

STEP 6

Facing Your Body Image Avoidance

Marlena is miserable. She hates her body and is firmly convinced that her “pear shape” is the only thing anyone ever notices about her. Every day of her life is filled with bouts of self-consciousness and efforts to avoid or escape these unpleasant feelings. She never accepts her friends’ invitations to pool parties or workout sessions with them at the gym. Dark outfits that hide her hips and thighs are the only clothes she wears. Having sex with her fiancé is very unpleasant, because she is extremely anxious about him seeing her body, so she keeps the bedroom dark and always wears a loose-fitting nightgown. She’d prefer to avoid the “whole ordeal.” Because Marlena is also embarrassed by the freckles on her face, she routinely applies a thick cover-up cosmetic to conceal her complexion before leaving the house. Her motto seems to be “What they can’t see can’t hurt me.” But if she were right, why would she hurt so much?

SELF-DEFEATING SELF-DEFENSES

With Steps 4 and 5, you began changing the faulty mental assumptions and distortions that provoke and perpetuate your painful body image experiences. In Steps 6 and 7, you’ll learn how to change certain troubling behavior patterns. People engage in all kinds of efforts to manage their appearance and to deal with their disturbing Private Body Talk. From monitoring the ABC Sequence of your own body image experiences, you’ve probably observed that you try to avoid certain Activators that set off your discomfort. Among your Consequences, you may discover patterns of specific self-protective actions you take to manage your misery once it’s begun.

Body image distress, whether actually experienced or merely expected, usually will set in motion behavior patterns for self-defense. These maneuvers are efforts to correct, conceal, or compensate for what you think is wrong with your looks. However, these habitual behavior patterns create their own problems. They stir up their own distress and then, paradoxically, are used to cope with the difficulties

they've caused. Unfortunately, these well-learned patterns reinforce your conviction that your looks are somehow defective. Put simply, your self-defenses are self-defeating.

So why do you continue to do such things? The answer is self-protection: You want to avoid or escape feeling bad about your looks. You develop these behaviors to protect yourself, so that bad events either won't happen or, if they do, so that they won't be nearly as unpleasant as they might be. Psychologists call this learning by *negative reinforcement*. This is entirely different from learning by *positive reinforcement*, in which we do things because doing them rewards us with positive outcomes and pleasurable emotions.

Thus, self-protective actions are motivated more by preventing discomfort and emotional pain than by providing pleasure. With these actions, you either try to hide (avoid, disguise, or flee) the "problem" or you compulsively seek ways to make it go away. These two patterns of behavioral self-defense—hiding and seeking—are called *Evasive Actions* and *Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals*.

Now, look back at your Body Image Coping self-test results in Step 1. Two of the scores are indicators of the extent to which you use these two self-defeating behavior patterns to deal with threats or challenges to your body image. How high were your Appearance Fixing scores and your Experiential Avoidance scores?

Figure 6.1 shows how these self-protective patterns emerge in the flow of your body image experiences. With your Appearance Assumptions setting the stage, events trigger your distorted Private Body Talk and your resultant body image discomfort or distress. To manage these negative thoughts and emotions, you engage in action to defend against or cope with these experiences. I want you to understand that such patterns of self-protection are really acts of self-rejection. You are rejecting the acceptability of your body, which worsens both your body image and your self-esteem.

In Step 6, first you'll discover your own Evasive Actions and then you'll learn how free yourself from these self-defeating avoidant behaviors. In Step 7, you'll identify your Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals and learn how to rid your life of these problematic patterns. So, let's get going with self-discoveries.

DISCOVERING YOUR EVASIVE ACTIONS

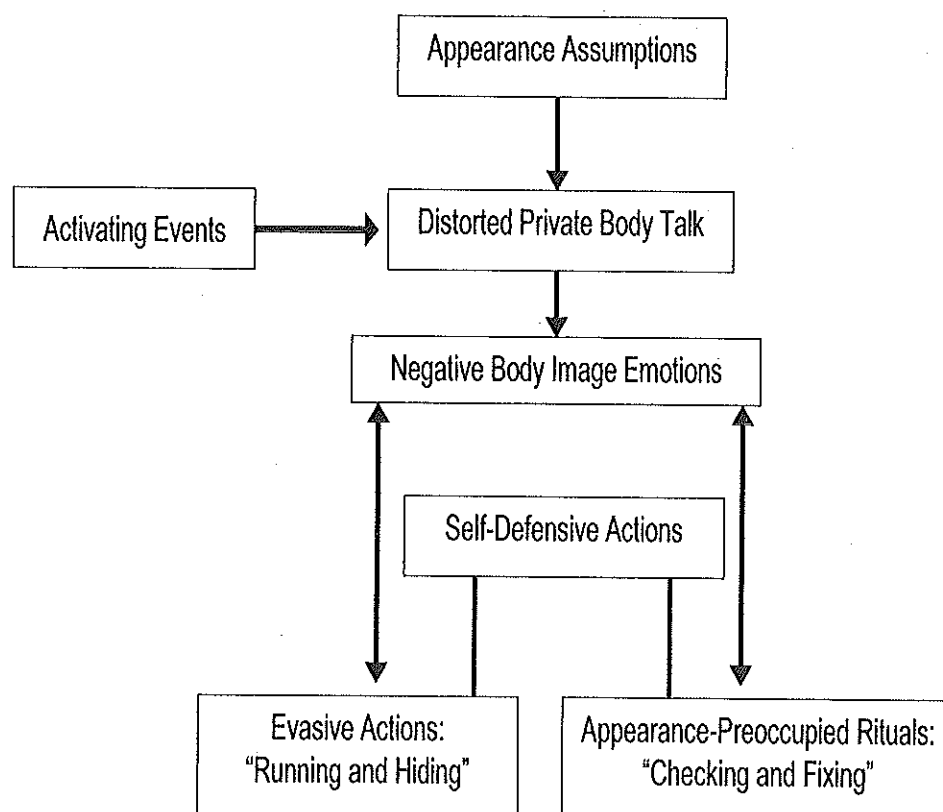
Often, people with a negative body image will go to great lengths to avoid displaying their "defects," not only to others but to themselves, as well. There are two basic kinds of Evasive Actions—running and hiding. Let's examine them.

Running

If you go back and review your Body Image Distress Test from Step 1 and the entries in your Body Image Diary, you'll probably find various situations and activities that you run from. When you engage in the Beauty Bound Distortion, you forbid yourself to do certain things because of your looks. You avoid these things because they threaten you with feelings of self-consciousness, shame, anxiety, or embarrassment.

What you avoid falls into one or more of the four categories of the four P's: practices, places, people, and poses. Each of the following four sections has a checklist of some of the things that people

Figure 6.1. The Role of Self-Defensive Actions in Your Unfolding Body Image Experiences



may avoid. If an item applies to you, check it. Then, based on your answers, write down what you personally avoid in the Self-Discovery Helpsheets: My Evasive Actions below. Feel free to include any of your Evasive Actions that are not in these checklists.

DO YOU AVOID CERTAIN PRACTICES?

- ☐ Wearing clothes of a style, color, or fabric that might reveal your "flaws."
- ☐ Some physical activity that might call attention to your body's appearance—such as exercising, dancing, or playing certain recreational sports.
- ☐ Some normal activity in which somebody might see you when you are not "fixed up"—such as going to the grocery with sweats on, or going out without makeup or with your hair not done.

- ☐ Some activity that might “mess up” your appearance—for example, an activity like swimming that would wet your hair or wash off your makeup.
- ☐ Paying attention to your body—for example, weighing yourself or viewing your mirror reflection or a photo of yourself.
- ☐ Allowing your partner to see you in the buff.
- ☐ Certain physical contact—such as giving or receiving hugs—that might disclose to others how your body feels.
- ☐ Being photographed or videotaped.
- ☐ Eating heartily in the presence of others—for fear they’ll think you’re fat.

DO YOU AVOID CERTAIN PLACES?

- ☐ Any place where your body is relatively exposed—such as at the pool or beach, or dressing rooms and public showers.
- ☐ Places where appearance is emphasized—such as dressy formal occasions or singles’ gatherings.
- ☐ Clothing stores where your appearance is “on display” to clerks or customers.
- ☐ Places with prominent mirrors—such as department-store dressing rooms or exercise classes in mirrored rooms.

DO YOU AVOID CERTAIN PEOPLE?

- ☐ People who are good-looking in ways you’d like to be.
- ☐ Good-looking members of the sex you are attracted to.
- ☐ People who do a lot of things to “look good”—for example, people who diet, exercise regularly, or wear stylish clothing.
- ☐ Individuals who talk a lot about physical appearance.
- ☐ People who might comment on your appearance—usually a friend or relative who’s inclined to make unwelcome comments about your weight, manner of dress, and so forth.

DO YOU AVOID CERTAIN POSES?

- ☐ Where or how you sit or stand during a social interaction—for instance, stances or profiles that might “spotlight” your disliked characteristics (e.g., body shape, posture, hair, or facial features).
- ☐ Gestures that you think make your “defects” more pronounced—such as smiling (and exposing disliked teeth, dimples, or wrinkles) or hand gestures (which show “stubby” fingers or chipped or bitten fingernails).
- ☐ Particular positions during sexual relations—notably those that allow your partner to see the parts of your body that you dislike.

