a kiss? In
a class room? How is this body tense? Why is it tense?
What makes it tense and what suggests that tensioners is
the appropriate response? How does it respond to a stimulus?
Why? What stimuli make it responsive? to what degree?
When? How does this body learn? How does this body
play? How does this body engage other bodies? What
is the range of this body's action? of its feelings?
What does this body forget? What does this body forget?
What does this body pass by? When is this body scared?
How many tears does this body cry? Does it wipe the tears
away or does it let them stream down the cheeks?
How does this body feel? What is this body doing?
What does this body want to do? Where does this body
want to go? What does this body want to feel? How
does this body move? What is walking? Why does
this body walk like this? Does this body like walking
like this? Does this body lean past center with every step?
Does this body sway side to side? Does this body walk
with feet turned in? turned out? straight ahead? walks
backward? Run? Roll? What surrounds this body? What
does this body want to be surrounded with? What has
surrounded this body? How many times has this body
been rested? Did this body eat breakfast? Does this body
prefer to snack all day? Does this body fast every other
day? Does this body refrain from movement on Wednesdays?
What is this body finishing now? performing now? feeling now?
For whom does this body perform? whose ears does it meet?
Does this body worry there might be something in its teeth?
Think its bad at writing? Love the feeling of writing in the wrist?
Smile when it has ice cream? ~~Put~~ Purr when it ~~has~~ wants to?
~~Smile~~ Worry it might be smelly? Wash its hands with soap?
Wear heavy shoes? What time is this body? In what time? In
what rhythm? Is this body wearing clothes? What is it
like under these clothes? When do these clothes come off? How
is that? When are our rituals altered? How does the sock come on?
The shoe? Is it tied the same way every morning? ~~How~~ Does this
body have a name? Why? Whose name? How is it said? Written?
How does it feel to say its name? To write it? How does it respond
to a question?

