

IMAGINING OURSELVES WHOLE A FEMINIST APPROACH TO  
TREATING BODY IMAGE DISORDERS

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The relationship to our bodies is the first relationship we have. It is the foundation of self. Yet it is a relationship that few people in Western society do well. Western females do it poorly in a particular way; we do battle with our bodies. We attribute to them the power to make or break our lives and then scapegoat them for everything that is wrong. We turn them into objects, which we disown, deny, haul around as burdens and generally find inadequate. We live in a state of normative discontent, feeling that we should be thinner, prettier, firmer, younger, somehow better. We deprive our bodies of food and drag them to the gym to whip them into shape, bring them under control. We dedicate our time, energy, and obsessive attention-- in short, our lives-- to trying to "fix" our bodies and make them "right". We do everything but live in them.

Woman's troubled relationship to our bodies spills over into a troubled relationship to our selves. It is central to the current epidemic of disordered eating, low self-esteem, depression, and self-contempt in the female population. In my clinical opinion there can be no true healing of an eating disorder without a focussed attention on the disordered relationship between self and body-- the negative body image.

Although the majority of women I have treated with body image disorders also suffer with a disordered relationship to food, my work has not been with eating disorders as such. For the last fourteen years, I have steadied my focus on treating negative body image. I do this primarily through a therapeutic group process called **Transforming Body Image**. The material in this workshop forms the core of my book, Transforming Body Image: Learning To Love the Body You Have. In this work, I attempt to return to my clients and readers the birthright to feel at home in the bodies they **have**--even if those bodies fail to conform to external or internalized standards of appearance. I will discuss this work further later in this chapter.

I see the relationship between self and body not only as a major underpinning of women's disordered relationship to food and eating, but also as a keystone of our identity and self-worth. It is an issue that involves

the intersection of mind, body, and culture. A feminist approach to the treatment of disordered eating must deal with negative body image as it truly is, a psychophysical manifestation of a social disease. Any struggle that afflicts the great majority of the female population is not an issue of psychopathology. It is "reasonable", albeit destructive, adaptation to a culture that is sick. Women become sick as we conform to it.

For women to become whole, we must see clearly the toxicity of our patriarchal culture as it impinges unrelentingly on our lives and we must take political action against it. But while we wait for the needed changes in our cultural values and societal actions, we must also heal our personal psyches, loosing the effects of centuries of brainwashing and creating a kind of psychic impermeability to the continuing onslaught. We must take back our bodies as home, not as enemy, or as commodity.

Everything about the socialization of females in our patriarchal culture leads us to view the value of our selves in terms of the value of our bodies-- as attracters of love, as child-bearers, as nurturers, and as ornaments for men. Few of us escape the effects of the deep programming that comes from our culture.

We are bombarded daily by messages-- from the media, from family, and from our peers. These are "seeds" that flourish or die depending on the soil conditions they meet. This soil is cultivated by the early messages our bodies-- and the developing selves that inhabit them-- learn from those prime agents of culture, our parental figures. This communication --touch or its absence, looks of approval or disapproval, teasing, criticism, warnings-- tells us whether we are acceptable or not. The extent to which we fit or fail to fit in the community of our peers during our formative years also cultivates the soil in which these later seeds will grow into a healthy or troubled relationship to the body.

Regardless of our degree of enlightenment and raised feminist consciousness it is a struggle for most women not to be controlled by the powerful, indelible messages that bombard us daily. They echo our early and deeply embedded learning and make it difficult to forget that for a woman's life to be successful and meaningful we must: please, be in relationship, be chosen, belong, be loved. We have further learned that our success or failure to accomplish these prescriptions will be determined by the acceptability of the appearance of our bodies.

The message echoes over and over again, that to be successful as a woman, we must have an acceptable physical appearance, i.e., we must be thin, beautiful, "in shape", and eternally youthful-- whatever the price. Each of us carries around a mental image of our own body-- a body image-- that either measures up or fails to measure up to the standard by which our society attributes value to its female members. In our society, it is an unnaturally thin ideal that is unattainable by 95% of the female population whose body types can never conform.