Hiding

Hiding is an Evasive Action in which people try to protect themselves against negative body image thoughts and feelings by using various grooming behaviors to conceal or camouflage what they dislike about their looks. Certain Appearance Assumptions that you uncovered in Step 4 can lead you to disguise what you despise. That is, if you assume that your unadorned appearance is unacceptable and will taint others' impressions of you, you'll probably want to hide what you really look like.

The trappings of bodily adornment can act as mood-altering substances. People select clothing, jewelry, cosmetics, and hairstyles either to feel attractive (positive reinforcement) or to feel less unappealing and to shield their shortcomings from others (negative reinforcement). Of course, the latter is a self-protective way of Grooming to Hide. How do people groom to hide?

Well, the skinny guy wears long-sleeved shirts and long pants all year round to cloak his arms and legs. The heavy-hipped woman shrouds her shape with dark, loose-fitting shirts and slacks. The aging woman conceals her wrinkled face under layers of makeup. The balding fellow hides beneath his hat. The man with protruding ears veils them with his long hair. The woman with small breasts wears padded bras. The lady with dark hair growth on her face or arms bleaches it. And God forbid that her gray hair should show. She conceals it with hair-coloring. This list could go on and on.

Now, think about your own physical characteristics that trouble you. What do you do to hide them so they'll be less apparent to others or for you to feel less concerned about them? Add these behaviors to your Self-Discovery Helpsheets: My Evasive Actions.

Self-Discovery Helpsheet: My Evasive Actions

List what you do to avoid negative thoughts and feelings about your looks. Then, rate how often you engage in each Evasive Action on the scale of 1 to 3 below.

1 = on occasion; 2 = fairly often; 3 = very often

How Often

Practices

Places

People

Poses

Grooming to Hide

Facing Avoidance

Now, having identified the self-defeating, avoidant behavior patterns that are linked to your negative body image, it's time to learn how to take control of them, instead of allowing them to continue to control you. There is a lot of substantial scientific proof that people can overcome their anxieties by gradually exposing themselves to whatever they avoid because of anxiety. Of course, what is really avoided is an inner experience (i.e., thoughts and emotions) that they find uncomfortable or unacceptable. One very effective way to manage your Evasive Actions is to use an active strategy called *Facing It*.

You have already acquired most of the skills you need to face down your Evasive Actions. You've learned how to mindfully observe and accept your inner experiences, without judging them or reacting to them. You've also cultivated your New Inner Voice—an essential ally for Facing It. Now, I'd like to teach you a few additional skills that can help you manage the tension or discomfort that is likely to come from Facing It.

LEARNING BODY-AND-MIND RELAXATION

Several fairly simple techniques to calm yourself physically and mentally can really help you face what you no longer choose to avoid. These build nicely on your capabilities of mindfulness and acceptance. It is an indisputable fact that relaxation is the physiological and psychological opposite of distress. You cannot be uptight or upset and be "cool, calm, and collected" at the same time. Body-and-Mind Relaxation techniques will enable you to become more comfortable and to bring to a halt any runaway train of negative body image thoughts and emotions. Spend a few days learning and rehearsing the following three exercises so that you can put them into practice whenever you need them.

Letting Go of Tension

When you're troubled or distressed, your brain sends messages that signal your muscles to contract. Because these messages are stored in those muscles, your muscular tension can linger and you may stay vulnerable to emotional negativity about your body image or even to something completely unrelated to your body image. Here's how you can counter such messages:

- First contract (tense) and then relax your muscles, one set at a time, for each of these four sets of muscles: (1) face, neck, and shoulders; (2) hands, forearms, and biceps; (3) chest, stomach, and lower back; (4) buttocks, thighs, calves, and feet.
- Inhale as you are tensing for each set of muscles for about three seconds. Slowly exhale as you release the tension.
- Be mindfully aware of exactly how the tension feels and how your body feels as you release or let go of the tension.
- Each time you release tension, mentally repeat the phrase "letting go."

- With repeated practice, you can simply tell your body to “let go” of any specific muscular tension that you’ve noticed, without having to go through the tense-and-release sequence.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

When under stress, your breathing becomes irregular and leads to physical sensations that further undermine feelings of control or contentment. With deep, rhythmic *diaphragmatic breathing*, however, you can enhance experiences of relaxation and contentment.

- Lie down and, reclining comfortably in a quiet, private location, gently close your eyes.
- Take five slow, deep breaths. Preferably, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Breathe evenly from your diaphragm, which is the lowest part of your chest at the top of your abdomen. Breathe so that your stomach slowly rises and falls, while your chest moves only slightly. You can put one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest to verify this.
- Be mindful of the sensations caused by the air flowing in and flowing out of your body. Be aware of your abdomen rising and falling. Be aware of the sounds of the flow of your breathing.
- Engage in this exercise for about ten minutes, or longer if you wish. Practice diaphragmatic breathing a few times a day for several days.

Mental Imagery

When fretting about your appearance, it's likely that you replay frustrating or upsetting situations in your mind. These mental images evoke negative emotions. Being able to shift your attention away from distressing images and to turn on pleasant ones cultivates inner serenity.

- With your eyes closed, allow your imagination to paint a pleasing picture of a landscape in your mind. Using your imagination, simply place yourself in a springtime scene, at the beach, in the mountains, or in the countryside—whichever pleases you most.
- Begin to paint your mental picture vividly and then experience your pleasant scene as if you were really there.... You hear the songs of birds, singing so sweetly.... You see the colors of nature around you.... You feel the soothing, gentle warmth of the sun.... Against your skin you feel a soft breeze that caresses your body...
- Mindfully enjoy your pleasant scene.... For about ten minutes allow its details to unfold and envelop you in experiences of contentment and peacefulness.

Building Your Ladder of Success for Facing It

Here's what you need to do to get ready for Facing It:

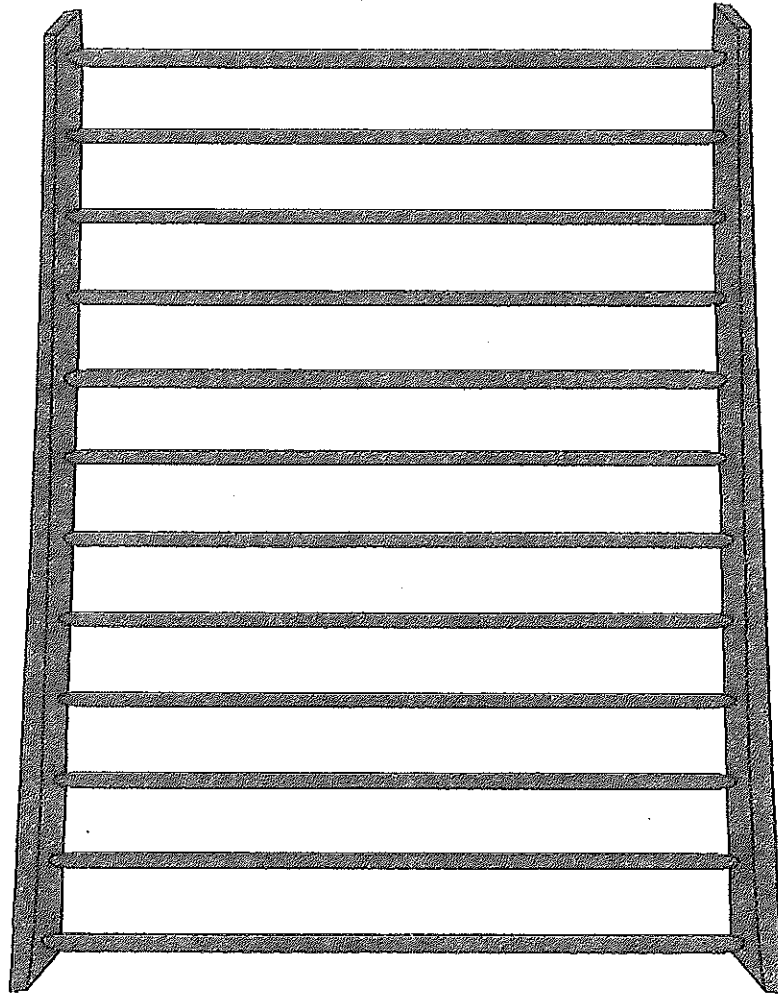
- On the Evasive Actions you listed in your Self-Discovery Helpsheets: My Evasive Actions, above, review the practices, places, people, and poses that you avoid because of past experience or future expectation of discomfort. (Hold off on the Grooming to Hide items; we'll deal with those later.)
- Make a simple judgment about each situation or activity that you avoid. This is a judgment that psychologists call *self-efficacy*. Self-efficacy is your degree of confidence that you could actually enter the situation or engage in the activity. For instance, suppose that you avoid going swimming at the community pool because you feel self-conscious in a swimsuit and have too many thoughts that you look unattractive with wet hair. Ask yourself, "How confident am I that I could actually take a dip in the pool?" Your answer is your level of self-efficacy for this activity.
- Assign each item on your Evasive Actions list a self-efficacy rating from 0 to 100. A rating of 0 means "No way. Never in a zillion years would I be able to do that." A rating of 100 says "I'm 100 percent certain that I can do that." A 50 means there is a fifty-fifty chance that you could Face It. Write down your self-efficacy level in the margin next to each of the avoided practices, places, people, and poses.
- Next, you will design a Ladder of Success. Transcribe the items and their self-efficacy ratings to the following Helpsheets for Change: My Ladder of Success for Facing It. Put the hardest items (those with the lowest self-efficacy ratings) at the top of the ladder and the easiest ones (with the highest ratings) at the bottom.
- Make sure your list contains a reasonable range of ratings, though about half should be under 50 (that is, fairly difficult). If two or more items have the same numerical rating, decide which is a little more difficult and list it on a higher rung. If an activity or situation is very general, be more specific. For example, "eating in front of others" might become "having hors d'oeuvres at Paddy's Pub with my friends." Drop any item that isn't practically feasible. For instance, you can't go to the beach if it's below freezing outdoors right now.
- If all or nearly all of your items are rated below 50, yours is a hard-to-do list. If most are rated above 50, it's an easy-to-do list. Try to even out a lopsided list by adding a few more Evasive Actions, either easy or hard, or by modifying the existing ones to make them more or less difficult to do.

