



Getting Comfortable with the Uncomfortable:

Teaching Carmen María Machado's
Her Body And Other Partiesto Adolescents



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NEWBURGH, NEW YORK | LEADING • CARING • INNOVATING

"Banning My Book Won't Protect Your Child"

"I have teamed up with Margaret Atwood, Jodi Picoult, Jacqueline Woodson and many other authors whose works have been targeted for removal from class reading lists in Leander. In conjunction with PEN America, a group that promotes free literary expression, we wrote a letter to the school district demanding that our books remain available to students. While our books may contain passages that are potentially uncomfortable, challenging or even offensive, exposure to our books is vital to expanding minds, affirming experiences, creating appreciation for the arts and building empathy — **in short, respecting the adults that the students in Leander, Texas, will soon become.**"

(Carmen María Machado, New York Times, May 11, 2021)

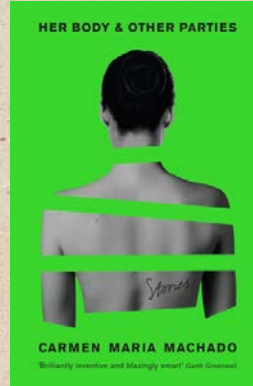


Overview

Carmen María Machado



Art Streiber/ AUGUST

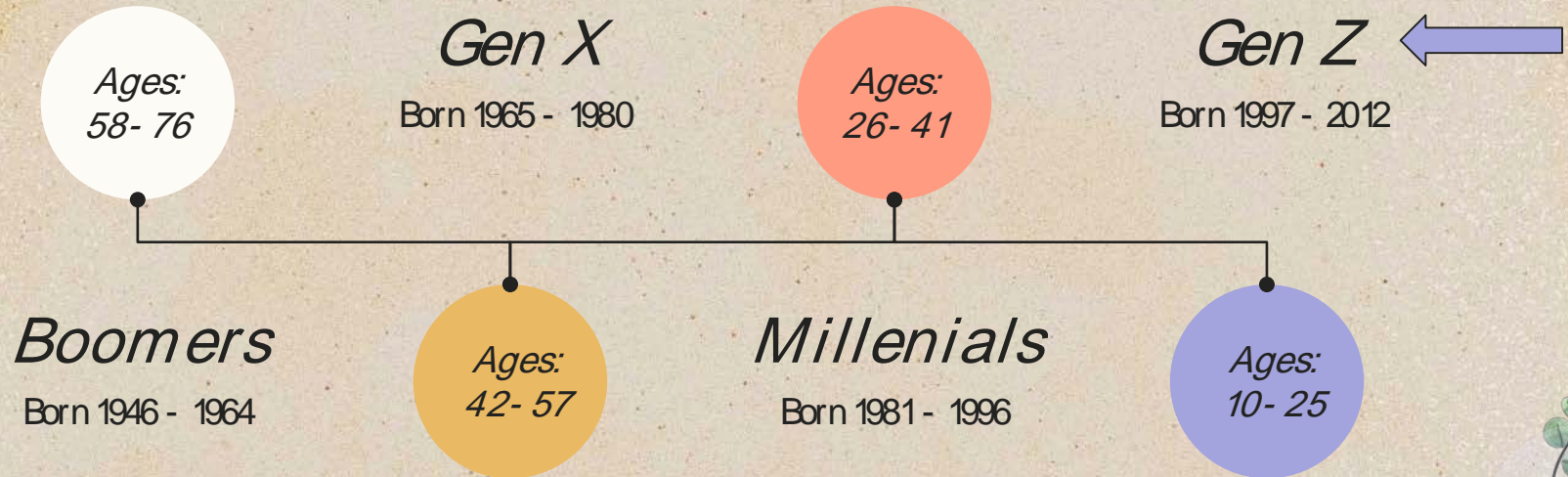


*Her Body and
Other Parties*
(2017)

Adolescence



Who's Who?



Teens, Media, & Body Image



Media Usage



The average teen spends about **nine hours per day** using media for their enjoyment, according to a report by Common Sense Media.

These same teens spend **under 10 minutes per day** speaking with their parents.

(Morin, 2020)

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/media-and-teens-body-image-2611245>

Teens, Media, & Body Image

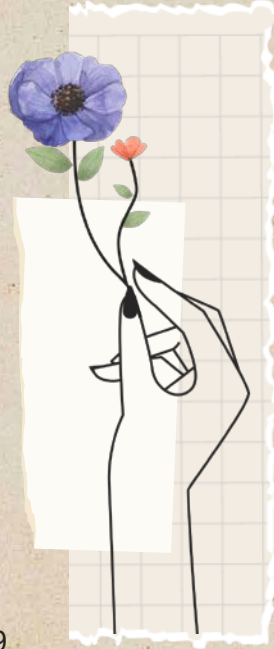
Images of the so-called perfect body abound in media outlets. What are the consequences?

Children as young as 3 prefer game pieces illustrating thin people.

By age 10, 80% of US girls have been on a diet

(Harriger, J.A., et al., 2010)

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11199-010-9868-1>



Unrealistic Portrayals
of Beauty



“Real Women Have Bodies”

What makes them real? Unreal?



Reality or Fantasy?



“My coworker Natalie thinks that Gizzy runs this store because she’s pining after her lost youth, which is her answer for why any “real adult” does anything she thinks is stupid. Natalie rolls her eyes behind Gizzy’s back and always rehanges the dresses a little roughly, like they’re to blame for the minimum wage or useless degrees or student debt.”