Body image refers to the organized subjective experience and mental representation of the body. There are two aspects of body image that come in to play in dealing with eating disordered populations. The neurological aspect allows us to know ourselves proprioceptively: where the body is in space, how much room it occupies, how body parts relate to one another, how to organize and plan movements.

The aspect of body image that I have focussed on in my work is body-cathexis. Technically, this refers to the value-laden aspect of the body image experience and describes the feelings and attitudes about the body as well as the emotional loading placed on the body, It also describes the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the body. Although most women with disordered eating and disturbed body images, have a distortion in their ability to estimate the correct size of the body, it is my belief that this distortion is more emotional than neurological.

Body image is the image of the body that we see with the mind's eye; it is the image of the body that we *feel* with the kinesthetic or felt sense that allows us to know about our emotions, sensations, bodily needs and appetites, as well as to negotiate our physical environment; it is the image of the body that we *hear* about as we listen in to our inner speech. I use the term body image in a broad way to describe the **relationship** between the self and the body that contains it, the piece of psychological space where body, mind, and culture come together. Body image encompasses our thoughts, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, and judgments about the bodies we have.

The body image is a product of the imagination, and is not to be confused with the actual physical body or with the image that the body projects to an outside observer. The term body image is an unfortunate one because it echoes this confusion. Raised on a diet of movies, TV, and

the printed page, we are a society that, in general, confuses image with reality. Although body image describes an **internal and subjective** sense a person has of her own body, the term easily jumps from the subjective to the objective and is used interchangeably by many to mean the image that a person's body projects to the onlooker. They are far from the same thing.

The translation from the physical body to the body image that represents it is a very complex process that is prone to distortion. Very few women see their bodies as they really are. Most of us live with body images shaped and distorted by our feelings and attitudes about our selves, and about being women in a patriarchal society that devalues and disempowers everything female. The distortion comes from many sources: the way our parents and family related to our bodies when we were growing up; traumatic life experiences that have become "frozen" into our body image; the body role-modeling we have had; the acceptance or rejection we felt of our bodies by family, peers, and important others; and the ways we have perceived our bodies to fit or not fit the cultural image. In a more generic sense body image is prone to distortion because of the "weight" or emotional charge that our bodies carry by virtue of the make-or-break power with which they are imbued. It is no wonder they loom larger than life and are prone to distortion. We attribute to our bodies responsibility for everything that goes right with our lives and blame for everything that goes wrong.

Women in our society are under tremendous pressure to attain a "look", a single standard of weight, size, and age. We live in a time when our values are shaped primarily by mass culture. It used to be that values were shaped at a community level by real, flesh and blood people. These values were transmitted slowly and organically from parent to child within the shared view of the local community with its acceptable range of diversity. Today, most of what we learn of values comes from the media's version of the world. We learn from images we receive directly from media, or indirectly from parents whose values have been significantly shaped by the same media.

Today, the great shaper and transmitter of values is the media. The meteoric speed within which values are made and changed by television is unprecedented in history. It reaches to all social levels and to all geographic corners, homogenizing one and all. The images that the media feed us are

carefully regulated by big business--the diet/fitness, and cosmetic industries--designed to sell product. I have heard it estimated that the average American spends nine full years of their lives watching television. That is a lot of impact, taken in a passive, uncritical, semi-trance state. We see images of women who are anorexic, and have been surgically altered. Images that are airbrushed and computer-altered. These are not real women whom we aspire to look like. They are artifacts.

We all want to look alike, dress alike, speak alike, think alike, etc. The two-dimensional media teach us through images that thinness, good looks, and eternal youth are the ways to happiness and success. We learn that thinness is next to godliness, and fatness is a moral blemish. We learn to see ourselves more as packaging than as content. More as outer form and less as selves. We are bombarded daily by images designed to make us feel inadequate so we will buy products that will fix us. The campaign persists, because it works. We see the images, "buy" the need to measure up, and feel bodyshame when we fail. Our economy is based on setting up this tension and need in us so that we consume. It is the American way.

The cultural ideal of women that we "buy" has grown thinner and less attainable over the last thirty years, as the bodies of real women have grown larger and heavier. As the gap between the real and the ideal widens, women experience our real bodies as inadequate and our body images grow increasingly more negative. These same thirty years we have also witnessed, not coincidentally, the second wave of feminism that left in its wake a new landscape of opportunity and confusion for women as well as a backlash from the patriarchal system it threatens.