Helpsheet for Change: My Ladder of Success for Facing It

Self-efficacy ratings are from 0 for no confidence to 100 for complete confidence.

Self-Efficacy Rating

What Am I Going to Face?
(practices, places, people, and poses)



LEARNING TO PACE YOURSELF

Next, you will engage in the practices you avoid, go to the places you avoid, be with the people you avoid, and strike the poses you avoid. You'll do this gradually, one step at a time. You'll start out at the lowest rung on the ladder—the easiest one to do. Success at each step will give you the confidence to move up the ladder to master more difficult experiences.

Of course, you are apprehensive about facing these uncomfortable situations. Otherwise you wouldn't be avoiding them in the first place, right? So you may already be talking to yourself about what you're not going to do. Be aware of your resistance but don't retreat! Together we'll formulate a positive plan of action so that you will be victorious over avoidance.

Facing It always has four fundamental steps: (1) Prepare, (2) Act, (3) Cope, and (4) Enjoy. The first letters of these four steps remind you to PACE yourself. Here's how it works.

Prepare

You'll Prepare for Facing It by writing down your strategy in advance. This first step is crucial, as it involves you in planning and rehearsing the remaining three steps. Decide exactly what you're going to do and when you're going to do it. Figure out how you will talk back to your Old Inner Voice of avoidance that says, "No, I can't. Not now. I'll do it some other time." By anticipating which pessimistic thoughts are likely to run through your mind and how they might make you feel, you can decide how you'll handle them. Finally, you can promise to reward yourself for your efforts at Facing It. Decide ahead of time what your reward will be—a special treat, some affordable trinket, a cone of tasty frozen yogurt, or a relaxing moment with your favorite music. Having first spelled out this detailed plan using the Helpsheets for Change: My Ladder of Success for Facing It, rehearse it in your mind.

Act

The time has arrived to Face It—to carry out your plan. To warm up cold feet, give yourself the pep talk you've prepared, engage in a moment of Body-and-Mind Relaxation, or do whatever else will help you follow through. You can be mindfully aware of your inner experiences of anxiety and your impulses to avoid, and can accept these experiences without allowing them to control your actions. And off you go! As you begin confronting what you've so often avoided, encourage and commend yourself. Good for you!

Cope

When uncomfortable thoughts and feelings rise up, that should come as no surprise attack. You expected them, and you know how to accept them. Just draw upon the coping skills you've learned and roll with any discomfort. For example, you can use your New Inner Voice or elements of Body-and-Mind

Relaxation, such as calming imagery or breathing techniques. Reassure yourself that you can handle this. Remind yourself that you are handling it. Stay in the moment of what you are accomplishing.

Enjoy

There, you Faced It! But don't forget the deal. Facing It earns a reward. Applaud your accomplishment, don't criticize it. Never say "Yes, but" to yourself by saying "Yes, I did it, but..." Just enjoy your success. Relish your reward. You deserve it.

Preparing Your PACE Plans

The My Plan for Facing It Helpsheet that follows this section is for developing your PACE plan of action for each item on your ladder. Make copies of this Helpsheet and fill them out as you climb each rung of your Facing It Ladder of Success.

- Develop your first plan. Start at the bottom rung of your ladder, with the activity or situation that you're reasonably confident you can face. Prepare by drafting your plan for Facing It.
- Decide how you will Act. Specify the place, date, time, duration, and frequency of your action. For example, suppose your Evasive Action is "I avoid standing anywhere that people are behind me and can see the shape of my rear." Your action plan might be "Each day at work for the next five days, at 10 A.M. and at 4 P.M., I'll spend at least two minutes at the file cabinets where my coworkers can see me from behind."
- Now write down your plans to Cope. Remember, your goal is not to be totally free from discomfort while facing what you normally avoid. Your goal is just to carry out the activity, to accept any discomfort you feel as natural, and to comfort yourself. So, in my example, you must understand that when you stand at the file cabinet you will accept your self-consciousness rather than fight it and you will use pleasant imagery and particular corrective thinking to create other experiences of the situation.
- What's the reward you'll Enjoy afterwards?

Helpsheet for Change: My Plan for Facing It

Practice, place, people, or pose avoided: _____

Step-by-Step Plan for Facing It

Prepare: Exactly what will I do?

Act: When? Where? For how long?

Cope: What uncomfortable thoughts and feelings do I expect? How will I accept and cope with them?

Enjoy: How will I reward my efforts?

What were my results of Facing It?

Implementing Your PACE Plans

Okay, you've prepared your plan by writing it out on the Helpsheets. Now what?

- After you've prepared your plan by scripting it, rehearse it. Mentally review exactly how you will act, cope, and enjoy. Visualize yourself carrying out each step of your plan. Then... Ready... Set... Go! Execute your plan. Act... Cope... Enjoy!
- As you move up the ladder, if an item seems too hard to do, break it down into simpler steps. For example, the situation "having my partner see me naked" might begin with your partner seeing you in your underwear. There's no need to get totally naked until you're ready.
- Focus on the current rung of your ladder. Don't worry about the rungs you haven't prepared for yet. You'll handle those when you get there. Don't be like the guy who has trouble doing high school geometry because he starts worrying that he'll never be able to learn college calculus.
- After each accomplishment, however small, make a note of what worked best and record the results on your Helpsheets.

Onward and upward!

COMING OUT OF HIDING

With the second type of Evasive Action, you Groom to Hide what you dislike about your looks. However, your "cover-up" is experiential avoidance—your self-protective strategy to avoid having negative thoughts and feelings. The Facing It approach to changing these behaviors is identical to the strategy used to confront the activities and situations that you avoid.

Building Your Facing It Ladder for Grooming to Hide

Previously, at the bottom of the Self-Discovery Helpsheet: My Evasive Actions, you listed your maneuvers for hiding whatever it is that you don't like about your appearance. By now, you probably know what to do next: You will use the following list to develop your Ladder of Success for Facing It on the next Helpsheet.

- First, rate your confidence in your ability to refrain from using each particular action to conceal your looks.
- Organize and fine-tune your ladder from the bottom (the easiest item with the highest self-efficacy level) to the top (the hardest item with the lowest self-efficacy level).

- Because your Grooming to Hide takes place in a range of contexts, pick specific situations to work on. For example, suppose that you listed “I always wear heavy foundation makeup to conceal my pale complexion,” or “I usually wear long, baggy tops to hide my tummy,” or “I always wear baseball caps or hats to hide my hair loss.” For each of your Grooming to Hide behaviors, think of a couple of situations in which you could conceivably not do these things. Select common everyday situations like walking around at the mall, going to class, or getting coffee at your local café. Choose situations in which not engaging in your Grooming to Hide behavior is reasonably acceptable for anyone. Nobody’s asking you to attend church services in your bathing suit.

Helpsheet for Change: My Ladder of Success for Facing It

Self-efficacy ratings are from 0 for no confidence to 100 for complete confidence.

Self-Efficacy Rating

Situations in Which I Won't Groom to Hide

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper designed for writing. On the left side, there are ten horizontal blue ruling lines. The rest of the page is a large, empty rectangular space, typical of a composition or notebook page.

PREPARING AND EXECUTING YOUR PLANS FOR COMING OUT OF HIDING

Having constructed your Ladder of Success, here's how you will "blow your cover" and come out of hiding:

1. Start with the bottom item and PACE yourself. Use a copy of the Helpsheets for Change: My Plan for Facing It, which follows this section, to write down on paper how you will Prepare, Act, Cope, and Enjoy the success. Mentally rehearse each aspect of your plan.
2. Afterward, carry out your plan, and acknowledge and write down the results.
3. As usual, move up to the next rung, and the next rung, and the next, all the way to the top of the ladder.

