

# Body Kindness and Yoga for All with Dr. Jennifer Webb

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:00:02] weight does not tell the whole story. It often doesn't tell much of the story.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:00:07] That was Dr. Jennifer Webb on psychologists off the clock.

**Diana Hill:** [00:00:20] we are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work and health.

**Debbie Sorensen:** [00:00:28] I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado.

**Diana Hill:** [00:00:32] I'm Dr. Diana Hill, practicing in seaside Santa Barbara, California.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:00:35] From coast to coast, I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

**Jill Stoddard:** [00:00:42] And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, director of the Center for Stress and Anxiety Management.

**Debbie Sorensen:** [00:00:48] We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

**Diana Hill:** [00:00:51] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock. Hi folks. It's Diana here. And as you know, we'd love to keep learning on psychologists off the clock and in particular learning about what's latest in psychological theory and application. And that's why we're excited to be partnering up with Praxis continuing education. Praxis offers in person workshops, online programming, and really the most cutting edge psychological interventions, including ACT, cognitive behavioral therapy and compassion focused therapy.

You can learn more about Praxis by going to our website, which is [offtheclockpsych.com](http://offtheclockpsych.com) off the clock, P S Y C H.com and then click on the sponsorship page and you'll find out not only about the offerings they have, but also a chance to get a \$50 discount on their upcoming ACT bootcamps. ACT bootcamps are an incredible way to get full immersion into acceptance and commitment therapy. You learn all the foundations of the psychological flexibility model, as well as develop with getting a set of skills that you then practice and can take home. And the best part is you get to do it with the act co-founders. Dr. Steven Hayes and Kelly Wilson, as well as master ACT therapist, Robin Walzer, who we just love. They've all been on the show. So take a listen to them if you want a little sampling of what you would get with a full ACT bootcamp with them.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:02:16] Hi, Debbie. I'm so glad to be here with you today to introduce this episode that I did with Dr.

Jennifer Webb, we talk about accessibility of yoga, sort of yoga for all and body kindness, and how these two really merged together. And I know you've listened to the episode and had a lot of positive feelings about it. What, what came across as being most important for you.

**Debbie Sorensen:** [00:02:38] Yes I did. Yeah. I'll thank you for interviewing Dr. Webb. First of all, I want her to be like my personal body kindness coach because she's amazing. Her work is amazing, and just her way of talking about this feels really great to hear. I think what stands out for me, well, there were a lot of things about this episode that I really could relate to, and that just seems so important to me.

And I think one of the things that feels really meaningful to me is this piece about how sometimes when you look at people who are going to a health club or going to a trendy yoga class or something like that, you might feel like you don't really fit in. Maybe if you don't kind of fit a certain mold or a certain.

You know, view of the way a yoga body should look, or something like that. And I could really relate to that from my personal experience that sometimes that sort of shows up for me. You know, you feel like you have to look a certain way. And I think it's just sad to think that that could potentially keep people from doing something that's consistent with their values.

And so I just love how she kind of questions that framework and goes for a more kind and compassionate and inclusive approach.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:03:46] What she talks about in a lot of her work is the way that some of the original intentions of yoga and the original practices of yoga that went along with those intentions of being inclusive, of focusing on function as opposed to object of the body, um, has gotten lost. And part of that really is driven by our consumer culture.

And by our, our obsession with thinness and whiteness and eliteness and , in a lot of her research and in a lot of her review articles and in a lot of the interventions that she is developing, she really tries to bring some of the original intentions of yoga back to the front so that it's more obvious and more accessible to people.

Um, and I think becomes less scary. And so.

**Debbie Sorensen:** [00:04:33] that. I think that's so cool that she's, she's doing that.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:04:36] Yeah. And so you had been talking to me about this book that you had just read with mindfulness and how that kind of fits into some of the ideas that Dr. Webb talks about.

**Debbie Sorensen:** [00:04:44] Yeah. I think in the book McMindfulness he come, he sort of critiques westernized mindfulness because it's almost become this. He would kind of describe it as a bit self self centered in the sense that it's like, Oh, you know, finding your own inner peace in the midst of hard stuff in life. And it takes out this concept from Buddhism of right action where it's like sometimes you have to actually.

Do things to try to make the world a better place and, and you don't want to sit with, it's not just about making your own inner peace with some of the problems of the world. It's like the change part is really important, but we've kind of left that out and it's become all about finding our own personal kind of peace and satisfaction with life.

And so in that sense, some of the westernized versions of mindfulness have have kind of lost some of the heart of where it originally came from with Buddhism. Similar idea.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:05:36] Yeah. For me, that's why integrating yoga and mindfulness with acceptance and commitment therapy. Deals and principles is so useful because acceptance and commitment therapy puts such a high value on, on values, right? I love that idea of bringing the values back to the front of the kind of practices that we engage in. We also just wanted to, uh, comment that it's such a small world because Dr. Webb made reference in this episode to, um, Dr. Emily Sandoz, his work. And we were so fortunate to have had her on. So if anybody wants to take a listen to the episode where she talks about body image and eating disorders, that's episode 68.

