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To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00029157.2004.10403620

Published online: 21 Sep 2011.

Article views: 92

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In the entertainment world of space alien Star Wars' figures, the magical wizardry of Harry Potter characters, and the Middle Earth *Lord of the Rings* (LOTR) creatures, the last 25 years of cinema has stretched the imagination visually with regard to body image. The visual media has placed before us both endearing and revolting creatures and the public has responded with fascination, and at times devotion, not to the simply human but to the grotesque, the odd, the different, the exotic. How paradoxical that in an age when the cliché, “appearance is everything,” dominates our culture, the entertainment seeking public seems to crave and respect a wide range of appearances. What explains this paradox? Are the folks who dress-up for a showing of the cult movie *Rocky Horror Picture Show* or who don their capes for LOTR, the same as those who copy fashion magazine images of Madonna or 007?

These questions and others generated by the above paradox reflect the complexity of the question, “What is body image?” which the editors, Thomas Cash and Thomas Pruzinsky have so boldly asked and attempted to answer. In *Body Image*, the theme of the interrelationship of culture and psyche is woven throughout. These two Thomases, as they are gently revered by contributors to the volume, as “doubting Thomases” in the best scientific tradition, have compiled an outstanding resource on the topic of body image. Going far beyond a nascent field which has been dominated by eating disorders, the authors take body image beyond the pathological disorder and dysfunction literature into medical contexts of congenital abnormalities and plastic surgery for rehabilitation from dental, urological, oncological, and dermatological issues, to name just a few contexts.

This book truly has something for everyone, especially newcomers to the topic of body image and prospective researchers who want a quick study on what has been done and what is desperately in need of further study. The editors have created a resource which is up to date, includes references to the extensive literature on eating disorders and abuse, which catapulted the field of body image into every practitioner’s awareness, is sensitive to the questions of gender, sexism, development across the lifespan, racism, culture, and eco-systems and is a call to action to any clinician who struggles with helping clients integrate their “body concepts” (that term implies we are in the realm of mind-body) in an increasingly body/appearance-conscious world.

In a book to which so many authors have been asked to contribute, the editors have created a smooth-reading compilation of articles. Each seems to conform to a style which permeates the book. The book begins with an historical overview of the field and ends with the challenges and directions to be pursued. The outline of each article reflects the style of the book as a whole. Laying a conceptual foundation each article begins by defining the term *body image*, and then explains its theoretical orientation, reviews its topic and relevant research, and then asks the outstanding questions which continue to need more research or that perplex further study. Every article ends with an annotated reference list, a major strength for the serious student. The volume is unabashedly mostly cognitive-behavioral, but consistent with its commitment to breadth and inclusiveness, incorporates more than lip service to the importance of the psychodynamic approaches to understanding and changing body image. It is as if
these writers speak with one inclusive voice, and that is not to say they are in agreement with each other’s work. It is truly a pleasure to read a work which has been compiled with such care and thoughtfulness. A weakness of the text is that no article is able to go into much depth because of limitations of space. This seems forgivable since the reader is left yearning for more and the comprehensive annotated bibliography satisfies that craving. In addition, the book is so well crafted that one can gain information from a single article and acquire the main themes of the entire book.

So what is body image? Cash and Pruzinsky argue that the construct of body images—the plural, while awkward, conveys its multidimensional and complex nature—can only be “attained by precisely defining conceptual referents within the context of...the body experience” (2002, p.7). For example body image has been variously and interchangeably defined as weight satisfaction, size perception, and appearance evaluation, exemplifying the need for consistent terminology. Many of the authors note that distinguishing between attitudinal and perceptual components (Radika & Hayslip, p.155; Garner, p.295; Gilmour, p. 376) is critical to elucidating what is meant by this term.

An interesting reconceptualization was offered by Thompson and Garner in their chapter on measuring perceptual body image, noting that perception can be further separated into the sensory and nonsensory components which allows for the interpretation of perception. (p. 137). One may be dissatisfied with a part of one’s body, yet like the body as a whole, for example, or perceive the body as distorted although the outside observer would not. To complicate matters further, the view of one’s body is fluid and ever changing, with the individual liking it one day, and not the next, or in one context, but not another. The chapters on assessment detail the challenges facing researchers who wish to bring some clarity to how to study such variability.