Before long, you'll see that your sense of self-efficacy and your ability to PACE yourself have become much stronger. Avoiding and hiding are becoming patterns of the past. Now, Facing It seems more like a game—a game of challenge and skill rather than one of chance and risk. And in the end, you'll be a winner!

Speaking of winners, I'd like tell you about Charlotte, who faced one of her Evasive Actions and enjoyed complete success. Since her adolescence, Charlotte had never left home without wearing layers of facial makeup. She was horrified that anyone seeing her might think she looked plain or homely. But applying her makeup every morning was taking up too much of her time. So, she constructed her plan for Facing It. She started with something she felt she could do—go outside, without makeup, to her mailbox to retrieve her mail. She did this every day for five days. Next, she went for a walk at a nearby park wearing less makeup than usual. Then, on five occasions wearing fewer and fewer cosmetics, she biked to a convenience store. Of course, she felt somewhat nervous and self-conscious each time.

Charlotte accepted these familiar feelings and did not allow them to deter her. Her discomfort diminished as she followed through with her plan. She used her mental imagery skills and her New Inner Voice to calm herself when her anxiety became troublesome. Charlotte capitalized on her love of exercise and was mindful of how invigorating the walk and the bike ride felt. After each trip, she rewarded herself by listening to Mozart. Ultimately, Charlotte freed herself from the necessity of hiding behind a mask of cosmetics. It felt so good to be able to be herself!

Helpsheet for Change: My Plan for Facing It

How I Groom to Hide: _____

Step-by-Step Plan for Facing It

Prepare: Exactly what will I do?

Act: When? Where? For how long?

Cope: What uncomfortable thoughts and feelings do I expect? How will I accept and cope with them?

Enjoy: How will I reward my efforts?

What were my results of Facing It?

FINAL WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Changing your Evasive Actions requires courage, commitment, and your acceptance of momentary discomfort. These behavioral changes are likely to be your most life-changing accomplishments. Doing away with the self-defeating habits of falsely protecting yourself from your own thoughts and emotions is a change that promotes your body acceptance and your self-acceptance. Facing It takes time, planning, risk taking, and patience. You need to accept your own imperfections while making these changes. Don't give up. Giving up is an act of avoiding failure, but of course it doesn't really work because nothing changes. Nothing gets better. Savor your successes, however small, because one small change makes the next one easier and more likely! In the next Step of this workbook, you will learn how to change your Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals, which also undermine your ability to accept your body.

STEP 7

Erasing Your Body Image Rituals

Greg suffers from *androgenetic alopecia*. Don't worry, it's not a deadly disease. Greg just has normal male-pattern balding—mostly a receding hairline and some thinning hair on the crown of his head. But it drives him crazy. So what does he do? He counts each hair lost forever as it swirls down his shower's drain. He mousses and meticulously combs the remaining strands over the visible part of his scalp. He scrutinizes his scalp in the mirror from every possible vantage point. He has tried dozens of different brands of shampoo that promise thicker hair. Often when he's out, Greg has the urge to check his hair to see if it looks okay, so he'll search for public restrooms with mirrors or look for reflective surfaces. While driving, he frequently (and dangerously) inspects his hair in the rearview mirror. If Greg isn't satisfied that his hair looks acceptable, which is often the case, he will wear one of his many baseball caps all day long.

Denise is a fashion plate. Whatever she wears, it is always chic and well coordinated. Her hair and makeup are impeccable. Her friends often tell her how great she looks. Most people would assume that Denise derives immense satisfaction from being so attractive. But she doesn't. In fact, she regularly ruminates that she doesn't look "right." Each morning getting ready for the day takes her two hours. When dressing for a social event, she changes clothes three, four, even five times. Each outfit seems to reveal to her something "awful" about her body. Because she worries that her thighs are huge and that her stomach sticks out, Denise must find an outfit that won't betray her "ugly secrets." Often, she'll try on older clothes that are a size smaller than she wears to see if they will magically fit again. She's terrified of gaining any weight, diets constantly, and nervously weighs herself and pinches her tummy (her "fat check") several times a day.

DISCOVERING YOUR APPEARANCE-PREOCCUPIED RITUALS

Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals were introduced in Step 6 and depicted in figure 6.1. In addition to Evasive Actions, they are a second type of self-defeating body image behavior. These rituals are repetitive efforts at body image damage control. When these patterns have been established, people compulsively inspect and check and recheck their appearance and seek remedies to fix whatever they believe might be wrong with their looks. Individuals trapped in such rituals spend inordinate amounts of time and effort to "look right."

Unlike the self-conscious avoiders of mirrors, people like Greg and Denise practically live in front of their mirrors, fussing over and "fixing" every perceived flaw. Their Private Body Talk constantly nags them about how they look, and they need reassurance, from themselves or others, that they look okay (or better). Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals come in two forms—*Checking* and *Fixing*.

Appearance Checking

Checking Rituals are often preceded by recurrent thoughts that something is wrong with your looks. This preoccupies you and makes you ill at ease. Your Private Body Talk has an answer for its nagging notion that you might not look just right: "Gotta check it out!" So, to quiet your restless mind, you check it out.

Let me offer an analogy. When you're tucked in bed and dozing off to sleep, has the question "I wonder if I locked the door?" ever crossed your mind? You may be 99.9 percent certain that you did. But the question lingers and you can't put it to rest. So, what do you do? Yes, you get out of bed and check whether the door is latched. It is. Now you can start counting sheep. The worrisome rumination in your mind is called an *obsession*. The checking behavior is a *compulsion*. Because acting on the compulsion quiets the obsession, the pattern is reinforced. The next time the preoccupying thought occurs, the stronger the urge is to act out the checking behavior.

The principal aim of Checking Rituals is to seek and obtain relief from unsettling worries about your appearance. Checking Rituals are sometimes willful, deliberate attempts to avoid worrying. At other times, they are mindlessly automatic reactions, because they've become well-practiced habits.

Some signs of this pattern are listed below. To what extent does each example describe you? Place a check mark next to the descriptions that fit fairly well.

- ☐ You have intrusive thoughts that tell you to inspect your appearance. These thoughts are hard to dismiss until you've acted on them.
- ☐ If you pass a mirror (or other reflecting surface), you often reflexively check to make sure that your appearance is okay.
- ☐ You frequently visit the restroom with the conscious intent of checking your appearance, even though you have no good reason to believe that something is really wrong with your looks.

- ☐ If concerned about your weight, you frequently weigh yourself to find out if you've gained or lost any small amount. Whenever scales are available, it's hard to resist weighing yourself.
- ☐ If concerned about your body weight or shape, you often pinch or squeeze areas of your body to try to determine how fat or thin they are.
- ☐ You routinely check out other people's opinions about your looks to seek reassurance that you look fine. Trusted loved ones or friends are typically asked, "Do you think I look okay? Are you sure? Are you really sure?"
- ☐ In social situations, you repeatedly check how your appearance compares with what others look like, so that you can feel more certain that your appearance is acceptable.

Now, based on the items in the checklist above, describe your own Checking Rituals. Write these down in the top section of the Self-Discovery Helpsheets: What Are My Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals? that you will find following the section "Appearance Fixing," below. Add any Checking Rituals that you engage in that may not have been mentioned. In describing your personal pattern, be specific.

Appearance Fixing

Fixing Rituals, which usually coexist with Checking Rituals, involve elaborate and meticulous efforts to manage or modify your appearance. You must do a lot of things with a lot of precision to be satisfied that you look okay. Special social situations may demand even more time and perfection in figuring out what to wear. If something doesn't appear (or feel) quite right, you may start your fixing all over again. How frustrating!

Recall that your Appearance Fixing score on the Body Image Coping self-test in Step 1 offers a partial index for this behavior pattern. Here's a more specific checklist of some telltale signs of Appearance-Preoccupied Fixing Rituals. Think about each one and decide how often you become fixated on fixing.

- ☐ At home, getting out of the bathroom and getting dressed on time is a rare event.
- ☐ Friends or people in your household have remarked on the amount of time you spend on your appearance. Their comments may range from gentle kidding to irritation at having to wait for you to get ready.
- ☐ You primp and fuss with your clothes, hair, and/or makeup more than you think you should. Rationally, you know you look fine. Emotionally and behaviorally, you just can't leave well enough alone.
- ☐ Different situations demand that you change what you're wearing. Otherwise, you worry that your appearance might be inadequate or inappropriate.

- ☐ You purchase clothing or grooming products that you seldom wear or use. When you bought them, you were sure that they were what you needed to enhance your looks. Ultimately, they didn't fully meet your expectations.
- ☐ Before going out, you change clothes or redo your hair several times until you're satisfied that you look okay.
- ☐ When you see yourself in a mirror or other reflecting surface, you reflexively adjust some aspect of your appearance—like your hair, your tie, or your dress—even though nothing is really amiss.
- ☐ You regularly make significant modifications in your appearance—for example, changing hairstyles or hair colors or getting cosmetic makeovers.
- ☐ Gaining a couple of pounds or the experience of feeling fat compels you to go on a diet or to exercise more intensely for a few days.