Um, so we hope that you all enjoy this episode.

I'm here today with Dr. Jennifer Webb, who is an associate professor in the UNC Charlotte department of psychological science. Jennifer teaches undergrads and grad students, and does research that we're going to be talking about today.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:06:33] Thank you so much for this opportunity and it is really a delight and a privilege to be able to talk with you and your listeners today.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:06:40] So Jennifer, your work explores the value of body kindness as it applies to marginalized groups and pregnant and postpartum women. And a lot of your work incorporates acceptance and commitment therapy and also compassion focused therapy as well as inclusive yoga practices.

I'm curious how you would sort of summarize the current culture of modern yoga.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:07:01] Well, you know, it's really fascinating because, you know, historically that the notion of a yoga for all really was part of the roots. Um, you know, I can think of some of the, um. The swamis, for example, Swami Vivekananda, you know, during British colonial times, uh, you know, yoga was viewed as sort of a rebellious practice of revolution.

It was a way for the masses to be able to form some form of resistance. So it was not supposed to be something that was just for the elite. Um, you may also, um, your listeners may also be aware of, uh, Indra Devi who was viewed as sort of the mother of Western yoga, and she was of European heritage, but was able to, uh, through her standing and, and, and folks that she knew at the time in India was able to really break through certain, uh, gender barriers and to learn the practice of yoga.

Um. In India, and then bring that to the West. Now, although that was viewed as progressive because now more particularly white women were not being introduced to the practice, and they were also introduced to sort of the business of entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial pursuits within yoga, so that, so they were able to foster more, um, you know, empowerment in that way.

Financial empowerment. I think that's a very important contextually that it's still sort of set the tone a little bit more from a Western standpoint in terms of who did have more power in terms of who the face, the bodies of sort of. You know, yoga practitioners in the West. So really trying to kind of contextualize it there, that there's that complexity that on the one hand it was exclusionary to women.

Then women did gain some footing. Yet though, the woman who gained the footing typically were viewed from more of a privileged standpoint.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:08:54] Yeah, and I think there's this interesting sort of double edged sword about. The way that yoga practice and inclusion versus

exclusion has evolved because in some ways it has sort of opened up and you know, a lot more people are engaging in healthier movement practice and meditation, like practice because of the popularization.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:09:15] Um,

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:09:16] but at the same time, there's this sort of sense that it's really geared towards more elite white lean fit. Individuals and therefore that folks who don't fit into those categories may not feel as welcome. So it's sort of like the westernization, and this is actually something that one of my cohost Diana Hill, who's a really engaged.

Yoga practitioner and teacher. She wrote me an email that she said also, the westernization and de secularization of yoga makes it more accessible to people with religious beliefs who would not otherwise attend an ashram or Hindu based practice. So

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:09:52] that's in some

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:09:53] ways it opens it up and in some ways it kind of closes it down.

So where do you fall on how evolution of yoga has become more or less inclusive.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:10:02] think this is a really exciting time. You know, in the last few years we've been seeing a really a growth of this grass roots movement, both from the academic realm as well as among, uh, yoga teachers and practitioners. And, you know, a lot of this grass roots has really been emerging from a more social media context.

So whereas traditional media has tended to still convey sort of traditional. A stereotypical representations of who does and can, you know, practice over those perceptions. Individuals in social media really harness that, uh, that, um, that realm in order to sort of provide alternative spaces. And so I think right now we're in a really great time because this, there's a new movement in leadership within accessibility and inclusion in yoga and really broadening inclusion.

So not only focusing on, for example, race, ethnicity. Uh, socioeconomic status, uh, but also body size, sexual orientation, gender identity. And so I think, again, it's just, I feel very privileged to be able to, uh, contribute to this, uh, even in a small way.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:11:14] well, I think you contributed in a really huge way. Actually. I loved your paper on. Looking at yoga from with a social justice lens and not willing to do it through our web, through our website. But you talk a lot about how yoga is, you know, really beneficial for folks from all kinds of different categories that we don't typically see on the cover of yoga magazines, right? So individuals who have disabilities, individuals who are transgendered, individual men and women, individuals who have a higher weight. And. In all sorts of ways. Yoga helps to, improve health and their functioning and relate to their body in more flexible ways. And we'll talk a bit more about your concept of body flexibility.

And yet the way that it gets portrayed in the media suggests that these individuals either aren't engaged or aren't welcome to engage

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:12:05] Exactly. And a lot of this is likely unintentional. Right? And so I think one of the goals of that paper was to not only describe these

experiences and to provide some research evidence, because that's sort of another gap, is not only are we seeing some of these disparities in representation in, for example, those who are, who are, um.

You know? Yeah. In the yoga studios for example, or at the gyms where yoga classes are offered in the West, but also within the research context that we're all trying to do a better job of, of increasing the accessibility, uh, to being research participants that are looking at yoga based interventions.

