



Handbook of Positive Body Image and Embodiment: Constructs, Protective Factors, and Interventions

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Body Appreciation

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In the relatively young field of positive body image, most research has focused on *body appreciation*, which entails having favorable opinions of the body regardless of actual physical appearance, accepting the body in spite of perceived imperfections, respecting the body by attending to its needs and engaging in healthy behaviors, and protecting the body by rejecting unrealistic appearance ideals found in the media (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005). Body appreciation has gained and maintained empirical ground due to its comprehensiveness in covering the positive body image construct and its ease of assessment (Tylka, 2011; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015b).

Regarding its comprehensiveness, body appreciation emerged as a primary theme within each qualitative study that aimed to understand the characteristics and components of positive body image by interviewing those who espouse a positive body image. Across the board, participants emphasized that positive body image involves respecting, honoring, loving, and displaying gratitude toward the features, functionality, and health of the body. For instance, US college women reported that they now appreciate features of their bodies that they disliked or ignored during adolescence and are grateful for the ways their bodies appear and function (Wood-Barcalow, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2010). Swedish adolescents reported appreciating the functionality and appearances of their bodies, even though they considered their appearance to

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be “average” (Holmqvist & Frisén, 2012). Aboriginal Canadian girls indicated that they appreciate their Native features and their bodies’ ability to engage in the powwow dance, which connects them to their culture (McHugh, Coppola, & Sabiston, 2014). Canadian adults with spinal cord injuries revealed that they acknowledge and appreciate improvements in their health, function, independence, and strength (Bailey, Gammage, van Ingen, & Ditor, 2015).

Regarding its assessment, the psychometric integrity and ease of use has made the original Body Appreciation Scale (BAS; Avalos et al., 2005) and the Body Appreciation Scale-2 (BAS-2; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015a) a viable choice for (p. 23) scholars who need to assess body appreciation within research, clinical, prevention, and education settings. This chapter covers the BAS, BAS-2, and research on the body appreciation construct, including its links to psychological well-being and physical health, and ends with possible future avenues for research and clinical application.

Body Appreciation Scale



The original 13-item BAS (Avalos et al., 2005) was designed to measure the extent to which individuals accept, hold favorable opinions toward, and respect their bodies, as well as reject media-promoted appearance ideals as the only form of beauty. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses have revealed that the BAS has a unidimensional factor structure in many samples, including US women and men, Spanish adolescents, Austrian community women and men, and Turkish college women; however, a two-dimensional factor structure (a large general body appreciation factor and a smaller body image investment factor) was found in samples from Brazil, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Poland, South Korea, and Zimbabwe (see Swami, 2018, for a review). Evidence for the original BAS’s internal consistency, test-retest reliability (when reported), and construct validity has been upheld across all samples. Because it was the only measure of positive body image available between 2005 and 2015, most research on body appreciation has been based on the original BAS.

Although evidence clearly supports its psychometric properties, two of the original BAS authors—myself and Nichole Wood-Barcalow—revised the original BAS in 2015 for several reasons: (a) Three items produce lower factor loadings (perhaps the reason a two-factor structure was found in some cultures); (b) women and men were required to complete different forms due to gender-specific language within an item; (c) two items were written as though it is normative to see the body as flawed; and (d) two items narrowly conceptualized positive body image as the absence of shape and weight concerns. Thus, we revised, reworded, discarded, or replaced eight original BAS items to resolve these issues and better reflect current knowledge of the positive body image construct. This revised scale, the BAS-2 (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015a), contains five original BAS items and five new items. Like the BAS, the BAS-2 recognizes that body appreciation involves holding favorable opinions toward one’s body, accepting its unique characteristics, respecting it by taking care of its needs, and believing that it is beautiful and valuable despite any perceived inconsistency with media-promoted appearance ideals.

A thorough investigation of the BAS-2’s psychometric properties was conducted among several samples of US college and community samples of women and men (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015a). The BAS-2 conformed to a unidimensional factor structure and demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .93-.96$) and stability over a 3-week period ($r = .90$). Measurement invariance analyses revealed that its structure is similar between men and women, as well as college (p. 24) and community samples. It was positively related to self-esteem and proactive coping and inversely associated with body dissatisfaction, internalization of societal appearance ideals, and body surveillance, upholding convergent validity. It accounted for unique variance in adaptive and maladaptive eating behaviors after removing its shared variance with appearance

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evaluation and body dissatisfaction, supporting incremental validity. It was negligibly related to impression management, demonstrating discriminant validity. Its unidimensional factor structure, measurement invariance (when explored), internal consistency, and construct (mainly convergent) validity also have been upheld across many college or community samples from different geographical locations, such as the Netherlands, France, Spain, Iran, Romania, Poland, Portugal, Iceland, Serbia, Hong Kong, and mainland China (see Swami, 2017, for a review).

