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English 112B

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**Body Talk: 37 Voices Explore Our Radical Anatomy**

By Kelly Jensen



**About the Author**

https://kellybjensen.com/books/



Kelly Jensen is a writer, editor, yoga instructor, public speaker, and advocate for mental health. She started as a public librarian for people of all ages in various libraries and is now a full-time writer and editor at Book Riot, the most significant book website in North America operating independently. Her books include three anthologies (*Here We Are: Feminism For the Real World, (Don’t) Call Me Crazy,* and *Body Talk: 37 Voices Explore Our Radical Anatomy)*, all having to do with mental and physical health.

* Jensen was named Person of the Year by Publisher Weekly in 2022
* She was a cohost for a YA book podcast, *Hey YA* with Eric Smith

**Summary**

*Body Talk: 37 Voices Explore Our Radical Anatomy* is composed of essays, art, comics, and words from people of various backgrounds. They detail their experiences of living in the body they possess in relation to physical differences, genetic diseases, gender identity, eating disorders, facial hair, and much more. They give insight into a wide range of viewpoints on what it’s like to live in their unique bodies and how their circumstances have shaped their identity and the way they navigate the world.

**Quote 1**

“Sometimes standards are used as weapons. They’re used to keep people down so others can benefit. This type of masculinity has been directly linked to depression, mental health problems, and suicidal feelings, according to a report from Samaritans (a UK-based mental health charity)” (20).

This quote speaks to every single person as Eugene Grant notes the harsh reality of norms being used to keep people in control. Everyone knows the norms that have been placed upon us and what the consequences of not following the norm gets you. Grant reveals how standards keep certain people in power and at the top of the pyramid while oppressing those who don’t fit and keeping them at the bottom of the pyramid. This quote is especially significant because it’s something that anyone can see as they step into the outside world. If we pay attention, we can see how norms influence our daily actions, what we consume, how we treat/judge each other, and how we feel about ourselves.

**Quote 2**

“I joked to my doctor that I touch my testicles all the time, and I didn’t feel anything… I have a message for you: get your fuckin’ nuts checked” (101).

Benjamin Pu comically explains how uncommon it can be for men to check their testicles for any abnormalities, and shows the importance of doing so. Men tend to not go to the doctor, especially not to get their privates looked at, which is why providing a space for them to think about the seriousness of getting checked is extremely significant. They receive a firsthand account of a ‘regular’ person who happened to have cancer, and if it can occur to him, then it can happen to the reader too. As someone with testicles reads this, they’re less inclined to feel weird about reading this because it feels as if it’s a conversation between two people; by using this writing style, Pu seemingly plants the idea of getting your “nuts” checked because although it can be a weird, funny thing, it can also prevent any found issue from advancing.

**Quote 3**

I reached for makeup to enhance what I loved about my features, rather than transform what I disliked… There may be days when no one else around me can tell what difference I’ve added or subtracted, but it doesn’t matter. Because I know. And I’m the only one who needs to know” (161).

Roshani Chokshi marks the value of doing things for yourself as well as minding your own business. For a young adult to read this and notice how Chokshi began to use makeup to enhance her features rather than hide them, once she got older, reveals that they, too, might need some time to be able to do this. Young people are growing and learning and the process of doing things for themselves will slowly build up inside of them; they just have to be patient. This also serves as a reality check that it’s no one’s business what we decide to do to ourselves; the only thing that matters is that it’s what we want/need and we know why we’re doing it.

**Classroom use**

I would teach this to freshmen and sophomores during a mental health unit and pair it with the other two books in Jensen’s anthology (*Here We Are* and *(Don’t) Call Me Crazy).* All of these books together explore, feminism, mental health, and personal identities which are all things young adults are dealing with during their teenage years. A fictional book that I would assign during this unit would be *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky because it is a perfect example of teens with very different identities navigating their world and trying to figure out who they really are. The students could do a writing assignment in which they choose a character from the Chbosky’s book and write a personal narrative from the viewpoint of their character. They could also choose to write their own real personal narrative to get an insight into their identities. They could put all of their stories together to create their own mental health book. They could then read each other’s narratives and have a deeper understanding of what it means to have their own unique identities.

**Why Give This Book to Teens?**

Teens should read this book because they are already tackling the world and all the different norms they’re pressured to follow, so reading different accounts of people confronting everyday challenges can be relieving and eyeopening for them. Not all teens will be experiencing those same issues, but they’re likely to know someone who is and by educating themselves about the topic, they could be a better ally and support system for that person. This book also correctly informs teens of certain topic that they may have their own misconceptions or prejudices about. Reading about something they may not always be exposed to could help them realize they were wrong and that there may be a lot of other things they should learn more about. This book is not a hard read and it usually reads as if the writer is conversating with the reader which could help teens feel included in the stories and better understand the topics being addressed.

 **How it fits in Chapters 4-8 in *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning***

*Ch 4: Books about Real Life Experiences*

* There are many essays of common issues people face daily like girl’s dealing with facial hair, being diagnosed with scoliosis at a young age, having trouble asking for help, etc. These are issues many young adults face all the time and to read about them will only normalize the topics and encourage them to speak about it.
* There are essays of less talked about topics that are still real life experiences even though people avoid talking about them. For example, having “ball cancer” (100), being demi-pansexual, having dwarfism, the pink tax, etc. Reading about topics that are less discussed can expose young adults to issues that they may not encounter daily but could plausibly impact them at any point in their life.

*Ch 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination and Struggles with Decisions*

* Every single personal account has to do with the author’s body influences their identity. Young adults are constantly aiming to discover their identity and reading narratives of all the different identities that exist in the world can assure them they don’t always need to have it figured out and that everyone’s identity is unique.
* There are stories of people dealing with discrimination of their disability, weight, gender, etc. Young adults could be dealing with these sorts of discrimination as well and having some type of guidance on how to cope with this could be valuable.
* asexual/pansexual experiences, being little,

*Ch 7: Books about Courage and Survival (?)*

* All of the different voices in this book are courage to write about their individual experiences that have deeply impacted them. Being bold enough to do this reveals to young adults that advocating for themselves, their experiences and their needs is something to be proud of.

**Quantitative**

Lexile: Age range: 14-17, 1070L

AR: ATOS Book Level: 7.8, AR points: 13.0, Word Count: 71,104

Dale-Chall: Grade Level: 9-10

**Qualitative**

* Structure:
* First person narratives: there are various narratives written from the author’s point of view.
* Illustrations, comics, and FAQs: each chapter has these and they add small breaks from reading all the essays back to back.
* Various plots: there are many diverse plots all having to do with that certain person’s experience.
* Contain six chapters: the book as a whole revolves around bodies, they’re categorized by the stories’ relation to different physical, emotional, and mental subtopics of bodies.
* Language Conventions and Clarity
* Language and vocabulary are fairly simple with a few difficult words but overall easy to read and understand.
* Some parts are formal and serious, while others are more comical and lighthearted.
* Knowledge Demands
* No explicit knowledge about this topic is required although everyone already has knowledge about bodies (particularly their own) in general.
* Some knowledge on some topics would be good to know such as knowing about the LGBTQ community, what disabilities are, what mental health is, etc.
* Beginner-friendly