So. I think as we can look towards trying to improve sort of partnerships, also with various yoga professionals, I think we more than where we can do that, we can put our heads together collectively to try to figure out ways that we can be able to reach more diverse groups and to be able to, you know, again, portrayed different messages that can help make yoga more welcoming and accessible.

Um. And sometimes accessibility is also related to the financial aspects. I'm dr Christine Spatola, for example, has done some excellent work, uh, qualitative work with individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. And she was asking them, Hey, you know, what is it. That gets in the way. When you think about yoga and engaging in a yoga practice, and as you can, as you might imagine, there's multiple factors that are at different levels of the social ecology, this individual level factors.

Uh, for example, again, like you're saying, like on the flip side, the, um, for some individuals it might be this perception that yoga, if you're engaging in yoga, then you do have to take on more of a die hard spiritual, uh, orientation. Um, so some have those kinds of perceptions, uh, family structure, uh, diversity.

So for example, uh, childcare, childcare needs also could get in the way. Uh, where are the yoga classes being offered? Are these yoga classes actually within the communities where, uh, members of diverse groups might be living and working? Work schedule, for example, as well, um, may not align up very well with, uh, again, the typical class offerings.

Um. And the home environment. So for individuals who might also want to, uh, explore a home practice, um, maybe they don't have as much, uh, opportunities to have privacy or to have a space to do, to do yoga. Um, and then again, the commercialism as we've been also alluding to. Uh, sort of creates this perception that yoga, you need expensive equipment.

You have to wear certain clothes. Uh, that again, for some individuals might be thinking, you know, this is really not for me.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:14:57] I'm thinking back to one recent yoga studio and, um, the classes were all underground and I don't think they had an elevator. So I'm just thinking for certain individuals who that might not even be accessible. So I do think that there's a reality of, of all sorts of limitations that, um, make yoga studios harder to access, not to mention the cost, cause they are very expensive.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:15:21] And even though, again, I think I really applaud those studios who have Dharma classes, you know, donation-based classes that end or have free classes on a regular basis. I think, again, that needs to be acknowledged and at the same time trying to also figure out ways that we can continue to expand those, those opportunities.

So for example, online classes is sort of another vehicle. That, um, you know, various yoga professionals are trying to increase accessibility, uh, to individuals

for whom, again, maybe it relates to being able to get to the actual physical location, um, of the, of the yoga class. So that, again, trying to negotiate, okay, well we have online access, but also again, financial aid, what might seem to be feasible for, for, for many people.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:16:08] Right, right, right. I know that when I was on maternity leave, I turned to YouTube for some instructional videos and that's a really great resource and I think a lot of yoga teachers are taking advantage of getting their, um, practices out to the public in that way.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:16:23] And I think that that's also this idea of, you know, the research on the one hand is saying, yoga, you know, is demonstrating a lot of benefits for individuals, particularly women who have been included in the research. Um. In relation to their experience of the body. So they're experiencing improvements in body image and also how they're relating to their understanding of their body as a physical, as a physical being, what it can do for them, not only its appearance.

So, you know, I think again, it's such a ripe time. It's like, wow, if this does have this potential based on research evidence.

And how can we, again, try to increase the opportunities for individuals who would like to, uh, give yoga, try that opportunity.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:17:10] a concept that you talk a lot about in your writing is body as process versus body as object. . I think one of the things that we know from yoga is that it teaches us how to appreciate our body as process, sort of the things that it can do in the way that we relate to in health, in healthy ways over time.

But what's interesting is at least the way it's portrayed in the media. It has become very much body as object, where you see these incredibly slender, well outfitted, mostly very young women portrayed on the covers of these magazines. And so it sort of suggests that yoga is intended to improve the appearance of your body body as an attractive object.

And you write a lot about how, you know, it's important to return to this idea of body as process. And that yoga really does. Help us do that despite how it can be portrayed in the media. So I wonder if you can talk a little bit about how yoga can help us, um, enter into this body as processed relationship with our body.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:18:09] And I think you're raising such an excellent point that sometimes it's also not only about the practice, but also the guide. So the yoga professionals who are, you know, leading the classes, um, how intentional are they about the language they use as it relates to making those connections between the mind and the body being really.

Attuned to what's going on with you and not overly attuned, particularly if you're in a group class as to what's going on with your neighbors. Right? So even within the context of a yoga practice, a group practice within the studio or, or a similar group setting, uh, you still could be focused on what we, what we're also learning about is this notion of a body functionality comparison or body competence comparison.

So it's not only about what. Uh, the yoga practitioners are looking like while they're doing the practices, but also, wow, look how, you know, look how deep

that person can get in there. Look how, you know, they're able to do, you know, headstand or, or something like that. More of these advanced poses. So I think that part of the challenge is on the yoga teachers who are providing guidance and how we can go backwards in terms of yoga teacher training.