Now, based on your answers above and any other Fixing Rituals you engage in, write these down in the following Self-Discovery Helpsheets for Change: What Are My Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals? For both your Checking and Fixing Rituals, rate how often each behavior occurs.

ERASING RITUALS

Let's be sure we keep things in proper perspective. Managing your physical appearance is definitely a good thing. We bathe, shave, do our hair, and clothe and adorn ourselves in ways that make us feel comfortable and are esthetically pleasing. Only people with problems like severe depression or schizophrenia may completely neglect their physical hygiene and appearance. Later, in Step 8, we'll consider how these activities can represent positive ways in which we relate to our bodies. In contrast, when we are dealing with Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals, we've lost control and are really struggling not to feel bad about ourselves.

Like Evasive Actions, we experience our rituals as what we *must* do to avoid thinking and feeling that something about our looks (and worth as a person) is flawed, wrong, inferior, unacceptable, imperfect, judged negatively by others, and so forth. Because checking and fixing temporarily calm our concerns, we keep doing them, despite the clear or partial realization that they are preoccupying and seem to have a life of their own.

This reminds me of the story about the fellow who regularly went out into his front yard, surveyed the premises with his binoculars, then flapped his arms like a duck, turned in a circle, did a little dance, and spit three times over his left shoulder. A curious neighbor finally approached him to ask him what he was doing. Somewhat nervously, he replied that he was keeping the elephants away. Perplexed, the neighbor said, "But there are no elephants around here." The fellow smiled proudly and said, "I know. What I do really works!"

I hope you can see that Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals also fuel false assumptions—for example, if you don't look perfect all the time, bad things will happen or people won't like you. To change these

Self-Discovery Helpsheet: What Are My Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals?

List your Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals below, and rate how often you engage in each:
1 = not more than once or twice a week; 2 = about once or twice per day; 3 = several times per day.

Ritual Frequency

My Checking Rituals

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Ritual Frequency

My Fixing Rituals

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

habitual patterns, you can either prevent yourself from initiating them or interrupt them once you've begun the ritual. I call this solution *Erasing It*. It derives from *exposure and response (or ritual) prevention*, a well-known and effective behavior therapy procedure. Several successful strategies exist for Erasing It. I'll describe each and illustrate its helpful use.

Obstructing Your Rituals

Most Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals occur whenever the "right" opportunity arises. Given certain triggers, or Activators in your ABC Sequence, you carry out the behavior before you know it. Therefore, you may need to obstruct its opportunity to occur. You block its path.

- Think about one Appearance-Preoccupied Ritual for which you need certain "tools" or conditions to carry out the ritual. For example, you require a mirror for rituals in which you repeatedly scrutinize your looks. Compulsive weighing would be impossible without scales. How could you make trouble for your ritual by altering the environment? Developing this strategy is a challenge to your creativity. So be creative!
- This obstructive technique for change is usually a short-term, stopgap approach. You don't want to avoid one thing in order to avoid another. It can be helpful, especially at first, but note that you'll want to use additional strategies to remove most rituals.

Allow me to illustrate this point: Lois felt compelled to weigh herself almost every time she ate anything. She was ill at ease until she confirmed that she had not put on several pounds. So Lois applied masking tape to the weight-displaying window of her scale. She obstructed her ritual's path. In this way, she weakened her compulsion to weigh herself. She combined this technique with the By Appointment Only strategy (discussed below), weighing herself only on Saturdays, when she changed the tape. Lois's innovative strategy helped her to change her preoccupying mental tape, as well.

Delaying Your Rituals

Another method for Erasing It is really simple. You learn to wait a while before commencing your ritual. This works quite well for Checking Rituals.

- Appearance checking is usually preceded by an inner urge to check. For example, you may have a gnawing feeling that you "need" to weigh yourself, inspect your hair or makeup, or seek reassurance about your looks. Your urge is typically narrated by your Private Body Talk that asks "What if?" and conjures up distressing scenarios. "What if I've gained weight and I look fat?" "What if my hair is out of place and looks really messy?" "What if my makeup is wearing thin and my big pores are showing?" "What if my husband thinks this outfit looks dumb on me and he's ashamed to be seen with me?" Just be mindfully aware of these urges and mental what-ifs. Accept that they occur and let your consciousness move away and focus on other things.

- Checking Rituals serve several self-protective purposes: They interrupt your preoccupied thoughts and your feelings of discomfort. Moreover, they offer a clear answer to your what-if? question. When you learn that you look fine, you feel relief. And, if something was slightly amiss, fixing it brings relief. So, you'll want to detach the thoughts from the ritual. You are aware that you want engage in the checking behavior. You remind yourself that it isn't required that you do so.
- By postponing your checking even for a short time, you sap the power of your anxious urge. Instead of succumbing to the urge and letting it immediately dictate your actions, you become the decision maker. You take control of deciding when (or whether) to check on your looks. This usurps the urge that instigates your ritual, as well as the ritual itself. So, for example, you decide "I'll delay checking for ten (or fifteen or thirty) minutes."
- Waiting it out will be uncomfortable for a while, so you'll need to accept the discomfort and create mindful experiences to soothe yourself during your wait.

You can learn from the following success story: Roger is a sales representative for a pharmaceutical firm. He's on the road a lot, calling on doctors and clinics. During the course of a typical day, he checked his appearance often. Every time he stopped at a traffic light, he inspected his hair and face in the rearview mirror. At his office, he checked his appearance once or twice an hour, using a mirror he kept in his desk drawer or the one in the men's room.

When Roger decided to delay his rituals, he put off checking his reflection in the rearview mirror until he reached his destination. Whenever he had the urge to check his appearance at the office, he deferred checking for twenty minutes. At first the waiting troubled him—what if he looked awful all that time? However, he just mindfully observed and accepted his worried thoughts. Next, he spent a few moments doing slow, diaphragmatic breathing and listening to his encouraging New Inner Voice. Then, he more easily shifted his attention to his work. Eventually, Roger kept his urge to check in check.

Restricting Your Rituals

Fixing Rituals can be exasperating for others. Each fixing episode usually continues until you are either momentarily content with its results or you run out of time. An alternative to allowing your ritual to run its course is to place specific limits on it. Here are three ways to weaken your rituals by placing specific limits on them:

PLAYING BEAT THE CLOCK

Here's how you could tackle a Fixing Ritual in which you take too long readying your appearance to face the world.

- First establish how long your Fixing Ritual usually takes.

- Then make a fair estimate of how much time would be reasonable for you to take if you didn't get so compulsively caught up in it. For example, suppose your morning grooming regimen takes two hours. You know that if you were a bit more organized and less picky, you should be able to get ready in one hour. At first, set your initial goal generously—say, to be ready in one hour and fifty minutes.
- Set your alarm clock or kitchen timer to this limit and play Beat the Clock.
- After a few days of success, lower the limit—say to one hour and forty minutes—and play Beat the Clock for several more days.
- Continue in this fashion, shaving off ten minutes each time you change your limit, until you've reached the reasonable amount of time to groom that is your goal.
- Reward your progress by using the time saved to do something enjoyable. Then you'll appreciate the change even more.

Kyra liked her hair, but she insisted that it always had to look perfect. Her hair was the “saving grace” she relied on to make up for the physical features she disliked. Dreading a bad hair day, each morning Kyra would style and restyle her hair for about an hour, until her ride for work arrived. For two weeks, she played Beat the Clock by setting her timer for gradually shorter intervals—forty-five minutes, then thirty, and finally a reasonable twenty minutes. Her goal was to be finished with her hair, out of the bathroom, and enjoying her cranberry juice before the timer alarm went off. By making a challenging game of it, Kyra eliminated her morning preoccupation with her hair, which looks just as attractive as it did back in the days of one-hour fixing sessions. Now if she has a bad hair day, she sticks to her new abbreviated schedule anyway. She knows that the world won't come to an end.

RATIONALLY RATIONING RITUALS

This next method sets a limit on the number of times you engage in a ritual within a certain period. How does this work?

- Suppose that whenever you go out to dinner with a friend or loved one, your requests for reassurance that you look fine begin to sound like a broken record. The more you ask, the more insecure you feel, especially if you start to sense your companion's annoyance. So, you set a quota and allow yourself only two reassurance requests during an entire evening.
- You can use your allocation whenever you wish, but having used up your ration, your requests are over.
- Over time the goal is to set your ration progressively lower until it reaches zero.

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

Here's the third method for restricting your rituals:

- An intense urge to practice a ritual usually dictates when your rituals will take place. So instead, put those rituals on a schedule. In effect, you make an appointment with yourself to carry out your ritual.
- Like any appointment, the one for your ritual should begin and end on time.
- Because you're permitted to have the ritual by appointment only, it cannot occur at unscheduled times. If you miss your appointment, you must wait for the ritual's next scheduled occasion.

Here's an example of an effective use of this strategy: Since adolescence, Ivan's face has been prone to blackheads. Many times a day, he would get out his magnifying mirror and peruse his pores in search of blackheads and blemishes, squeezing and picking at them. Not only did these search-and-destroy missions take a lot of time, they took their toll on his complexion as well. To gain control, Ivan scheduled an appointment for his ritual, allowing it to take place only during ten-minute visits to the mirror at 7 A.M. and 7 P.M. Thus, he restricted his ritual's duration and frequency. Much to his dermatologist's relief, Ivan eventually reduced his unhealthy practice to once a week.