Illustrative BAS-2 items include “I respect my body,” “I appreciate the different and unique characteristics of my body,” “I feel love for my body,” “I am attentive to my body’s needs,” and “I feel like I am beautiful even if I am different from media images of attractive people (e.g., models, actresses/actors).” Its 10 items are rated along a 5-point scale ranging from *never* (scored as 1) to *always* (5) and averaged, with higher scores reflecting greater body appreciation. The BAS-2 has also been modified for children (BAS-2C), with its psychometric properties (internal consistency, test-retest reliability, as well as convergent, incremental, and criterion-related validity) upheld in a sample of girls and boys aged 9–11 (Halliwell, Jarman, Tylka, & Slater, 2017). A validated state version of the BAS-2 (SBAS-2), sensitive to context-specific fluctuations in body appreciation, also exists (Homan, 2016).

Research on Body Appreciation



Most research on body appreciation, assessed with either the BAS or BAS-2, has focused on how it is linked in an adaptive direction to psychological well-being and physical health—areas with great clinical, empirical, and theoretical relevance—and therefore is the focus of this section. Unless otherwise noted, study designs are cross-sectional and findings are based on samples from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, or the Netherlands.

Psychological Well-Being

Body appreciation is positively associated with multiple indicators of psychological well-being, such as optimism, self-esteem, proactive coping, positive affect, life satisfaction, subjective happiness, and emotional intelligence (Avalos et al., 2005; Gillen, 2015; Swami, Begum, & Petrides, 2010; Swami, Tran, Stieger, Voracek & the YouBeauty.com Team, 2015; Tylka, Calogero, & Daniélsdóttir, 2015; Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2013). Body appreciation is also inversely related to negative affect and depressive symptomatology (Gillen, 2015; Tylka et al., 2015; Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2013). The spotlight is next placed on body appreciation’s **(p. 25)** strong links to three indices of psychological well-being: intuitive eating, self-compassion, and state body dissatisfaction.

Intuitive Eating

Intuitive eating is a flexible pattern of eating largely based on internal hunger and satiety cues rather than emotional and situational cues (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2013). Body appreciation has been examined within the acceptance model of intuitive eating (Avalos & Tylka, 2006). According to this model, body acceptance by others encourages individuals to appreciate their bodies and focus less on their appearance, which then facilitates intuitive eating. In two studies, Avalos and Tylka (2006) found that body appreciation mediated the relationship between body acceptance by others and intuitive eating; that is, women who perceive that important others accept their bodies have higher body appreciation, which is in turn associated with higher intuitive eating. These associations were also upheld in samples of men (Kroon Van Diest & Tylka, 2010); adolescent girls (Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2015a); and women in emerging, early, and middle adulthood (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011). Andrew, Tiggemann, and Clark (2016c) prospectively examined the acceptance model of intuitive eating among adolescent girls

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assessed at two time points separated by 1 year. They found that body acceptance by others predicted increased body appreciation, and body appreciation predicted increased intuitive eating over the year. Expanding the model, Tylka and Homan (2015) found that, among physically active college students, the connection between body appreciation and intuitive eating was disrupted the more participants endorsed exercising for appearance reasons (e.g., to lose weight).

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion, or being mindful, kind, and nurturing toward the self during situations that threaten self-adequacy (Neff, 2003), has been found to be associated with, and even increase, body appreciation. Albertson, Neff, and Dill-Shackleford (2015) delivered a 3-week self-compassion meditation training to adult women with existing body image concerns. Women who received this training reported significantly greater gains in body appreciation at postintervention compared to a waitlist control group and maintained these gains at a 3-month follow-up.