And how much there is an emphasis within educating, uh, yoga teachers about sort of being sensitive to the nuances of language as it relates to inclusion. And also as it relates to really the more of the ideals of yoga for embracing the body as process. Um, and again, sort of. For the self and self benefit, not as much about or being overly focused on sort of comparing what you're able to do relative to others.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:19:56] Yeah. So if you were to achieve this body, and obviously it's more of a journey than a goal that you finish, um, but if you were to kind of get closer to this ideal of relating to your body more as processed, then this object, what, what would, what would change? What, how would that be embodied.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:20:14] And I think part of that would be more of the sort of mindful acceptance as your experiences unfolding. So as you're engaging with various poses, your mind might be telling you certain messages and thoughts. Um, you might be experiencing certain physical discomfort. Uh, you could be experiencing emotional activation.

And so the body is process allows us from a kind of mindfulness perspective to sort of non-judgmentally observe those experiences and to be sort of attuned. Into how you want to utilize it, information in the moment as opposed to being on autopilot. They be going through the motions, maybe overdoing it actually, um, in, in, in the yoga practice and maybe not listening to your body or for example, letting your mind sort of hijack you and you can be off now ruminating about something that was distressing that happened before the yoga class.

So this, this notion of being mindfully aware, uh, during. The actual yoga practice means that you're more grounded in what's happening moment by moment from this nonjudgmental stance.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:21:29] And so how does that relate to this concept of body flexibility, which I know is informed by principles of flexibility. So I wonder if you can talk a little bit about body flexibility.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:21:39] Yes. So body image flexibility is a construct, highly aligned, as you mentioned, with the underpinnings of a psychological flexibility from act. And it was developed, uh, uh, now about. A few years ago now by a dr Emily standoff. And she again, uh, you know, was trained by, you know, some of the, the, the fathers of act and in her, uh, sort of contribution, she had a very strong interest in the application of act within the context of body image.

And so she sort of adapted this idea of psychological flexibility to the realm of body image. So what that looks like, again, is sort of like. We are have opportunities throughout the day to encounter various like body image related stressors. We might hear somebody, you know, talking badly about their bodies through what we call fat talk, uh, you know, perhaps you see something in the media that sort of triggers this negative self evaluation of your own appearance.

So we think about those as sort of everyday body image stressors. From an act

standpoint in relation to body image of it, much flexibility. It's sort of like from that mindfulness again, you sort of catch that negative evaluation, that increased negative sort of emotional activation, and then you're like, Oh, okay.

I notice I'm having this experience. I don't necessarily like it, but I have an opportunity knowing this to still maybe move in a direction towards my values even in that moment, um, as, as opposed to maybe moving further away from my values. And so some of the things we've considered in our, in our research is moving towards our values in relation to how body much flexibility might be useful.

In the context of negative body image or body, Mister stress, and being able to translate that negativity still into valued action, which could, for example, look like intuitive eating, mindful eating, for example, a body appreciation, which is another form of positive body image. So you're not. Mmm. You're not denying the negativity, but you're aware of it.

You're accepting of it, even if you don't like it, and you can still, again, have that opportunity to choose how you want to respond in the moment.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:24:02] I love that cause I think it's so empowering. The reality is we do get whacked every day, all the time with images and and talk. That can be very triggering in terms of our own views of our body. Certainly body as object kind of ideas. Like, I don't fit up to this ideal. My butt doesn't look as good in those yoga pants is the model.

I'm not as flexible as my neighbor. And you know, when I attended the class and. It's hard to stop our mind from doing that. And what's so lovely about acceptance and commitment therapy strategies is that the, the expectation is not that our mindset saying those things, but that we're empowered to choose how we respond to it.

And when you're clear about what our values are in terms of living with our body and moving forward with it and towards a life that feels more meaningful and purposeful and healthier in whatever way we design that we can make choices that are consistent with that. And so that concept of body flexibility, it sort of, um, a really nice way to think about like how do we respond to the messages that we get as opposed to changing the messages, which we may not have full power

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:25:12] Exactly. So that really is more of a self empowerment, um, uh, approach, which is also contextualized by yes. And there are other opportunities to try to increase empowerment, to try to change some of this other socio-cultural messages. But like you're saying, sometimes we're not able to do that or do that right away.

So what can we do in the moment?

Yeah.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:25:34] Right, right. And the other thing that, for me, it really fits into, which I know you talk a lot about, is this sort of idea of health at every size that we don't need to fit into a perfect, you know, into the image of like, you know, tall, white, thin looking a particular way, having a certain bus size. To choose to engage in healthy activity.

And it really depends more on what our values would guide us to do. Other than, you know, are we suitable to attend a class or to go for a run or, or what have you.