Resisting by Rebellion

This last strategy for Erasing It can be rather difficult, yet sometimes it is the most successful. You rebel against your ritual by resisting it cold turkey. You face the temptation and exercise restraint. You ride out your urge without performing the ritual. Controlling a ritual, despite the conditions being ripe for its occurrence, can greatly increase your self-confidence.

- You may want to try this approach first on weaker rituals. For stronger ones, you'll probably graduate to this approach after successfully delaying, restricting, or obstructing your behavior pattern.
- With mindful acceptance, Body-and-Mind Relaxation, and corrective thinking as your allies, you force yourself to remain in the situation where you experience the urge without performing your ritual—the longer the better.
- Often a gradual approach is most helpful. Schedule your rebellions for progressively longer periods. In this way, you build up your resistance.
- In other instances, it may be effective for you to remain in the situation until the urge to perform your appearance-preoccupied pattern has subsided. You mindfully observe the urge and its weakening.

- If you try this total rebellion against the ritual and don't succeed, give yourself the credit you deserve for trying. Never give yourself a hard time for having a hard time!

Take inspiration from Jessica, who learned how to resist two self-defeating patterns: Whenever she was on a date, Jessica spent almost as much time in the restroom checking and fixing her appearance as she spent with her companion. She would end up stuck to the mirror the way a magnet sticks to a refrigerator, brushing her hair, freshening her makeup, and adjusting her clothes.

But once Jessica made up her mind to end her appearance checking and fixing, she planned her resistance well. On several occasions when she was at a restaurant, she allowed herself to visit the restroom only to use the toilet, not to primp. When washing her hands, she made a point of looking down at the sink instead of up at the mirror. For her next step, Jessica required that, on each visit, she look at herself in the mirror—but not fix anything. She progressed to longer and longer periods between “check-ups.” Relying on her mindfulness and coping skills to get her through her initial discomfort, Jessica was finally able to break her pattern of checking and fixing.

BUILDING YOUR LADDER OF SUCCESS FOR ERASING IT

Now it's your turn to take the first steps toward weakening your Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals. Erasing It requires you to do some creative planning to devise a strategy appropriate for yourself. Once you've settled on a strategy, execute it frequently to erase your old pattern.

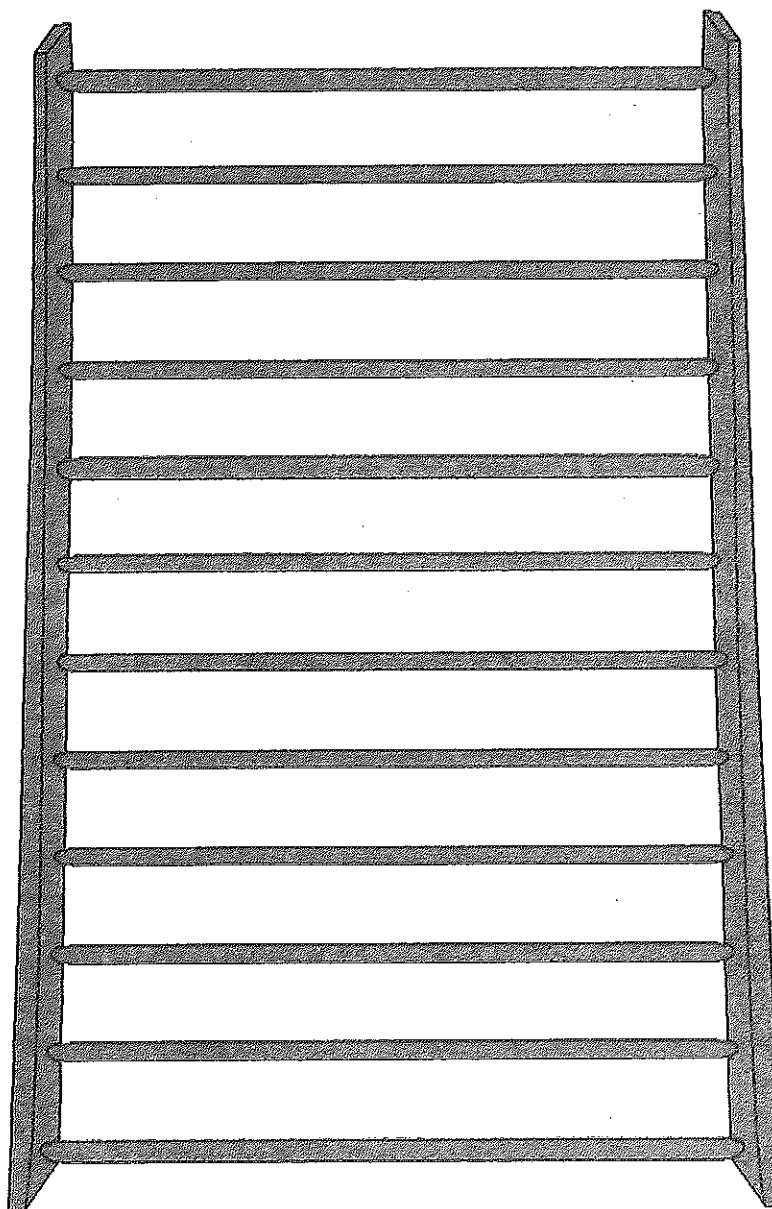
- Go back to the Self-Discovery Helpsheet: What Are My Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals? earlier in this chapter, where you listed your Checking and Fixing Rituals. Read through your list and evaluate how confident you are that you could refrain from the behavior if you were in the situation where it normally occurs. Just as you did in Step 6 when you were preparing to change your Evasive Actions, assign each entry on your list a self-efficacy rating from 0 to 100. This indicates how confident you are that you will be able to refrain from each Checking or Fixing Ritual.
- Arrange these rituals in order of self-efficacy on the following Helpsheet for Change: My Ladder of Success for Erasing It, going from the highest rating at the bottom to the lowest rating at the top.

Helpsheet for Change: My Ladder of Success for Erasing It

Self-efficacy ratings are from 0 for no confidence to 100 for complete confidence.

Self-Efficacy Rating

Checking or Fixing Rituals That I Am Going to Erase:



Helpsheet for Change: My Plan for Erasing It

My appearance-preoccupied Checking and Fixing Ritual: _____

Step-by-Step Plan for Facing It

Prepare: Exactly what will I do?

Act: When? Where? For how long?

Cope: What uncomfortable thoughts and feelings do I expect? How will I accept and cope with them?

Enjoy: How will I reward my efforts?

What were my results of Facing It?

Preparing and Executing Your Plans for Erasing It

- Start with the ritual at the bottom—the easiest one to eliminate. Write out your plan for Erasing It, using the Helpsheet for Change: My Plan for Erasing It. You'll want to make several copies of this Helpsheet to use for each ritual, or you can use your own notebook to write out your plan in this format.
- PACE yourself, just as you do when Facing It to manage your Evasive Actions. As you plan, anticipate and specify each step—Prepare, Act, Cope, and Enjoy. Visualize yourself carrying out your plan, coping effectively with any troubling thoughts or feelings, and affirming and enjoying your accomplishment.
- You've made and rehearsed your plan for Erasing It. Now go for it!
- One rung at a time, just keep climbing your ladder. When you've made headway with several Checking or Fixing Rituals, go ahead and begin Step 8 of this workbook. Continue to follow through on your Erasing It plans.

FINAL WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The behavioral changes you make by doing the work of Steps 6 and 7 represent important strides in your journey toward body acceptance. They enable you to shed your old self-defeating habits that are fruitless efforts to protect yourself from uncomfortable inner experiences. As you continue to work on these changes, I want you to face forward and imagine your life free from Evasive Actions and Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals. Close your eyes and take about fifteen minutes to picture this new life clearly and in detail. Mindfully immerse yourself in this vision. How is your life different? How does it feel to be rid of these behaviors? How do you feel about yourself?

STEP 8

Treating Your Body Well

All human relationships involve a fundamental exchange of actions and reactions between people. We exchange both positive and negative giving and receiving. In satisfying romantic relationships or friendships, we feel that the giving and the getting are balanced fairly. Positive, rewarding exchanges greatly exceed and overshadow negative, punitive exchanges. Good times can redeem bad times.

In unhappy relationships, giving and receiving are out of balance, and negative exchanges outweigh the few good times. One common complaint is "I'm not being treated right. I deserve better than this!" Discontent can range from resigned disappointment to raging anger and resentment. Whether in self-protection, protest, or retaliation, each person tends to react in ways that make the relationship deteriorate even further. But quietly withdrawing and avoiding or ignoring one's partner won't restore troubled relations to a better balance. Angrily demanding better treatment and punishing your partner for not providing it only make matters worse.

POSITIVE BODY-SELF RELATIONS

So, perhaps you are wondering, what does all this have to do with body image? Well, your body image does involve a relationship—between you and your body. If it's a frustrating, unhappy one, the "gives and gets" seem unjust and the exchanges are distressing and demeaning. You then react in ways that worsen rather than affirm and enhance your relations with your body. Understanding how you mistreat your "body-partner" is essential to turning this relationship around.