The war against FAT and the natural fleshiness of the female body escalates. It is a war against Nature. It is a war that most women are destined to lose. I like the metaphor that I heard Joel Gurin, co-author of The Dieter's Dilemma, use to describe the power of the setpoint. He likens the body's natural resting weight to a powerful metal spring. When we starve the body and fight against its natural weight, we are pushing down against the force of the spring. As we lower weight by withholding food, the spring is held down under increasing pressure. The spring (or weight) stays down as long as a strong and vigilant force (food deprivation) is applied against it. Any break in the force and the spring springs back to its

rightful configuration just as bingeing occurs to restore the body's natural resting weight.

Each body has its own ideas about "correct" weight, ideas that are probably radically different (i.e. higher) than the current weight ideal. It is in the nature of female bodies to be fatter than male bodies. It is part of our hormonal make-up. Part of Nature's plan to preserve the species. Fighting against the natural fleshiness of our bodies to conform to an unnatural ideal can only result in a cycle of bingeing/purging, compulsive dieting/ compulsive overeating. It is only by accepting, honoring, and being willing to live with that weight--even if it means being in this world in a non-conforming, non-ideal body-- that this cycle can be broken and the relationship to food can be normalized.

Our culture makes it very difficult for women to accept our natural fleshiness. There are other chapters in this collection that offer credible explanations of how we have arrived at a value system that is so destructive to its women. Certainly this sorry state of affairs is the result of many complex events and trends that come together with synergistic power.

My own particular leaning is to see it largely in relation to the patriarchal system. The rules that drive our culture/ society are based on male-oriented, patriarchal values. Feminine qualities are devalued, as are those aspects of life traditionally associated with the Feminine. Woman is seen as mistress of the dark, mysterious, and powerful realm of the flesh, her body associated with instinct, irrationality, unpredictability, sensuality, uncleanness, evil, and the power to give and take life itself. Because Woman has been seen as essential but feared, she has been controlled, as has Body, by being objectified and placed under restraints. This continued objectification of woman's body by society-- and by women themselves-- sustains the disembodiment and disempowerment that is such a central aspect of the female experience. The realm of the feminine--Body, Nature, emotions, intuition, cooperation, affiliation, and community--finds little room in this patriarchal/ capitalistic system while the power, giftedness, priorities, and contributions of women go unacknowledged.

I see our society's worship of thinness as a brilliant form of social control. There is a status quo to be preserved, whether we look at it in terms of the balance of power, or the maintenance of the economy. The

voices and power of women--not imitation men, but *realized women*--loosed on the social order would constitute a major disruption in the status quo. One that the patriarchy is committed to preventing.

I am not so paranoid as to imagine that there is a committee of good old boys called "the patriarchy" that meets in a board room somewhere and conspires to figure out how to keep women down. But if there were such a committee, they could not have conceived a more ingenious strategy for keeping its women out of contention. What a great idea it is, to make FAT--that natural and essential part of the female constitution-- into a dreaded, hated, and shameful substance that must be eradicated. The carrot is the promise that it can be eradicated-- with enough strength of character. Driving women into a futile struggle against an aspect of our own bodies that fundamentally cannot be changed, keeps us too pre-occupied-- too obsessed, too hungry, too busy fixing ourselves, too tied up in shame-- to challenge the social order. It is social control at its best, where the oppressed police themselves. It is brilliant, and it is working.

The obsessive and destructive relationship that most women have with our own bodies is an internalization of the relationship that our society has to women's bodies-- simultaneously one of contempt and worship. It is a completely normal and appropriate adaptation to an abnormal and disembodied culture that treats all bodies, but especially women's' bodies as objects.

There are features in our culture's relationship to the body in general that affect both men and women, and teach us not to feel at home and comfortable in the bodies we have. We live in a neurotic culture with a neurotic value system-- a culture that fears flesh and seeks to control it at any cost. Body and the dark, feared, irrational and uncontrollable realm of experience that it represents-- has always been relegated to the dustbin-- the realm of the Feminine. This dustbin also contains the world of the emotions, of intimacy, intuition, as well as the body of the earth itself.