**Jennifer Webb:** [00:26:04] That's right. And I think the health at every size, uh, philosophy, you know, I think what's so exciting also is not only the social justice foundations, it's also the fact that there's more research that's coming out now that's really supporting the benefits of the health at every size and other weight neutral non dieting approaches that are focused more on wellbeing, regardless of one's body size and not focus so much on weight being the, the, the, the be all and end all of what we need to be focusing on.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:26:32] Well, I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about that too, because you talk about the role of body shame and why body positivity is so important. Because I think that there is this just culture wide myth that saying your body is beautiful, gives you a free pass to just be however you are and what you suggest in your research suggestion and the broader, um, body of research on bodies, Hume suggests is that body shame is actually counterproductive to getting us going and getting us healthier.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:27:02] So what we're finding, and um, doctor told me mama's work. Uh, she's a UCLA researcher has been very instrumental in helping us to think more critically about how weight stigma really does get under the skin. And it also not only kind of fact, sort of neuroendocrine mechanisms from a stress and coping standpoint, it can also impact the ways individuals respond to those stressors.

And for some that could reinforce certain types of behaviors, such as dieting, restricting their eating and or overeating, which sort of, um. It's almost a paradoxical, but research is, there's a wealth of research which is demonstrating that, that that dieting, restricting your eating, that actually leads to more weight gain.

Your set point keeps shifting up and up and up, and you're sort of a evolutionary mechanisms. They're saying, Hey, you're undergoing starvation. We're going to make sure to kind of. Put a full court press to make sure that you're not going to die. Um, so I think that's what's also encouraging is this idea that even though the socio-cultural messages are certainly really strong, that Oh yes, shaming, that's a motivator for it.

Let's like, you know, weight loss, weight loss, weight loss. They're not really contextualizing it and understanding that. Individuals who actually have been like lifelong dieters, often have a much worse sort of cardio metabolic profile than individuals who have not been sort of lifelong dieters, chronic dieters.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:28:34] Yeah. Yeah. The research on that is clear, but I have to point out, so when I was doing research for our interview, I was looking up your name and some of the work that you've done. And there was an article and a media article titled professor at UNC Charlotte recently penned an academic paper that argues obesity should be fashionable and fit.

And underneath the commentary, there was all sorts of really angry comments. And one of them was. Yeah. Now cancer is classy and hip. Diabetes is Devin heroin. Dope fungal infection is funky, fresh. And I just think it really speaks to how pervasive this idea is that we cannot give a free pass to people who are at a higher weight index.

And, and despite the research and despite what we know to be true about how ineffective those messages are, they persist. They're so strong at this point.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:29:25] And you know, and I'm sort of chuckling because the. The title of that paper was sort of provocative, but it was based in the results that we had gleaned from Instagram images that.

Individuals had put out there themselves. So we were just reiterating what individuals themselves who were posting to fat Spiration and health at every size communities on Instagram or already saying about themselves.

So, you know, I remember a couple of years ago, you know, hearing about those types of responses, um, and receiving some nasty grams as well. So I've wrecked it. I realized sort of being in this space has sort of sort of opened up some opportunities, but also challenges with that. Um, and which, which is again, I can appreciate, um, but this whole notion of health also being one that's been almost exclusively tied to what the scale says.

So I think that's also part of a larger. Cultural shift that health at every size is trying to help break down is this notion of health needs to be more holistic. And that

weight does not tell the whole story. It often doesn't tell much of the story.

Um, but a lot of people have invested in, bought into the diet culture.

And so I actually have a lot of compassion for individuals who are, you know, very, uh, uh, frenzied and very reactive to this because it might mean that, wow, could I be wrong? Could I be wrong about something that I have invested so much of my time and energy in?

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:31:00] Yeah, yeah, yeah. I, I do think that it's useful to incorporate that compassionate tone even, you know, for ourselves as we're, for listeners as they're hearing this conversation. Cause I think switching the, the language and the conversation even internally is, it's a hard shift to do because the messages have been so pervasive and, and some of the messages are ones that we've internally bought into for so long that they almost become habitual and they feel like truth with a capital T.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:31:30] That's right. And also, um, the sources of those messages. So this is not only sort of popular culture media, this is also coming from the various sort of health and medical professionals. And so I think that's also a part of this culture shift that, um. Professionals within various sort of behavioral health domains are really trying to help, for example, physicians, nurses, nutritionists, sort of gain more understanding about sort of the complexities involved and not only against sort of keeping that same party line. Um, so there's wonderful opportunities for collaboration and further sort of education for sure.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:32:09] Well, I, so it sort of brings me to the topic of one of your studies that I had read about yoga magazine. Covers, and this is a really interesting study because you think of yoga magazine covers as being kind of crunchy and very welcoming and inclusive. Um, so I wonder if you could talk us through what the study looked at and what your findings were

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:32:27] Okay. So I think what's also really important is that this was a study that was published in 2017 but it was based on a sample of cover images from three yoga magazines only from the years 2010 to 2015 so. If we could do this again, there's been another like almost now five years. Um, I

think that would be really interesting to look at some of the findings. So what we actually learned, uh, were a couple things. We're looking at the cover images in terms of the attributes of the cover models. So in terms of, you know, perceived age, race, ethnicity, perceived gender, body size and shape, for example, breast size. Um, we were looking at attributes about, uh, the types of poses there were on these, uh, magazines.