Thus far in this workbook, the principal emphasis has been on changing your negative interactions with your body. By correcting your distorted Private Body Talk, you deescalate the critical assaults and accusations you direct at your body-partner. You are also working on becoming less demanding of perfection and more accepting of your body-partner's shortcomings. By Facing and Erasing your self-defeating

patterns of behavior, you are becoming less obsessed with your frustrating and resentful efforts to fix or control your body-partner.

These are necessary changes, but they aren't enough. As with all satisfying human relationships, a successful body-partnership requires more than the absence of bad times. Have you ever felt fulfilled by a friendship solely because your friend didn't belittle you? How many people do you know who are happily married only because their spouses don't berate them? The truth is that good things happen in good relationships. They thrive as the result of affirming and rewarding experiences, not just because of a lack of distressing ones. In Step 8, the final step of this workbook, you'll learn how to add good times to your relationship with your body.

If you wanted to improve a troubled relationship with a friend or relative, I would counsel you to create new shared experiences. I would tell you to put aside complaints from the past and to concentrate on the present. Both of you would commit to doing what you know you have to do to make things better—even if you don't feel like doing it. You would stop the mutual finger-pointing and say to one another, "I'm truly sorry. I know I haven't treated you well. I want to start fresh. I want to be as good to you as I can." Each of you would say, and affirm, something like this: "In the future, rather than being so faultfinding, I'm going to remind both you and myself of what I value in you."

TAKING AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS

Affirmative Actions are vital to improve your relationship with your body. These actions involve doing special things to foster positive body image thoughts and feelings. With conscious, mindful effort, you can counteract the quagmire of your previous negative experiences and start anew. To get started, first you need to make amends with your body.

Writing Wrongs

When thinking of your body as you would a friend, you can reach only one conclusion: You've mistreated your friend. In this exercise, you will write your body-partner a letter expressing your wish to set your relationship on a better course. In your letter, using the following Helpsheets, you will apologize to your body-partner for your prior mistreatment, express assurances that you want to change, and thank your body-partner for the good things it has given you.

Write this letter as you would write to an estranged friend with whom you want to restore relations. When you finish writing, keep your letter nearby, perhaps taped to your bathroom mirror. Put it somewhere that you will not fail to see it. It will be a reminder of your new attitude.

Right now you may be thinking, "You want me to do what? Write a letter to my body? That's weird!" Yes, maybe it is a little unusual. But that's okay. Do it anyway. Suspend judgment and see what happens. To help you draft your letter, here's a really thoughtful one that Ashley wrote to her body to use as a model.

Dear Body of Mine,

For years, I've done nothing but criticize you. I can't believe the inconsiderate and unkind things I've said about you. I've really been thoughtless and disrespectful. I am so sorry! This is an apology I've owed you for a long time.

We've had some great times together and you've done a lot for me. Still, I never gave you the credit you really deserve. If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have been on my high school swim team or won that gymnastics award. I wouldn't have had so much fun at all the dances I've gone to or been able to take all those wonderful walks along the beach. And, oh yes, I wouldn't have been able to enjoy my first kiss! You've also managed to get me terrific compliments. People often say how warm your smile is and how nice you look in a new outfit.

Rather than see your assets and appreciate all you've done for me, I dwelled on how much you weigh. I know it's not fair for me to eat burritos, cheesecake, ice cream, and the other stuff, and then to blame you for gaining a few pounds. I've also said some pretty nasty things to you sometimes just because your hair isn't the way I want it to be at the moment.

Body of Mine, the truth is you're not so fat. I'm just scared you'll get fat, so I exaggerate sometimes. And I do like your hair. I expect too much perfection of you. Sorry! I hope you'll forgive me and we can have a better relationship from now on. I promise to be kinder to you. See you soon in the mirror!

With love and regrets, Ashley

Now it's your turn to write a letter to your body-partner.

Helpsheet for Change: Writing Wrongs

Dear Body of Mine,

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Achieving and Pleasing with Positive Physical Activities

Bodies are much more than what they look like; they are instruments of action and sensation. People with a negative body image often neglect taking satisfaction from their bodies in ways that have nothing to do with appearance. Preoccupied with loathing, hiding, and repairing their looks, they also fail to find opportunities to enjoy their appearance. As stated above, Affirmative Actions are intended to improve your relationship with your body by doing special things to foster positive body image thoughts and feelings. These Affirmative Action opportunities fall into three categories of bodily experience: (1) physical health and fitness (i.e., feeling physically competent or healthy), (2) sensate experiences (i.e., your awareness of bodily sensations), and (3) physical appearance.

Within each of these categories, there are two psychological experiences that enhance your relationship with your body—mastery and pleasure. *Mastery* produces gratifying feelings of accomplishment from reaching a set goal. For example, setting and achieving the goal of running two miles or swimming ten laps can provide a satisfying sense of mastery. *Pleasure* simply means having fun. It doesn't require reaching a goal, only enjoying an activity because it inherently feels good. For instance, getting a massage or relaxing in a hot tub brings about calming, soothing sensations. Some activities furnish both mastery and pleasure. For example, aerobic dance involves mastering new moves and achieving improved fitness and also provides a pleasing, invigorating sense of bodily freedom.

Self-Discovery Helpsheets: Survey of Positive Physical Activities

For each activity below, rate how often you engaged in the activity during the past year. Then rate how much mastery you experienced and how much pleasure you felt. If you did not engage in the activity, rate the mastery and pleasure you would expect to feel.

Frequency during the past year:

- 0 = I never did this.
- 1 = I did this once or only a few times.
- 2 = I did this fairly often.
- 3 = I did this often.

The experience of **Mastery** refers to your sense of accomplishment or achievement felt when engaging in the activity.

- 0 = None
- 1 = Slight
- 2 = Moderate
- 3 = A lot

The experience of **Pleasure** refers to feeling enjoyment or having fun when engaging in the activity.

- 0 = None
- 1 = Slight
- 2 = Moderate
- 3 = A lot

Frequency	Mastery	Pleasure	Health and Fitness Activities
_____	_____	_____	1. Taking a long or brisk walk, jogging, or running
_____	_____	_____	2. Water recreation (swimming, scuba, snorkeling, waterskiing, surfing, windsurfing)
_____	_____	_____	3. Boating recreation (sailing, canoeing, kayaking, rowing, or rafting)
_____	_____	_____	4. Playing a team sport (baseball, softball, football, etc.)
_____	_____	_____	5. Roller-skating, roller-blading, skate-boarding, or ice-skating
_____	_____	_____	6. Playing tennis, racquetball, or squash
_____	_____	_____	7. Playing golf
_____	_____	_____	8. Working out on exercise machines or lifting weights
_____	_____	_____	9. Downhill skiing or cross-country skiing
_____	_____	_____	10. Hiking or rock climbing
_____	_____	_____	11. Indoor recreation (billiards, table tennis, bowling)
_____	_____	_____	12. Playing lawn sports (badminton, croquet, etc.)
_____	_____	_____	13. Horseback riding
_____	_____	_____	14. Bicycle riding
_____	_____	_____	15. Aerobic dance exercise
_____	_____	_____	16. Doing gymnastics or exercising on a trampoline
_____	_____	_____	17. Doing calisthenics (push-ups, sit-ups, etc.)
_____	_____	_____	18. Doing yoga
_____	_____	_____	19. Doing heavy outdoor work, lawn work, or gardening
_____	_____	_____	20. Individual dancing (ballet, expressive, etc.)
_____	_____	_____	21. Social dancing

Frequency	Mastery	Pleasure	Sensate Activites
			22. Getting a foot massage, back rub, or body massage
			23. Giving a body massage
			24. Having a scalp massage
			25. Having a manicure or pedicure
			26. Brushing your hair in a soothing manner
			27. Soaking in a hot tub
			28. Taking a relaxing shower or bath
			29. Sunbathing
			30. Having sexual relations
			31. Masturbating
			32. Rubbing your own body with lotion
			Appearance-Oriented Activites
			33. Getting a facial
			34. Getting a cosmetic makeover
			35. Wearing new or colorful clothes
			36. Wearing fashionable or formal clothes
			37. Wearing favorite casual clothes
			38. Wearing your hair in a different style
			39. Putting on makeup
			40. Wearing favorite jewelry
			41. Wearing cologne or perfume
			42. Brushing or whitening your teeth

Feel free to add other activities to the list!

Frequency	Mastery	Pleasure	Health and Fitness Activities
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
			Other Sensate Activities
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
			Other Appearance-Oriented Activities
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Your Scores (see the text below to learn how to score your survey.)

Health and Fitness Activities: _____

Sensate Activities: _____

Appearance-Oriented Activities: _____

The following Self-Discovery Helpsheets lists possible sources of physical mastery and pleasure. Answer the survey questions to begin discovering potential ways to act affirmatively toward developing a more balanced, fulfilling relationship with your body.

