

# Positive Body Image Workbook

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A Clinical and Self-Improvement Guide

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108731645](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108731645)  
 DOI:10.1017/9781108758796

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First published 2021

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-108-73164-5 Paperback

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All assignments from the book are available to download and print for use in sessions via: [www.cambridge.org/PBIW](http://www.cambridge.org/PBIW)  
 Password: PBIWorkbook21

## Foreword

For 33 years I taught abnormal psychology, introductory psychology, and an upper level seminar on eating disorders at a liberal arts college. Most of the students I taught were in the top 10% of their high school classes. Around 75% eventually went on to graduate school and/or professional training in fields such as psychology, medicine, law, the arts, or business.

Typically, the students were very bright, curious, and analytical. We had lively, sometimes boisterous discussions, often with personal examples, of a great many topics. These included language, symbolism, and Freudian psychosexual stages; the pleasures, hilarity, risks, and all too frequent tragedy of alcohol and other drug use; and people we have known—and, in some sad instances, grown up with—who had The Dark Triad of personality characteristics (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013): narcissism, subclinical psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. Only one topic, from fall 1980 through spring 2012, unfailingly evoked uncomfortable silence. If your first thought is trauma, think and feel again.

Body image was and remains for most people simultaneously too personal, too interpersonal, and too complex. It is freighted with strong emotions, it is deeply rooted in our past while always lurking in the immediate future, and it is influenced by a network of powerful forces in our cultures. When “body image” became the focus of that social phenomenon we call a “college class,” one could almost see and smell the self-consciousness and shame seep into the room, like foul-smelling smoke under a door.

I offer this observation neither as an experienced college professor nor as a body image expert. Standing or sitting with my students in class I experienced it, too. Every time. And right now in memory, as the adult form of a small, physically frail boy growing up in 1950s and 1960s southern California, with big ears, easily irritated skin, and curly hair and long eyelashes that girls envied, right above eyes that necessitated glasses at age 7 . . . a mere 2 years after I really began to need them. In the early 1960s, puberty and acne underway, I and my misery/shame/helplessness prevailed upon my thrifty middleclass parents to give money and time they could ill afford to securing for me what was then called “plastic surgery.” At a hospital 50 miles away in Los Angeles the bones in my “hey, there’s Dumbo!” ears were rearranged in order to set them back toward my head. This helped for a while, although I wonder how many of my peers noticed, really, when

middle school resumed in the fall (see the epigram at the beginning of chapter 22). And a mere 2 years later the Beatles and their “mop top,” ear-obscuring hair became an international sensation, and a sexiness ideal for White boys in middle and high school, including those of us with curly hair . . . .

Body image. Body dissatisfaction. Shame. Should. Ought. If only I looked like . . . . A few words, easily processed and elaborated in cool, conceptual form (e.g., actual-ideal disparity) while reading about and in some instances discussing these topics. But where to begin—as a person who wants to be healthier, as a grand/parent determined to resist imposing their past and the culture’s stifling present on children, as a counselor or a coach or a physician who wants to be a positive influence—to understand the hot emotionally and morally charged layers of body image? The whole matter is complicated by the fact that the geography of body image reflects an unruly set of influences ranging from genetics, to teasing, to trauma, to gender/sexual identity, to advertising as it represents economic and political forces.

It’s hardly sage advice for me to offer you Internet platitudes, such as “Stop. Breathe deeply. Step up, be mindful, and begin somewhere. Love yourself. Embrace health. Be the change you wish to see in the world . . .” But “Read and use the *Positive Body Image Workbook*” is not only sage advice, it is a compassionate, effective, and socially constructive move on my part. In fact, this is a book not only to be read, it calls us to engage with it mindfully, frequently, and in an intentionally recursive way. Whether you are a curious teenager, a frustrated 30-something dieter, or a pediatrician, this book is a unique and rich means of beginning to learn and practice the very skills necessary to improve our own body image, those of people we know and care about, and our societies in general. And, ultimately, the *Positive Body Image Workbook* will likely enable you to “love yourself” and “be mindful” and “embrace health” and “be the change you wish to see in the world.”

With its focus on skills and learning as they apply to each person, this book is, in the words of Dr. T. Aaron Beck, founder of Cognitive Therapy, person-centered and problem-focused (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979). In this regard, I call your attention to the chapter that covers one important aspect of positive body image: body acceptance. Chapter 6 of *Positive Body Image Workbook* exemplifies how this book helps each reader as an individual to understand, accept, and overcome

## Foreword

without a wasteful, self-critical fight the neurotic dynamics of negative body image, that is, the self-defeating and self-perpetuating vacillation between dysphoria (shame, anxiety, guilt), avoidance, and rumination. The *Positive Body Image Workbook* directly, matter of factly, and compassionately helps the reader to identify nonjudgmentally and then address the many external and internal forces that threaten and sometimes overwhelm body acceptance. This book itself, infused with the wise voices of its authors, is a great foundation, in terms of modeling, advice, knowledge, and support, for beginning to build and participate in what the authors call a Community of Acceptance (see chapter 17).

The methodology of the *Positive Body Image Workbook* is grounded in a flexible form of therapy, teaching, and strategic encouragement that emerged nearly 100 years in the decidedly non-Freudian eclecticism of Alfred Adler (1929). Adler's approach to therapy, education, and indeed social change combined brief lectures, guided discussion, analogies, stories, homework assignments, humor, and careful, multifaceted analysis of cognitions we accept as painful, suffocating truths instead of the mis/guiding, malleable fictions they really are. And yet the *Positive Body Image Workbook* couldn't be more rooted in and guided by current research and evidence-based practices to reducing negative body image while developing a positive body image. I counted explanations, guidance, and exercises, from, in alphabetical order: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Behavior Therapy, Cognitive Therapy, Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Feminist Therapies, Health at Every Size® principles, Media Literacy, Mindfulness-Based Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, and Stress Inoculation Training. These are integrated by the book's systematic yet flexible approach to helping people make significant changes and by the wisdom of the authors, drawing on their vast experiences in research, clinical work, and self-reflection.