Over a 7-day period, Kelly and Stephen (2016) found that college women's day-to-day fluctuations in self-compassion were connected to their day-to-day fluctuations in body appreciation: On days women treated themselves more compassionately than usual, they were more appreciative of their bodies. Self-compassion also was found to preserve women's body appreciation during body-related threats, such as situations that promoted body comparison (Homan & Tylka, 2015) and perceived negative evaluations from others (Marta-Simões, Ferreira, & Mendes, 2016). Andrew, Tiggemann, and Clark (2016b) found that the strong link between self-compassion and body appreciation was mediated by reduced focus on appearance. Thus, being kind and compassionate toward the self may minimize the salience of appearance, which helps women appreciate their bodies even when they do not conform to societal ideals.

(p. 26) State Body Dissatisfaction

Evidence suggests that body appreciation can protect against body dissatisfaction among women when they are exposed to sociocultural appearance ideals (e.g., pictures of glamorized thin models). Halliwell (2013) found that women high in body appreciation did not place increased importance on their appearance discrepancies (i.e., differences between how they would like to look and how they actually look) after viewing thin female models; their appearance discrepancies were similar in size to a control group who did not view thin models. In contrast, women low in body appreciation placed increased importance on their appearance discrepancies after viewing thin female models when compared to the control group. Similarly, Andrew, Tiggemann, and Clark (2015b) revealed that women with low body appreciation experienced increased body dissatisfaction following exposure to thin-ideal advertisements of women, whereas those with high body appreciation did not. This effect remained when controlling for participants' state self-objectification, appearance comparison, and previous media consumption and literacy. These studies suggest that body appreciation can protect against declines in state body dissatisfaction as a result of exposure to the "thin-ideal" body type promoted by the media (Andrew et al., 2015b).

Physical Health

Body appreciation also has been found to be linked to several health-related indices in an adaptive direction. These connections are highlighted next.

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Physical Activity

Body appreciation is associated with higher engagement in physical activity; however, Homan and Tylka (2014) found that this relationship was significant only when appearance-related motives for exercise were low. Conversations about weight loss and dieting prompt women to evaluate their appearance, which is linked to lower body appreciation, whereas conversations about exercise have been found to orient women to consider what their bodies can do, which is connected to higher body appreciation (Wasylikiw & Butler, 2014).

Certain types of physical activities are embodying and cultivate an appreciation of body functionality and deemphasize appearance. For instance, women who practice Iyengar and Bikram yoga reported higher body appreciation than women who do not practice yoga, with the yogis' lower self-objectification and higher embodiment accounting for this difference (Mahlo & Tiggemann, 2016). Additionally, female modern dancers (Langdon & Petracca, 2010), street dancers (Swami & Tovée, 2009), belly dancers (Tiggemann, Coutts, & Clark, 2014), and recreational pole dancers (Pellizzer, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2016) had higher body appreciation compared to nondancers. Among belly dancers, Tiggemann et al. (2014) demonstrated that lower self-objectification and higher embodiment accounted for this discrepancy.

(p. 27) Sexual and Reproductive Health

Body appreciation has also been connected to higher sexual functioning and positive reproductive attitudes. For instance, body appreciation was found to be connected to higher sexual arousal, orgasm, and satisfaction among a diverse sample of women, even when controlling for sexual orientation, partner status, and age (Satinsky, Reece, Dennis, Sanders, & Bardzell, 2012). Similarly, body appreciation uniquely contributed to women's higher sexual functioning and satisfaction and lower sexual distress, even when controlling for age and appearance dissatisfaction (Robbins & Reissing, 2018). Body appreciation was further found to weaken age-related changes in sexual satisfaction, leading Robbins and Reissing to suggest that body appreciation may be a promising clinical intervention in the treatment of sexual problems emerging with age. Body appreciation was linked to greater sexual liberalism in women and men when controlling for sexual orientation, relationship status, age, and body mass index (Swami, Weis, Barron, & Furnham, 2017), as well as more positive attitudes for women toward their menstrual cycle (Chrisler, Marván, Gorman, & Rossini, 2015).

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Physical Self-Care

Body appreciation has been positively linked to a range of behaviors suggested by medical professionals to help promote physical self-care and avoid disease. For example, higher body appreciation among adolescent girls and college women and men was associated with greater intentions to protect their skin from UV exposure and damage and conduct skin cancer screenings (Andrew et al., 2016a; Gillen, 2015). Body appreciation predicted increased physical activity as well as decreased dieting, alcohol, and cigarette use over a year among adolescent girls (Andrew et al., 2016c). Higher body appreciation among first-year medical students from Romania was connected to their oral health (Dumitrescu, Zetu, Teslaru, Dogaru, & Dogaru, 2008). Furthermore, college students with higher body appreciation reported lower abuse of prescription stimulants for weight loss compared to those with lower body appreciation (Jeffers & Benotsch, 2014). Body appreciation was also found to be inversely linked to disordered eating behaviors and endorsing cosmetic surgery among women and men (Andrew et al., 2016a; Avalos et al., 2005; Gillen, 2015; Swami, 2009; Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2013; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015a). These findings highlight body appreciation as an important variable to target for interventions addressing physical self-care.