In 1985, Rodin and her colleagues introduced the groundbreaking concept of “normative discontent” to describe the American and western woman’s chronic negative feelings about her body. Steeped in feminist and eating disordered perspective many women noted that if there were only women in the world, they would all be running around fat and happy. Body image is, however, no longer just a feminine concern. For women masculinity is the growing concern: That is, “Do my muscles fit the prevailing media-generated image?” One client of mine succinctly stated that, for women, body image is about how many pounds they weigh, while for men it’s about how much muscle mass there is. For both, the issue is about fat, but fat is defined differently for men and women. Several authors note that just as Barbie doll’s shape presented an unattainable body and has grown thinner over the decades, action figure toys for boys have grown leaner and sport the equally unattainable human equivalent (California Governor excepted!) of 15 inch biceps and 55 inch chests (Corsen & Anderson, p.193). The concern that girls ages 6-8 are already expressing worries about wanting to be thinner (Striegel-Moore & Franko, p.184), and that adolescent boys are increasingly abusing anabolic steroids (Olivardia, p. 214), are noted as two of the persuasive arguments for urging more study in the body image field, and for promoting psychoeducational interventions for future generations.

Students of the field of hypnosis will note some similarities in the fluctuations of the study of body image which was initially dominated by a neuropathological focus. The pendulum then swung to a psychodynamic focus which was thought to have removed the “body” from the body image (Pruzinsky & Cash, p.5), and a balanced
perspective was restored to a multidimensional, biopsychosocial perspective, where mindbody are integrated. The authors quote Seymour Fisher, a pioneer in the body image research, to summarizes their beliefs: “Human identity cannot be separated from its somatic headquarters in the world” (Ibid, p.7). This is certainly the prevailing view within hypnosis today.

In the sections on interventions the reader will find many direct and indirect references to hypnotic techniques, with consistent mention of imagery, progressive relaxation, and reframes. I particularly liked Garner’s (p.302) reframe of the body as vehicle for pleasure rather than control, mastery and self-definition as this is in keeping with the new emphasis on positive psychology. In a book where authors argue for multifaceted definitions, it is fitting that Rumsey notes in her article on surgical interventions for disfiguring congenital conditions that interventions need to be multifaceted too.

Body image, self-esteem, self-concept, beliefs and values are interrelated variables at the psychic, relational and cultural levels and the authors have worked hard to convey the enormous task facing researchers who wish to tease apart these elements for study. The clinician, however, need not wait for such research, but will be inspired by David Kreuger’s chapter on “Psychodynamic Approaches to Changing Body Image.” After many chapters written in the jargon of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), it was delicious to return to the familiar ground of empathic attunement and transference. In a few pages Kreuger discusses “listening for nonverbal material” (p.465) and how to take the client past embodied emotional affect while serving as an anchor and/or resource for the client to teach him/her the language of emotions heretofore locked in the soma.

Rather than feeling overwhelmed by the findings of the research, the reader is likely to enjoy the “good news.... that most of us are already attractive (i.e., average)” Jackson, p.19), that we may care less as we age (Whitbourne & Skultety, p.88), and that the most recent research suggests body images are improving for the upcoming generations (Cash, p. 273). Perhaps the notion of “changing” body images, will be replaced by “morphing,” and the young of today will internalize and integrate the media’s images of a resilient adaptable body whose archetypes, whether alien, magical or powerful share the dictum to morph over time.

This is a big volume. The reader will not find it a ho-hum, boring approach to body image. It is an energetic text that echoes not just the fast food culture but the fast pace of influences between cultures (Altabe & O’Garo, p.255) and will guide any professional who wants a comprehensive presentation of what is available in this field. This book argues for embodiment as a concept (Linden, 1999) that needs to be included in our understanding of human behavior, cognitions and emotions, and embodies its message on every page. I highly recommend it as an addition to your professional library.

References