People in the West--women and men alike-- typically are disembodied. Men are considered less than masculine if they pay attention to their bodies at all, while women are not "real" women unless

they are *preoccupied* with their bodies. The preoccupation can be a battle to bring the hated antagonist, the albatross of a body, in line with cultural requirements. Or it can be a narcissistic drive to sculpt and perfect the body as a prelude to worship. Unfortunately obsession with the body is not the same thing as embodiment. We can be disembodied while being excruciatingly obsessed with our bodies. Although qualitatively different experiences, body hatred and body narcissism both treat the body as if it were an **object** separate from the self.

In our disembodiment, we are numb to our bodies. We repress so much of our bodily experience that our bodies feel alien to us. There is an invisible line of demarcation at the neck that separates the world of the mind above from the world of the body below.

We tend to repress (or stuff) those dimensions of our experience that frighten us, or have made us vulnerable--unwelcome signals of our bodily experience, such as pain, sexuality, hunger, knots of anger, and also pleasure. Eventually we obliterate the experience of our somatic selves. Our bodies effectively are removed from our self-images. We deny their existence or importance.

If, as a child, our pleasure in our bodies was punished, then we will functionally amputate the source of the pleasure from the self-image rather than continue to live in fear of punishment. If, on the other hand, the body was the victim of violation, either physical or psychic, we will dissociate from it, write it out of our experience of the self.

If we do not accept and value our bodies--either because they do not look the way we think it should-- or because they do not behave the way we think they should-- or perhaps they are disabled, ill, or otherwise "deviant"-- we then disown them and disembody ourselves.

Objectively this repression of the body experience often manifests as an armoring of the muscles forming particular chronic holding patterns or tensions. This armoring leads to particular patterns of muscular rigidity or flaccidity that give us our characteristic posture, expression, gait, and

style of movement. It deadens us to our feelings. This armor can also impinge on the inner workings of the body.

Subjectively, this repression of the body is felt as a hole in our experience of being. We feel dehumanized. We feel disconnected from ourselves, trapped in a pile of flesh that is alien. This may sound extreme. But what I describe is not limited to the psychiatric back ward. It has become almost a norm. Being in the world--armored and unembodied-- seems to make it possible for people to endure the boredom, pain, stress, overstimulation, and violence of conventional, status-quo-maintaining life styles. Sometimes the functional amputation of the body is incomplete; the feared excitement, or the deadness, or the unwelcome pain or pleasure breaks through. We then attempt to anesthetize or excite ourselves through compulsive behavior or substance abuse.

To be embodied is to experience one's body as the **center** of one's existence. Not as the **focus**, but as the reference point for being in the world. To be embodied is to feel alive, to perceive bodily states as they change from pleasure to pain, hunger to satiety, energy to fatigue, from vitality and excitement to calm and tranquility. When that rich source of information is blocked or dismissed, we miss out on opportunities to know who we are.

Everything we think, feel, or do registers in the body through subtle changes in the musculature and bodily functions. There is no e-motion without motion however small the motion: a change in pulse or body temperature, a restriction of the breathing, a tensing of the musculature. Having access to body awareness helps us perceive those changes at the body level that signal emotional shifts and let us know ourselves emotionally. Intuition, that sense of knowing in your gut, is also based on awareness of the subtle, felt shifts in the body.

To be embodied is to have access and ascribe value to the world of experience and information about ourselves that is available primarily through the language of the body. Embodiment positions us to know our

selves-- emotionally, spiritually, and physically so that we can access our needs and our wisdom, and make meaningful choices and judgments in life.

### **Treating Negative Body Image**

After years of my own struggle with a body that would not conform to the societal requirement for thinness, and a resulting negative body image, it was my doctoral project that provided the incentive to focus on ways of treating negative body image in women, including myself. I had always been struck by a complete lack of approaches to help women accept their bodies as they were. There was a plethora of programs and formulas directed at changing the body as a prerequisite for feeling good about oneself. None of these ever really worked for me.

There was nothing at the time-- 1978-- that suggested that I could accept myself as I am -- imperfections and all-- either as a prelude to getting on with my life, or as the forerunner of behavioral changes that might possibly lead to changes in my body. Everything available said: "Change your body and it will change your life". But try as I might, I could not change my body, in any lasting way. It finally occurred to me that it was not my body that needed to change. It was my mind-- my body image. It also occurred to me that I would have to figure out how to change body image on my own.