Were they active poses? Did they have most of the body visible or they more so focused just on sort of the face or the, or a bust up kind of, uh, image. We also looked at the captions that were on the covers and we want to sort of look thematically how those, um, how those captions could be grouped together content wise.

Now that was one of the overall goals, but we were also interested in one, it's kind of not all yoga magazines are necessarily alike. And so we wanted to also take a little bit of a nuanced approach to see if, based on the sort of stated philosophy of the magazine. If there were some relationships between the cover model attributes or emphases, as well as the types of themes of the captions, so that the content that would be in the actual magazine sort of based on this philosophy.

So what we were able to find is that there, there was some, uh, similarities across magazines. Um, but also if the yoga magazine tended to adopt. Uh, much more, uh, sort of holistic, uh, uh, sort of value set. They also tended to have sort of less emphasis on body objectification. Um, and there was sort of more emphasis on body functionality, uh, that was emphasized.

So I think that was also really interesting to note, um, across sort of the, the various magazines so that the philosophy of the magazine really mattered. Um, in terms of what they were representing and trying, and I will say that it's been encouraging anecdotally that again, um, over the last few years, you know, I am, I still subscribe to one of those magazines and I have seen some positive changes.

There have been increased representation in terms of racial diversity, size, diversity, not only on the covers, but also within the ads in the magazine. And it's been so nice to see that the leadership, the editors, um, have really said, you know what? We want to reconnect. We want to reevaluate our values and we want

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:35:19] so they haven't been in touch with you editors from those magazines that you analyzed

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:35:24] What's interesting is that I did have a conversation through email with one of them. Um, seem very interested in the topic, but it didn't get pursued further. So I don't know if sort of indirectly some of our work might've helped to contribute to some of the changes, uh, if you put it in a small way, but it's been very encouraging.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:35:45] Yeah. Yeah. Well, it's interesting. I mean, looking at media and in recent years, it does seem like there has been a shift, like I'm just thinking in Athleta, a lot of their advertisements now really look more obviously inclusive of racial and ethnic minorities and individuals of different weight. And it's sort of.

Interesting to have an eye out for how the culture might be shifting. I'll be at

slowly, but you know, not be quite as narrow as maybe it was, you know, five, 10 years ago.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:36:17] No, that is really exciting. know, one of the, one of the other forms of media that is sort of interesting cause we're, we're often talking about adults in yoga. Um, but this whole notion of socializing young people and children and particularly when we're talking about messages about body, body acceptance, um, and embodiment and how that affects things like a risk for disordered eating.

So. I think it's been also really interesting seeing how a different toys have been shifting in terms of, uh, promoting more body functionality. So for example, you might be aware of the Barbie made to move a series. It's like, yeah, it's, it's, it was, I think they first came out around 2018 ish and. These are now almost fully jointed Barbie dolls.

And, uh, the first line of them that came out were, uh, sort of posed in yoga clothes. And so there's several lines that have come out and on the last couple of years. And so that has also been encouraging even though up until I think this past year there now does include, and again, I think it's still female.

Uh, female gender, uh, made to move dolls. They have started including a little bit more body size diversity, um, with the Barbie made to move dolls, which is also encouraging because, um, another company that I think has been neat about trying to encourage someone of sort of yoga principles. Uh, in relation to improving wellbeing among young girls in particular, it's called as I am, and I think they've done a really great job, uh, of trying to bring more accessibility of these yoga principles to young girls.

They have a line of yoga dolls also, which are fully jointed. And I think, again, we're sort of moving in the right direction to some degree. Um, but their line still has very, very sort of slim looking dolls. Um, and similarly with, uh, uh, they have little story books that have these yoga, uh, friends, these, these young girls, uh, you know, engaging in various adventures.

And again, on the one hand, I think it's great cause there's trying to encourage functionality and yet again, and there's also a lot of racial diversity, but size diversity. Uh, is very, uh, constricted. Right? This has also made me think about just sort of developmentally, um, that not only we're trying to sort of shift messages for adults who are trying to engage in the practice, but also access, uh, for younger people.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:38:45] right? Well, that's so important if we're talking about some of these messages that get so repeated and so, Rigid in our minds. I mean, it's because it starts early and it is so pervasive. So it is so important to be shifting the way that we manufacture adults and or Jane in the media because our young kids are getting exposed so early, to be honest.

So I'm, you know, I have kids, but w we're not so much in the doll sphere with my, I have three boys, so that's,

a little bit nexus. But that's why we're not so in the Barbie.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:39:17] no. I have, I have a son as well, and he'd rather, you know, play with vehicles instead of like actual figures.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:39:25] Yeah, well, and you know my kids like this

superhero figures, but I'm just thinking, you know, a lot of them are not jointed. I had, I guess what I'm mad is I hadn't really thought about how most dolls are not jointed and that sort of in and of itself suggest this body as object versus as process idea because it's more like it is what it is.