Research and Clinical Considerations



Developments in theory, research, and practice on body appreciation are gaining momentum as scholars are beginning to see the benefits of body appreciation to psychological well-being and physical health in their studies, as reviewed previously, and clinical work. Yet, much work still needs to be done. Where should we direct this work?

(p. 28) A major way to advance body appreciation scholarship is to examine it as (a) a protective factor against ill-being and (b) an enhancement factor for well-being. To pursue body appreciation scholarship in this direction, we must shift from correlational and cross-sectional designs, which most studies of body appreciation are based on, to longitudinal and experimental designs. For instance, we need to investigate body appreciation over years to provide a clearer picture of its development, stability, and transience (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2015). Researchers need to identify which variables predict initial levels of body appreciation, the factors that maintain it, and the factors that preserve it in the face of body image threats. Given the development of the BAS-2C (Halliwell et al., 2017), it is possible to begin these investigations in children as young as age 9. Via ecological momentary assessment (EMA), researchers can investigate fluctuations in state body appreciation as a result of moment-to-moment events to determine what contextual factors threaten or enhance body appreciation and how these contextual factors may interact with other internal trait or state factors (e.g., self-compassion, negative affect) to determine levels of and fluctuations of body appreciation. The recently developed SBAS-2 (Homan, 2016) could aid in these endeavors.

Researchers also need to investigate the interaction of positive body image components. Efforts could be directed toward exploring “upward spirals,” or combinations of adaptive variables that trigger self-perpetuating cycles and trajectories of positive psychological growth (Garland et al., 2010). Researchers could use this reciprocal influence longitudinal design to study, for instance, whether initial levels of body appreciation predict subsequent body appreciation through embodied activities (e.g., yoga, belly dance), self-care, and intuitive eating.

We also need to investigate whether existing body image and disordered eating interventions promote body appreciation, as such interventions should increase embodiment as well as decrease disembodiment. Positive body image scales could be incorporated into existing and future interventions to more thoroughly evaluate their efficacy and effectiveness. Halliwell,

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Jarman, McNamara, Risdon, and Jankowski (2015) included the BAS-2 when examining the impact of a 1-hour cognitive dissonance-based intervention whereby secondary school girls voiced opposition to the thin-ideal body type through various activities. The intervention group reported increased body appreciation from pre- to postintervention, whereas the control group experienced no change.

Integrating the BAS-2 into larger and longer term empirically supported programs such as The Body Project (Stice, Rohde, & Shaw, 2013) seems worthwhile. In future developments and refinements of primary and secondary prevention programs, it would be useful to integrate empirical insights on body appreciation into the activities and use the BAS-2 to evaluate their efficacy and effectiveness. Clinicians can use the BAS-2 at the beginning of therapy, at several midpoints, and at the end of therapy to determine improvements in body image (to increase client self-efficacy) and therapy effectiveness (to increase clients' perceptions of positive outcomes); a collection of these assessments across clients (p. 29) could be analyzed via multilevel modeling to determine the effectiveness of certain interventions, such as compassion-focused therapy or acceptance and commitment therapy.

Last, clinical benefits of having a high level of body appreciation, as opposed to low or average levels, need to be investigated. Extending this thought, we need to understand whether it is feasible for clients with eating disorders or body dysmorphia to aspire to a high level of body appreciation in therapy (and if so, when and for whom in therapy) or, alternatively, aim for a more body neutral perspective.

Conclusion



Body appreciation has emerged as the predominant variable in positive body image scholarship due to its prominence as a theme in many qualitative studies of positive body image as well as its user-friendly assessments, the BAS and BAS-2. Via these scales, researchers have found much evidence for their hypotheses that body appreciation is associated with numerous psychological well-being indices and physical health indicators; initial evidence even points to it serving as a protective factor to prevent ill-being and an enhancement factor to promote health and well-being. Yet, many research and clinical advancements in body appreciation await us, with the findings sure to hone our understanding of how to cultivate this construct.

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