Another truly unique aspect of the *Positive Body Image Workbook* is its layered approach to self-assessment. This feature derives from the authors' expertise, and in some instances their leadership, in the science of tests and measurements for assessing facets of body image. The authors guide the reader in self-assessment—and thus a deeper understanding of important constructs—by making extensive use of valid questionnaires and opened-ended, semi-structured questions. At the simpler levels this connects with the reader's desire to understand multidimensional concepts more fully and how they apply to the self. Here there is guidance for scoring questionnaires and interpreting total scores. However, two truly distinctive features of the *Positive Body Image Workbook* constitute the more complex levels. One is inviting the reader to return to their responses to individual questionnaire items to explore those responses, as well as the productive potential inherent in alternative responses. This sets the stage for the transition to using such in depth self-assessment for goal-setting and for anticipation of both supports and obstacles.

Without either complicating or oversimplifying the task, the *Positive Body Image Workbook* provides, in clear steps, the perspective, the motivation, and the skills necessary for

healthy, sustainable changes toward body positivity within a fuller life. This book literally enables you to practice engaging, instead of avoiding, the dialectic between acceptance of the unchangeable *and* commitment to applying skills for what can be changed—and the proverbial wisdom to know the difference. This encouragement is particularly important for approaching one's body image, which may feel intractable. Tracy, Nichole, and Casey are authoritative—knowledgeable and nurturing—throughout this book. They also consistently serve as models for the courage to change. They know the task of transcending the past and the culture (not to mention the self) is daunting. They know there will be experiences of confusion, anxiety, and shame, and they know there will be setbacks. *And* in every chapter they are willing to be there—and for us to join them in the enterprise—with their healthy values and to stay present and mindful, and to take action, all in the presence of anxiety, doubt, and humility.

I was initially a bit reluctant to agree to write a foreword about a “workbook,” even though I have known, admired, and drawn upon the work of Tracy and Nichole for over 15 years. After all, I am not a clinician, I was trained to be suspicious of anything that was not a peer-reviewed journal article, and, yes, I've spent too many painful hours either avoiding or ruminating about my own body image issues. *And* as an advocate for the prevention of negative body image and disordered eating, I believe in the prospect and the psychosocial significance of positive body image, *and* I need to practice being courageous. I found, to my delight, that in reading the *Positive Body Image Workbook* I had the privilege of learning much more about negative body image (e.g., self-objectification; chapter 13) and positive body image (e.g., protective filtering; chapter 17). I also had the “life-enhancing” (see chapter 21)—personally, professionally, politically—opportunity to discover in each of the 23 chapters four of the pillars holding up the foundation of positive psychosocial development, of which positive body image is so clearly a major dimension.

The first pillar is *compassion* for the complexity, confusion, and challenges evoked by “working” in any manner, including use of a workbook, on body image. The authors understand, at all levels, that body image is not “just” anything. Rather, it is a fascinating but bewildering network of beliefs, strong feelings, sensations, visual images, auditory echoes, and, to paraphrase Carl Jung (1965), “memories, dreams, and reflections.” Moreover, all these important dimensions are embedded in transactions with how we behave and the contexts in which we live. Second, the authors, by virtue of their extensive years of research, clinical work, advocacy, and self-reflection, have the *skills* to provide us with the specific skills we personally need to (a) understand the positive and negative dimensions of body image, and then (b) gently *and* fiercely tackle the challenge of long-term change while embracing the process of discovering what positive body image means to us in the context of our own body agency.

Third, along with compassion, the authors infuse this workbook with the determination, reinforcement, humor, and patience necessary to help people learn through doing that change is a *practice*. This is the rare workbook that is well-

researched by world-class experts and well-organized by scientists who are clear thinkers and effective writers. *And* these authors know that to use this workbook effectively, one has to do what one does while engaged in any process of meaningful change—go back and forth, across the chapters, across the exercises, across the years of one’s life, across the skills, across the dialectic between acceptance and change. This leads to the final pillar, which is the importance of being guided by experts who are part of a *community* in which they themselves continue to develop personally, professionally, and politically in terms of the power to transform a world that all too often makes positive body image sound preposterous.

I am a psychologist who works in the body image and eating disorders fields. As noted, I am also an advocate for prevention of eating disorders and related conditions, including body dissatisfaction. *And* I am a 70-year-old husband and father whose body image issues stretch sideways and back beyond

memory, but well into pain that can be all too fresh. This book has provided me with knowledge, inspiration, self-compassion, skills, and more, including the willingness to learn and practice embodying its important lessons.

– *Michael P. Levine, Ph.D., FAED*  
*Goleta, California, 9 March 2020*

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## Acknowledgments

Thank you . . .

Cambridge University Press and the amazing editorial staff for believing in us and joining with us in this exciting collaboration.

Esteemed colleagues for contributing to the field of positive body image, encouraging us to engage in this endeavor, allowing the use of your intellectual property, and offering

invaluable feedback to contribute to the success of this workbook.

Cherished clients for your wisdom, courage, trust, and vulnerability. May this workbook be in honor of your struggles and successes.

Dear families, friends, and mentors who walked with us each step of the way with unwavering support and love.