And so you look at it and you see how cool it is as opposed to what it can do.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:39:51] Very limited functionality. Yes. Right? Yes.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:39:55] That's great. Interesting.

one other thing that I wanted to mention about body as process versus body as object is, um, some of your work with pregnant and postpartum women. And. One of the things that I've sort of reflected on is that my own personal evolution from body as object to body as process happened after having babies.

And I think this is the opposite of the experience that many women have after having children. And I really think that the difference was driven by my engagement with act principles that emphasize. Over goals. And so I wonder if you can talk a little bit about the kind of work that you do with pregnant and postpartum women in this sort of sphere of, you know, body kindness and, you know, working towards body as process ideals.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:40:43] Yes. And again, we can also thank a lot of the socio-cultural messages about sort of needing to get one's body back and, uh, you know, really trying to sort of minimize to some degree, uh, this notion of embodiment during pregnancy and then transitioning to the postpartum. It's that, okay, now this is over.

You're supposed to go back to what you were.

Before you even had the child. So the socio cultural messages, the pressures are there. And so in that context, it is very difficult to be kind to be compassionate with ourselves. And so we are just at the very beginning of sort of shifting some of our research in, in this realm.

Um, and we've had some very wonderful partnerships with Rebecca scritch field, who you may be aware of. She's really wonderful. She's a. A integrative nutritionist and she's the author of body kindness. And so what we've partnered with her is to do some work in, um, proposing a study that will be an adaptation of her body kindness, very holistic, mindful self care based approach in working with women during the early postpartum.

And so we don't have official data right now, but. Things are very encouraging in again, taking some of these principles of mindfulness, self care, body image, flexibility, um, self-compassion, and really translating them to the unique experiences that women during the postpartum are facing. Um, and also during pregnancy.

Uh, you know, again, there's a lot of emphasis on. You know, what the body should look like during pregnancy. It's sort of like, and even just, you know, some of this, the conversation about language, about something called like the bump, right. Um, and, uh, and, and things like that. And, and clothing that, that happens to be a really.

Important factor. Um, in some of the focus group work that we've done preliminarily with some postpartum women, it seems to be one of the strongest challenges is this idea of, uh, how accepting their changed body. Is difficult

because of, for example, the availability or limited availability of clothing in the postpartum.

Um, that again, it's sort of like some of these women are questioning, I'm still comfortable in my maternity clothes, but why do I feel bad about that?

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:43:18] Right, right. Yeah. I mean, there's this idea that we should be able to bounce back and have pre pregnancy bodies immediately, let alone, like you know, that it may not be possible for most people because the body just changes. And I will say, you know, I think I do think that. It was helpful to have these act ideas in mind after I had children because I was able to, you know, notice that my body looked different and feel that sadness of my, of the loss of my pre pregnancy body or my pre childbearing body to really focus on this idea of body as process.

Like, wow, my body created new life and it doesn't look the same, but it did this miraculous like surreal thing. And. And embrace and appreciate and savor that idea that it was able to do that, even if it looks different than it used to. And I think that's a much more body as process idea than what your body looks like as as a, you know, an attractive object.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:44:19] Exactly that, that notion of, like you're saying, you're not ignoring those thoughts that creep up and you're also recognizing that from that standpoint on living your values, being engaged from that, that I, that sort of framework that I'm still choosing not to give too much attention. To those thoughts, which could lead me down a road that could take me further away from, for example, connecting with my child or children.

Right. Um, which again, is, is something that could be an important enter in this time, this way of connecting and bonding, um, with your child.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:44:56] That's right. That's right. Because it isn't the case that I don't have self critical thoughts or that woman who's, whose body has changed significantly, wouldn't have self critical thoughts, but it's more. Again, as you're saying, how you respond to it and how much attention you give versus redirecting your attention to more value, consistent responses or behaviors.

So let's end with some more ideas for practices and exercises from your work that we know can help us to develop body flexibility and kindness. So you talk a bit about, um, body gratitude exercises, and I wonder if you can share a little bit more about what that might look like.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:45:36] Sure. So in one of our preliminaries. Studies that was looking at sort of a size inclusive yoga program, very brief one with college women, uh, with a BMI of 25 or greater. One of the practices we we asked them to do was to literally on a daily basis, just take a few moments, um, outside of your day, outside of your busy schedule, just to write down.

Anything that you are grateful that your body enabled you to do that day. So again, that also is sort of tying into this notion of values. So it's sort of like, you know, my body was able to do this in this matter to me. Um, so being able to talk about how, um. You know, more specifically, it could be certain body parts that you're grateful for.

So your arms from being able to lift, um, or for example, in the context of postpartum, being able to carry, you know, sometimes you're like amazed at like,

I'm able to carry a child and, you know, multiple things, big bags of groceries.