I decided to focus my research project on finding a way to treat negative body image. I created a treatment intervention that I empirically tested on a group of fifteen women, while another fifteen matched subjects waited in a control group. All of these women self-selected in response to a flyer advertising a group for women who disliked their bodies. I was looking for women of average weight who were not clinically eating disordered. Although I interviewed 114 women, all but five reported a significantly disordered relationship to food and weight, suggesting that weight and eating issues are essentially inseparable from body image struggles in women today.

I led the experimental group through a 7-week therapeutic group process. Subjects were also given cassette tapes of exercises to do on

their own time as homework. The results of the experiment were dramatically positive, both quantitative and qualitative measures indicating statistically significant improvement in both body and self-image. (Sankowsky) A six-month questionnaire follow-up revealed that these changes held or deepened for most subjects. Since that time I have lengthened the process into a 12-week group experience and have made alterations to the process that I will describe below. I have now led many hundreds of women through this work either in the weekly group or in a weekend version of the process. I continue to be encouraged that this treatment approach makes a significant impact on a woman's relationship to her body and by extension on her relationship to her self.

Although, as I said earlier, the ultimate cure for negative body image is to make radical, political changes in our society and the culture that drives it. This, if it is to happen, will take several generations to effect. In the meantime, radical changes need to happen on the individual psychological and cognitive level. I do not mean to imply that this is not political work. It is. Societal changes happen when enough individuals experience a change in their consciousness and develop a new relationship to the elements in the world that impinge upon our lives.

Women are particularly susceptible to cultural influences, whether they come through social institutions, cultural mouthpieces such as family and peers, or through media images. Our socialization teaches us to feel incomplete, to be directed toward others, to look outside of ourselves for the truth, for cues about who we are, how we should look, how we should act, whether we are adequate or inadequate. We learn to define ourselves in relation to, in comparison to others. We are ripe for brainwashing. And we have been deluged with toxic messages about our worth and obligations that are not going away fast. It is my objective as I work with clients, to help them become vessels that will no longer contain and tolerate these standards and pressures.

Although there is more activity now than when I began, the treatment options are still relatively sparse. Most are predominantly cognitive in approach (Cash & Pruzinsky 1990; Thompson, 1990). Some are cognitive and feminist (Freedman, 1988) while others (Sankowsky {a.k.a. Hutchinson}, 1981; Hutchinson, 1985; Wooley & Kearney-Cooke, 1987) are

feminist and experiential, for lack of a better label. I will confine this chapter to a description of my own work in this area.

In the **Transforming Body Image** process the emphasis is on helping each woman to own her uniqueness of body and self and to choose a kinder and more accepting relationship to the body she has. The therapy consists of twelve, weekly group meetings of two and a half hours each. Weekly groups are limited to a maximum of ten women, although weekend workshops are often considerably larger. The work is based primarily on experiential exercises using the focussed application of dynamic Guided Imagery or Visualization in conjunction with journal processing, group sharing, and movement.

### **Imagery As A Clinical Tool**

I have chosen Guided Imagery as my major clinical tool for several reasons:

1) I assume that body image is itself an image and that the use of controlled imaging is an appropriate tool for entering the realm where the subjective experience of the body can be accessed and altered. Since image is the language of the unconscious and of feelings, the focussed use of imagery is an appropriate key for opening the lock to access primary-process material and affective memories.

2) Working with imagery is a soft, respectful, albeit powerful therapeutic approach. The subtle, non-intrusive and often symbolic character of imagery can slide under the defensive radar, circumventing defensiveness and resistance, and often presenting profound revelations. Images are very efficient. A single image can symbolize and arouse an entire constellation of meanings that can be explored.

3) Imagery is the language of the self. Working with one's own inner imagery is a way of coming into deep contact with the self. Lack of a solid sense of self is a frequent characteristic of women with eating disorders and of women in general. This lack of self makes these women particularly vulnerable to toxic messages from outside. Developing contact with the richness of one's inner experience--feelings, images, memory images, thoughts, inner voices, sensations, and intuitions-- and

the opportunity of mapping of that landscape is an antidote to the spiritual vacuum, feeling of emptiness, and nobody home-ness that often plagues the eating disordered. A more substantial sense of self is essential for taking a stand that goes counter to everything our culture holds valuable.

