

Body matters : interventions and change techniques designed to improve body image

Citation for published version (APA):

Alleva, J. M. (2015). *Body matters : interventions and change techniques designed to improve body image*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Datawyse / Universitaire Pers Maastricht. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20151125ja>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2015

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20151125ja](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20151125ja)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

www.umlib.nl/taverne-license

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

Valorisation

In the context of academic research, *valorisation* refers to creating value from scientific knowledge that can benefit or be utilised by individuals outside of the academic setting. The research conducted in the present PhD project lends itself excellently to valorisation. In this chapter, we focus specifically on two areas that we think will profit the most from the present research: clinical practice, and (scholar) activism.

Valorisation for Clinical Practice

Given that body image is a “core feature” of physical and psychological health (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008), improving body image may be of interest to a broad range of practitioners. For example, negative body image predicts weight gain and physical inactivity, (e.g., Grogan, 2006; van den Berg & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007), and a recent study has shown that a healthy body image is the strongest predictor of healthy weight loss and maintenance (Santos, Malta, Silva, Sardinha, & Teixeira, 2015). At the present moment, we are collaborating with the *Dutch Obesity Clinic* (in Dutch: *Nederlandse Obesitas Kliniek*; NOK) to test whether a tailored variant of the *Expand Your Horizon* programme (described in Chapter 4) can help morbidly obese individuals to develop a healthier relationship with their body. Focusing on what their body can do might be especially beneficial for these individuals, as they have a very negative body image and may be accustomed to thinking of their body solely in terms of weight and shape (Schwartz & Brownell, 2004). Moreover, with regard to body functionality, they might be used to thinking of what their body *cannot* do in terms of physical activity and movement. Focusing on what their body can still do – *despite* their weight – and on body functionality in the broader sense, might be beneficial.

The plan for the study is to recruit approximately 70 morbidly obese individuals from the NOK. Half of the participants will receive the intervention programme, and half of the participants will be placed on a waiting list. The programme will be administered online, and will take place over the course of one week. Measures of body image (e.g., body satisfaction, body appreciation) – as well as secondary outcomes such as self-esteem and body weight – will be measured at pretest, posttest, one week follow-up, and three month follow-up. The study is currently in the preparation phase, and testing is scheduled to begin in the autumn of 2015. The NOK has expressed interest in implementing the programme into their existing treatment protocol if it is proven effective.

In addition to this collaboration with the NOK, our research group is currently working with *Accare*, an institution for children and adolescents with psychiatric illnesses. At *Accare*, some of the intervention techniques developed by our research group will be tested in children and adolescents with an eating disorder. For example, the evaluative conditioning paradigm developed by Martijn and colleagues (e.g., Martijn, Vanderlinden, Roefs, Huijding, & Jansen, 2010; see also Aspen et al., 2015) will be

one of the techniques tested, and will teach participants to associate accepting, positive social feedback with their own body. The research described in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of this thesis might be a beneficial addition to further change how these individuals perceive social feedback in relation to their own body. Furthermore, given that individuals with an eating disorder tend to place an inordinate amount of importance on their body weight and shape (Crowther & Williams, 2011; Delinsky, 2011), they might also benefit from a programme that teaches them to focus more on the functionality of their body, instead. It is hoped that the existing collaboration with Accare will provide ample opportunity to test these ideas in the coming two years.

Lastly, as mentioned in Chapter 3, an additional clinical application of the *Expand Your Horizon* programme concerns individuals with chronic pain. Treatment of negative body image in individuals that suffer from chronic pain is currently an unfilled niche, and these individuals report feeling that their body image concerns are neglected by medical professionals (Jolly, 2011). Given that chronic pain can elicit a *body-self split* – where individuals begin to see their body as a disabler (vs. enabler) and focus on what their body *cannot* do (Bode, 2014; Corbin, 2003) – learning to focus on what one’s body can do in the broader sense (i.e., not limited to physical capacities) and *despite pain* may be beneficial. During the PhD project, we have explored the possibility of administering a variant of the *Expand Your Horizon* programme to young women with chronic pain, as a compliment to their current treatment programme. We currently have contact with a colleague that works at Maastricht University and the academic hospital of Maastricht who is interested in collaborating on such a project. Further details about this potential collaboration will be discussed at the beginning of 2016.

Valorisation for (Scholar) Activism

In recent years, body image has been a topic that the general public has considered relevant and interesting. For example, *Kellogg’s*, a multinational food manufacturing company, launched their “Shhhut Down Fat Talk” campaign, with world-renowned supermodel and actress Tyra Banks as spokeswoman. The aim of this campaign is to reduce *fat talk*, a form of conversation or self-talk that focuses on appearance and is judgemental and evaluative in nature (e.g., “I’m so fat!” or, “I should skip meals to help me lose weight;” Arroyo & Harwood, 2012, p. 173). In addition, another multinational company, *Unilever*, launched the “Dove Campaign for Real Beauty,” which aims to encourage women to celebrate their own body and to broaden society’s conceptualisation of beauty. Both campaigns have been very successful and continue to receive worldwide attention; they have garnered both praise (e.g., for going against the current beauty ideal) and criticism (e.g., both companies may merely be using a positive body image approach as a marketing strategy to sell more products). Regardless of whether

they have been wholly positively received, the campaigns have sparked public discussion and raised awareness about issues related to body image.

Even without the money and resources of a multinational company, however, the research covered in this PhD project can be successfully translated to the general public, and may further contribute to ongoing discussions about body image. During the PhD project, I have maintained my own blog where I write about research studies in the field of body image. The primary aim of the blog is to translate research findings into knowledge that is relevant and understandable for a broader public. After posting the blog entries, they are shared via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. On several occasions, the blog entries have sparked lively discussions and were shared by many people. Some readers have even expressed gratitude that certain topics were covered that they considered especially helpful (e.g., body image issues in men). In addition to my own blog, I have recently been selected to join *About-Face's* team of writers. About-Face is a blog that is based in the United States, and features articles that focus on issues related to body image and media. About-Face has a broad readership, and many popular outlets (e.g., a website, social media pages), so my blog entries will reach a wider audience. I plan to write blog entries that relate to issues in the media and that are also grounded in research (e.g., an experimental study that tests the notion that "thinness sells").

Lastly, at the time of the PhD defence, a press release about the PhD research will be sent to various media outlets. We plan to do interviews with journalists from these media outlets in order to ensure that the research findings are disseminated to the general public. Some examples of the specific findings that readers or viewers may find interesting are that learning about body image and reducing negative body language (e.g., fat talk) can be beneficial (Chapter 2), focusing on body functionality (instead of physical appearance) can foster body satisfaction and body appreciation (Chapter 4), and that women with a negative body image may misperceive the amount of negative social feedback that their body receives (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

Taken together, it is hoped that these combined efforts in the areas of clinical practice and scholar activism will help the PhD research benefit individuals outside of the academic setting.