So really brief, um, uh, acknowledgements of what your body enabled you to do. In, in a way that took you places that mattered in your day, for example. Um, so again, it doesn't have to be something that's really long and drawn out. Um, but something that, you know, you are intentional and purposeful about doing.

And there are actually apps out there now. Um, they're not specifically focused, for example, on body gratitude, but, uh, they are sort of like more of the aligned with more of a general positive psychology orientation. Um, like one of them was like, think happy feed and it just asks you, it'll prompt you, you know, what are three good things that happened to you today?

So you could frame that in terms of what are three good things that you appreciated about your body today or when you, what's your body enabled you to do today?

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:47:21] Yeah. Yeah. When other, positive body kindness, idea that is something that you recommend, but that really I think comes through in this study that you had sent me about the, um. The images culled from Instagram with hashtag curvy fit versus hashtag yo curvy yoga is this idea of more intentionally exposing ourselves to positive body images that are, um, that are ones that we can relate to or aspire to or that help us feel more connected to our.

Our body as process versus body as object. So I wonder if you could just briefly talk a little bit about this idea of how we can more intentionally expose ourselves to positive images versus the ones that might, you know, more default get come across our Instagram feeds.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:48:11] Sure. And again, I think this nicely ties into this notion of sort of being mindful of what you're consuming and maybe taking a few minutes to really think about how the images that you normally consume, you know, how are they impacting you? Um, so what is your visual diet like on a given day? And again, how intentional.

Yeah, I didn't come up with that, but yes, I like that term too.

And how intentional are you about being strategic and purposeful in having more control over your visual diet and just really just doing the experiments, you know, when you then do decide to maybe check out different hashtags that are more body positive, whether they be yoga or some other kinds of a community, and just seeing how you feel.

Um, you know, versus maybe some of the, um, some of the images that you're, that you're consuming on a regular basis and you might not even be aware of how they're impacting you.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:49:07] Yeah. Well, I love that idea to do an experiment with yourself of, of sort of being more intentional about it and seeing how that might shift both how you feel about your body, thoughts that may cross your mind. And maybe this is that you might make about, you know, how you carry yourself through the

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:49:23] Indeed, indeed.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:49:25] Yeah. And then the last thing I wanted to ask about, and this was from your podcast episode on the body kindness project, you talked about wearing a motivational wristband, and I was just curious to have you talk about what that is and how individuals might jump on board with that idea.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:49:43] Oh, that's really interesting. That was another component of our, uh, brief size inclusive yoga project. So in addition to having access to a few online, uh, 15 minute, uh, yoga content that was developed by curvy yoga. Founder and a guest jelly. That was an amazing collaboration. They also did the, again, the brief brought body gratitude journaling, and they also receive motivational images that we sent to them.

And the fourth component was the wrist band. Um, and. Eh, the, the wristband said, you know, yoga, uh, is for everybody, no way and necessary. Um, and so, you know, I have to admit that that, at least within our sample it, that probably wasn't the most impactful component of the program, but it may just made me think about what are those things we can do to be reminders.

Of some of the values that we're either starting to embrace or that we've already bought into. Um, but that's also maybe a personal bias. Cause I, I do wear a lot of wristbands, um, and I've also used them in some of my classes as well, just to, not that you have to wear it, but maybe you can put it somewhere, um, that is accessible as just a reminder of what you're working towards.

Um, what you're trying to keep as, as, as a positive focus.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:51:02] Yeah. I love that because it's, it's sort of just another means of being more intentional about the kind of messages that you expose yourself to. Because if we're not intentional, then the default setting is just all the messages that were sent to by our culture, by our friends and family, and they may not be consistent with the values that we want to embody, but when we are more intentional about it, whether it's through a wristband or the hashtags that we choose to look up on her.

Theodore are the kinds of, um, intentional ways that we try to appreciate our body. Then we can get closer in line with the way that we want to relate to our body and sort of live that idea of body flexibility in a more positive direction.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:51:43] well said.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:51:44] You so much, Jennifer, for coming on and sharing your wisdom and your research. It's very cool work and I think it's going to have continued to have a huge impact on the field. And I'm, I'm really so honored that you took the time.

**Jennifer Webb:** [00:51:57] well, thank you so much for this opportunity. It was, it's been a delight and a privilege, and again, I'm really grateful that I got a chance to talk with you about all of these important issues.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:52:07] Thank you.

**Diana Hill:** [00:52:08] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:52:11] You can find us on iTunes, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Please help us out by writing a review on iTunes.

**Jill Stoddard:** [00:52:17] We'd like to thank our interns, Dr. Katharine Foley-



SaldeÃ±a and Dr Kati Lear.

**Debbie Sorensen:** [00:52:22] This podcast is for informational and entertainment purposes only and is not meant to be a substitute for mental health treatment. If you're having a mental health emergency dial 9 1 1. If you're looking for mental health treatment, please visit the resources on our webpage. We're at [offtheclockpsych.com](http://offtheclockpsych.com).