4) Work with imagery takes place in a state of altered consciousness in a state of deep relaxation that is in itself healing. It is here that new mental patterns can be created and deep emotional healing can occur. Through manipulation of images an individual can gain access to and control of cognitive maps--such as body image-- that manifest in destructive attitudes, moods, and compulsive behavior patterns.

5) And finally, extensive work with imagery conveys the power of the imagination in shaping reality as well as a sense of each woman's power in manipulating and controlling her own imagery including body imagery.

In my now fairly extensive experience of working with the imagery of my clients, I can attest to the power of this modality. I believe that working in a respectful relationship to a person's imagery as a significant part of the total personality is a key to psychic reconstruction. Deeply repressed material can be brought to the surface and worked through on a symbolic level under the respectful guidance of the therapist.

### **Treatment Objectives**

The treatment intervention has several broad objectives: Relieving Isolation; Heightening awareness of body issues; Exploring the roots of body issues; Exploring blockages and resistance to change; and Re-embodiment

**Relieving Isolation:** Working in a group format is essential to relieving the sense of isolation that most women feel with their body struggles. In spite of the pervasiveness of negative body image in this country, it is remarkable that most of the women I have worked with feel that they are the only ones who truly hate their bodies, or truly have body defects--real or perceived. It is commonplace for women to complain about weight, and discuss diets ad nauseum. And yet it is rare for them to speak authentically with others about the pain, and the time and energy waste,

about painful events in their body history. Our deep feelings about our bodies for most women remain shrouded in secrecy. Even if they are a core issue, they often remain unshared even with therapists of many years.

Although **Transforming Body Image** takes place in a group, I do not view it as group therapy. The group serves primarily as a support rather than as an interpersonal laboratory. In my original research project, I wanted to measure the impact of the treatment in the purest form possible. I designed the process in such a way as to factor out my leadership and the effect of the group. I led the exercises, but did not facilitate the processing of any material that was elicited. After each exercise, participants processed their own material through a journal with focussing questions. With the exception of introductions, and casual conversation before group, there was no official group interaction at all.

In my groups now, I still entrust the major processing to individual journal work, although I am available to facilitate the sticky points. In the group sharing that follows each exercise, there are many opportunities to place individual issues in a larger shared context, and to have one's pain and discoveries witnessed. In hearing each other's stories, participants can glimpse the magnitude of the problem, and can tap into the tragic proportions of this self-torture as extrapolated to the society of women. This awareness of waste often arouses anger at the system that drives body hatred. Finally, repeatedly I hear from group members how important it is to see that such attractive women (i.e. everyone else) can also torture themselves about their bodies. This plants a seed of doubt in participants' ironclad sense of their own unattractiveness.

### **Heightening awareness of body issues:**

Although the entire process holds this objective by maintaining a tenacious focus on body issues over many weeks, the first two sessions are specifically designed to help participants learn where they are starting from in relation to their bodies. We explore in broad strokes what it means to learn about one's body image on a kinesthetic level through exercises in sensory awareness that reveal size distortions, where emotions are held in the body, and how body tension pattern often reflect and impact the existential experience; on a visual level through an imaginal mirror

exercise; on an auditory level by beginning to listen to and identify negative body/self-talk; and on a symbolic level by exploring image/metaphors that represent issues to be overcome and directions for change.

**Exploring the Roots of Body Issues:** I operate from the assumption that negative body image has been learned, and can therefore be unlearned and replaced with new learning. This phase of the treatment spans several weeks, and involves uncovering and peeling away attitudes that have been introjected and internalized in the course of development and socialization, and placing them in the larger socio-cultural context. Personal history is explored through several experiential exercises designed to expose the sources of faulty learning and injury to the body image. These include exercises involving age regression, imaginal investigation of family role-modeling, imaginal interactions with parent and significant others, and rewriting key psycho-historical events. This section of the work serves to articulate the injuries clearly and to begin a process of differentiation from the sources of faulty learning.