(Machado, 2017, p. 125)

Fantasy or Reality




"No one knows what causes it. It's not passed in the air. It's not sexually transmitted. It's not a virus or a bacteria, or if it is, it's nothing scientists have been able to find. At first everyone blamed the fashion industry, then the millennials, and, finally, the water. But the water's been tested, the millennials aren't the only ones going incorporeal, and it doesn't do the fashion industry any good to have women fading away. You can't put clothes on air. Not that they haven't tried."

(Machado, 2017, p. 128)



“ ..the room is full of women.
Women like the one in the
viral video, see- through and
glowing faintly, like
afterthoughts.”

(Machado, 2017, p. 134)




“Hips,” Chris says. “That’s what you want.
Hips and enough flesh for you to grab onto,
you know? What would you do without
something to hold? That’s like—like—” “Like
trying to drink water without a cup,” Casey
finishes.

One Interpretation of Incorporeality: Eating Disorders


Eating disorders have become increasingly common among adolescents (Shiff, 2017).

Obsessive thinking about weight and compulsive exercise are linked to anorexia and bulimia in adolescents (Smith, Mason, & Lavender, 2018).



“..the room is full of women.
Women like the one in the
viral video, see-through and
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afterthoughts.”

(Machado, 2017, p. 134)



“Man, did I ever tell you about the time I
photographed a woman who had started to
fade?”

Shit, dude. Did you tell her?

Fuck no. I figured she'd find out soon
enough.”

Another Interpretation: A Metaphor for Misogyny

Women falling victim to an unavoidable fate

They are only valued when ‘attached’ to
things of beauty -- stitched into the gowns in
the dress shop

They are pushed into invisibility, yet criticized
by (male) pundits for the inconvenience of
their disappearance

Implications for #MeToo Movement





“Adolescence is a period of life in which the sense of ‘self’ changes profoundly”

(Sebastian, Burnett, & Blakemore, 2008, p. 441)

Increased self-reflection, identity exploration, and emotional changes are among the hallmarks of adolescent development.

Why not invite conversations that build from these topics?

Far more than children, adolescents seek to know **who** they are, **what** they are all about, and **where** they are going in life.

“ Self- esteem reflects perceptions that do not always match reality.”

(Krizam & Herlache, 2018; Olfmanns, Crego, & Widiger, 2018)



Masa Tome / Image: LC. Rosen

Most research on romantic relationships in adolescence has focused on heterosexual relationships.

The average age of initial same-sex activity for females ranges from **14 to 18** years of age, and for males from **13 to 15** (Savin-Williams, 2015).

We cannot generalize from heterosexual youth and simply switch the labels.

Trauma as a lens on school experiences

The difficult—those challenging life experiences that inevitably are carried into and lived within classrooms—can and must be made productive relationally and pedagogically within research and teaching

(Dutro, 2008, 2011; Dutro & Zenkov, 2008).

The inequities permeating school experiences for many students of color, those living in poverty, and GLBTQ students is well established in the research literature

(Blackburn, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2009; Lucas & Beresford, 2010; Noguera, 2008).

“...the struggle of language to adequately represent traumatic events, even as we are utterly dependent on symbolic representation to access, express, and interpret experience”

(Dutro, E., & Bien, A., 2014, p. 12).



Reading with a trauma lens

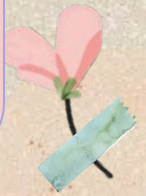
“The women started showing up a few years ago - they would just fold themselves into the needlework, like it was what they wanted” (p. 135).


“She said that as long as they sought us out, it was all right. And those dresses do so well” (p. 135).



“The girl does not cry out. Petra’s mother makes tight, neat stitches along the girl’s arm and torso, skin and fabric binding together as tightly as two sides of an incision (pp. 134-135).

“I see them all, faintly luminous, moving about in their husks. But they remain. They don’t move, they never move (p. 148).





“Those who seek to ban my book and others like it are trying to exploit fear — fear about the realities that books like mine expose, fear about desire and sex and love — and distort it into something ugly, in an attempt to wish away queer experiences.

They do not try to hide their contempt, or their homophobia. They accuse teachers who want to assign my book of ‘grooming’ students, language that’s often used to accuse someone of being a pedophile and a common conservative dog whistle when it comes to queer art. They want to shield their children from anything that suggests a world beyond their narrow perception.”

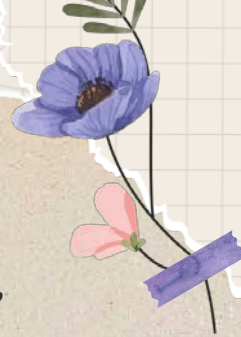
(Carmen María Machado, New York Times, May 11, 2021)



Language of Fear

How often do we hear these same remarks with regard to similar texts?

How can we counter narrow perceptions within our classrooms?



“Preventing children from reading my book, or any book, won’t protect them. On the contrary, it may rob them of ways to understand the world they’ll encounter, or even the lives they’re already living. You can’t recognize what you’ve never been taught to see. You can’t put language to something for which you’ve been given no language.

Why do we not see these acts of censorship for what they are: **shortsighted, violent and unforgivable?**”

(Carmen María Machado, New York Times, May 11, 2021)



Thank You!



Time for questions, comments, and reactions



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