

Hi, my name is Rachel Reinke and I am the Associate Director of the Sexuality, Women & Gender Center on campus, which is part of the inclusion and diversity in student affairs team, and today I'm going to be reading from *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love*, which is written by Sonya Renee Taylor, who is not only an author, but also a poet and a podcast host and a world renowned speaker, who we happen to be bringing to campus this month for Herstory Month. We're really excited to host Sonya Renee Taylor on March 12th, and her book is about radical self-love, and I'm going to be reading her premise of how she defines radical self-love, as well as a poem that helped inspire her work in this particular book.

This is from chapter four, which is titled "A New Way Ordered By Love: A World For All Bodies Is A World For Our Bodies."

Perhaps you've missed it thus far, but I have an agenda to which I am obnoxiously wedded. It is a simple agenda. I want to change the world by convincing you to love every facet of yourself, radically and unapologetically, even the parts you don't like. And through this work, illustrate for you how radical love alters our planet. Radical self-love is an internal process offering external transformation. How we show up to life reflects how we show up to ourselves. When we strip away the veneer of self-reliance and individualism and allow ourselves to access the most vulnerable truths, we can't help but be heartbeat present to the fact that our relationship with other bodies mirrors, in tangible ways, our relationship with our own body.

Yes, we have been cutting and cruel to ourselves and have watched our internalized shame spill over into how we parent, how we manage employees, how we show up to friends and family. Yes, we believed that our bodies were too big, too dark, too pale, too scarred, too ugly. So we tucked, folded, hid ourselves away, and wondered why our lives looked infinitesimally smaller than what we knew we were capable of.

Yes, we have been less vibrant employees, less compassionate neighbors, less tolerant of the bodies of others. Not because we are bad people, but because we are guilty of each of those counts against ourselves. Our lens to the outside world is an interior lens projecting our experience in our bodies onto our external landscape. A shame-clouded interior lens can only project shame and judgment. Employing a radical self-love ethos is like squirting glass cleaner on our daily lives. Suddenly we can see ourselves as employees or employers, as friends and parents, as neighbors and community members, as leaders, thinkers, doers, as humans, distinctly connected to other humans. Applying radical self-love to each facet of these roles and responsibilities alters the very fabric of humanity, ultimately creating a more just, equitable, and compassionate world.

And I'm going to follow that with the opening poem that Sonya has included in this particular book, and it's titled "My Mother's Belly." It's written for Terry Lyn Hines, 1959 to 2012, my first and most enduring example of the power of radical self-love.

My Mother's Belly.

The bread of her waist, a loaf I would knead with eight-year-old palms sweaty from play. My brother and I marveled at the ridges and grooves, how they would summit at her navel, how her belly looked like a walnut, how we were once seeds that resided inside. We giggled, my brother and I, when she would recline on the couch,

lift her shirt, let her belly spread like cake batter in a pan. It was as much a treat as licking the sweet from electric mixers on birthdays.

The undulating of my mother's belly was not a shame she hid from her children. She knew we came from this. Her belly was a gift we kept passing between us. It was both hers, of her body, and ours for having made it new, different. Her belly was an altar of flesh built in remembrance of us, by us. What remains of my mother's belly resides in a container of ashes I keep in a closet. Every once and again, I open the box, sift through the fine crystals with palms that were once eight, fill the grooves and ridges that do not summit now, but rill through fingers, granules so much more salt than sweet today. And yet, still I marvel at her once-body. Even in this form say, 'I came from this.'

Thanks very much for letting me be a part of the Read To You series.

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