**Exploring blockages and resistance to change:** Changing body image is not easy. Although body struggles are painful and limiting, the resistance to letting them go can be very powerful. I continue to be astounded by the depth of the brainwashing we have all experienced, and the tenacity with which most women hold on to programming that is destructive to us. Negative body issues are protective. In the treatment process four or five sessions are devoted explicitly to exploring the secondary gains embedded in negative body attitudes. The ultimate objective of all of the work with resistance, it to identify the functions that the defenses serve, and to find more functional ways of addressing these needs.

One exercise symbolically explores negative body issues described as a form of imprisonment where we limit ourselves with our beliefs about our bodies. Participants are asked to get in touch with the way their self-limitation **feels**, and to represent their felt experience by an image or metaphor of entrapment. In the end, participants are asked to attempt an escape from their prison. This exercise reveals many things: the woman

who is being entrapped, the forces of entrapment, the barriers to escape, the safety of imprisonment, and, on a metaphoric level, the route to freedom.

Another exercise that takes place over three or four sessions is designed to heighten awareness of negative self-talk by embodying it in the form of sub-personalities that operate self-destructively, or inner saboteurs. Participants choose three from a menu of Saboteurs: Critic/Perfectionist; Rebel; Overprotector; Pleaser; Victim; Pusher/Driver. Working with negative inner voices in the form of Saboteurs provides an opportunity to explore cognitive errors in very concrete form. It reduces vague and global inner noise to a manageable inner "character" with whom one can dialogue and negotiate.

In exploring resistance, some issues come up frequently: Many assume that it is only by hating our bodies that we keep control over them. To like your body is to go completely to pot and get fat; Many women use their body issues as a way of staking boundaries and saying "no". The fear operating behind this is that if we were to like our selves and our bodies, we would be **required** to be sexual, powerful, successful, be in relationship, etc.. --all of which hold some degree of risk. Simultaneously body comfort is imagined contradictorily to be a loss of freedom, and an assault of choices that necessitate responsibility and boundary regulation; Additionally, many women express the fear that by deserting the "club" of women who hate their bodies, they will experience isolation and the judgment of their peers. Finally, there is fear of the vacuum that would be left by eliminating negative body attitudes. For many women negative body attitudes are so central to how they view and experience themselves, that their very identity is threatened by the prospect of letting go of these issues.

**Re-Embodiment:** Most women who struggle with their bodies have abandoned their bodies as home. Central to negative body image is a dissociation between self and body, where the body becomes an object to criticize, torture, starve, perfect, etc. For healing of this split to occur, there must be some form of re-embodiment work that directly engages the physical body. In my work, I use movement, specifically the Feldenkrais

Method of neuro-muscular re-education to reconnect woman with their bodies (Feldenkrais, 1977). Although almost any body-oriented work will help, I have found Feldenkrais movement to be especially well suited to reintroducing women to their bodies in a non-judgmental way. Feldenkrais exercises hone body awareness in an exquisite way. They provide participants with a unique means for developing a sense of grounding in the body and respect for the integrity of one's body. They experience the harmonious cooperation between body parts, and a sense of lightness and grace regardless of size, shape, or level of function.

The above is a bare-bones summary of the way that I work with negative body image issues. It is not the only way. For a more elaborate discussion of the rationale behind my methods I direct readers to my doctoral dissertation (Sankowsky {aka Hutchinson}, 1981). Complete transcripts of most of the imagery sequences I use in the treatment can be found in my book. (Hutchinson, 1985).

Why should we learn to love the bodies we have-- with all their imperfections? Because feeling at home in our bodies is a birthright. Because having a peaceful relationship with our bodies is an absolute prerequisite to both physical and mental health. The Cartesian duality that has led to the hierarchy of Maleness/Mind/ Spirit/Culture/Technology over Femaleness/Body/ Emotion/Nature permeates every aspect of our culture and our values. This split hurts all of us-- women and men. We become deaf to the signals through which our bodies let us know its wisdom, let us know what, when, and how to eat, rest, move, and caretake our bodies. We become emotionally illiterate, our blunted awareness unable to read and interpret the flow of emotions as they register and express through our musculature and sensations. We all miss out on the richness of the experiences and pleasures genuine embodiment makes available. We miss out on a self fully expressed and a life fully lived. And the world misses out on us.

References