Next, review your answers to the survey so that you can obtain your Positive Physical Activities scores. Here's how to do it:

- Regardless of how often you engaged in the activities, circle those that you rated as 2 or 3 on either pleasure or mastery.
- Classify the circled activities as relating either to health and fitness, sensate experiences, or physical appearance. Beside each, write *H* for health and fitness, *S* for sensate experiences, or *A* for appearance. If you find that some fall into more than one category, you may mark them more than once, but think about which category the activity fits best. Many activities have the potential to create different experiences for different people. For example, although some people would regard "getting a facial" as an appearance activity, others might regard it as sensate because of the tactile pleasure enjoyed during the process. Similarly, an activity like lifting weights can cover lots of experiential

ground—enhancing feelings about appearance, promoting an awareness of being strong or fit, or evoking certain bodily sensations during the workout.

- Count the number of circled activities in each category. Omit any that aren't feasible to do within the next month. For example, don't count "sexual relations" if you're not in a sexual relationship. Forget about "rock climbing" if your arm is in a cast. For activities that relate to multiple categories, only count them in one primary category. Enter these scores at the bottom of the Self-Discovery Helpsheets. How many Health and Fitness Activities did you circle? How many Sensate Activities? And how many Appearance-Oriented Activities?
- Choose at least four activities from each of the three categories. If you have fewer than four, here are some ideas for coming up with more: Look for circled items that you can break down into more specific activities. For example, "playing team sports" lists multiple sports, so choose the ones you do. "Wearing favorite casual clothes" could be split into "wearing my favorite jeans" and "wearing my red bow tie." If there are activities that you initially placed in multiple categories but counted only in one primary category, reassign a few to a secondary category that needs more activities. Finally, to expand the list, ask yourself, "What have I done or considered doing that could lead me to feel physical mastery or pleasure?"
- Write down these twelve activities (or more!) on the following Helpsheets for Change. Soon you will use your chosen activities to build a better relationship with your body.

The next three sections of this chapter focus on the ways that you will use these activities for Affirmative Actions. By committing some of your quality time to these experiences, your relationship with your body has a very good chance to experience positive change.

Having Good Times with Health and Fitness Activities

Affirmative Actions for health and fitness nurture your experiences of physical competence and well-being. Routine exercise can benefit your body image, as well as your overall mental health. Compared to couch potatoes, whose only workouts are with the remote control for the television set, regular exercisers typically feel better about their fitness, their health, and also their appearance.

The most formidable obstacles to health and fitness activities pertain to motivation. Studies of people's motives for exercise reveal these four basic reasons: (1) to be more attractive or to lose weight; (2) to improve physical competence, fitness, and health; (3) to improve mood and manage stress; and (4) to meet, socialize with, and have fun with others.

Individuals with the first motive exercise to achieve a certain look—to look fit or slimmer or more muscular. Good health is incidental. Women are somewhat more likely than men to exercise primarily to manage their appearance and weight. Research has demonstrated that a negative body image is more prevalent among people who exercise for this reason. However, neither the mirror nor the scale measures your body's capabilities.

Helpsheet for Change: My Positive Physical Activities

Based on the results of your Survey of Positive Physical Activities, fill in the following:

List at least four Health and Fitness Activities that you will carry out:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

List at least four Sensate Activities that you will carry out:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

List at least four Appearance-Oriented Activities that you will carry out:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Physical exercise is most psychologically rewarding when done for the right reasons. Becoming physically competent and fit is certainly a good reason. Physical competence and fitness reflect what your body can do—its athletic abilities, flexibility, coordination, strength, stamina, and endurance. This mastery component of exercise represents the second motivation listed above. This is certainly a healthy reason to exercise, unless taken to the extreme.

Compulsive exercisers' pursuit of physical mastery can become dangerously consuming, or even addictive, as they push themselves harder and harder to achieve ever-more rigorous feats of physical mastery. Driven to achieve perfect control over their bodies, ultimately they come to feel that their bodies control them. Illness, injury, and other interferences with exercise are exasperating and barely tolerated. They exercise more but with less enjoyment. By contrast, regular physical activity done in sensible moderation can benefit your emotional life and your body image. As for the other motives, exercise also can be a pleasurable way to socialize with others and it is an effective tool for managing stress.

One scholarly summary of research pointed to the positive effects of physical activity training on body image (Martin and Lichtenberger 2002). Moreover, these body image benefits don't necessarily require substantial improvements in fitness per se; nor do they require reductions in weight. For example, in 1994, psychologists at the University of South Florida (Fisher and Thompson) discovered that a program of aerobic activity and weight training fostered body image improvements. In 1995, Sherri Hensley-Crosson and I evaluated the effects of regular participation in an aerobic dance class. Not only did the exercisers enhance their cardiovascular fitness, they also developed a more satisfying body image than did their sedentary peers. In 2001, Pamela Williams and I investigated the effects of circuit weight training. When compared with a control group, those who did weight training had greater body image satisfaction, less physical self-consciousness, and improved feelings of physical competence. All of these studies showed body image improvements after several weeks.

To get more out of exercise, you should shift your attention away from issues of appearance or weight control and focus more on the satisfying experiences of physical mastery and pleasure. Learn how exercise can help you improve mood, manage stress, and enjoy the company of others. One excellent reason to be physically active is that you can have such good times working out with others.

This week, set aside time for one or two of the Health and Fitness Activities you selected. I'm not asking you to run a marathon or to start training for the Olympics. Of course, before embarking on an exercise program, especially if you've been inactive for a while or have any health problems, consult your physician about your plans.

Don't be so demanding or judgmental of your physical competence that you take all the fun out of exercise. As a Nike slogan says, "Just Do It!" While you engage in these activities, monitor your feelings of mastery and pleasure. On the Helpsheets that follows, rate your experiences. Each week, do just one or two of these activities, including the new ones, and record your experiences.

Having Good Times with Sensate Activities

Your body has millions of highly specialized cells that enable you to experience it and the world around you. You can take in the visual beauty of a colorful sunset or a baby's smile. You can sense the essence of fragrant flowers. You can savor your favorite flavor. You can experience the symphonic sounds of an orchestra or the melody of a distant songbird. You can feel your body move rhythmically to music.

Helpsheet for Change: My Positive Sensate Activities

Ratings are 0 = None; 1 = Slight; 2 = Moderate; 3 = A lot.

[illegible]

You can feel your skin luxuriate in the sun's gentle warmth and the coolness of a soft breeze. You can be soothed by the caring touch of a loved one. If you're like most people, you take for granted such wonderful, sensate experiences. With all these riches that your body endows you, why dwell unappreciatively on what your body looks like?

Each week from now on, create opportunities to enjoy at least two of the Sensate Activities from your Positive Physical Activities Helpsheet. Schedule them and then carry them out. Mindfully immerse yourself in the pleasurable feelings that will arise. Let your sensate pleasure fill your consciousness. As enjoyable as these experiences may be, don't always schedule the same ones (like having sex!). Expand your sensory horizons to include activities such as bubble baths, head rubs (do it yourself if necessary), or body massages (with a little help from a friend). Use the Helpsheet to record the enjoyment you harvest each time. You need not rate mastery, of course. Sensate activities are treats of pleasure, not achievement.

Having Good Times with Appearance-Oriented Activities

In Steps 6 and 7, you began chiseling away at the various self-protective behaviors you use to manage your looks. You realize now that your Evasive Actions and Appearance-Preoccupied Rituals have undermined your body image. Many of these problematic patterns of behavior pertain to appearance management or grooming. But grooming doesn't have to create problems. It can enhance your feelings of mastery and pleasure. Whether your grooming affirms a positive body image or perpetuates a negative one depends on which type of groomer you are. There are three basic types:

1. The individual who Grooms to Hide and repeatedly checks and fixes her or his appearance is called the *Insatiable Groomer*. You will recognize this appearance-preoccupied pattern from Step 7. Primping, preening, fussing, and fretting are incessant. Satisfaction is fleeting.
2. A second pattern also seldom brings good times. *Gloomy Groomers* have given up on their looks. They mostly neglect their appearance, believing either that nothing could ever improve their looks or that they lack the ability to do so. Gloomy Groomers often fear doing anything to call attention to their body and invite self-consciousness. Therefore, they cling to a restricted range of "safe" looks. Some rationalize their pattern by thinking that grooming is somehow bad—self-absorbed or provocative.

Consider Norma, who's worn the same aqua eye shadow, pink lipstick, and thick black mascara for about twenty years. She's pulled her hair into a ponytail for nearly as long. She always wears loose-fitting, ankle-length dresses, usually of solid black or dark gray. Norma "doesn't care for" her appearance. She's unwilling to attempt even simple grooming changes that would allow her to enjoy her looks more. To her, enjoying her looks would seem vain. Besides, she hasn't a clue of what she would do.

3. The first two types of grooming are clearly self-defeating. Insatiable Groomers stir up trouble. Gloomy Groomers want to leave bad enough alone. Both types have an inflexible relationship with their body's appearance. The third type of groomer has the best attitude. This *Flexible Groomer* is neither preoccupied with compulsive grooming nor neglectful of appearance. The Flexible Groomer has adaptively discovered a happy medium between unhappy extremes. My

Helpsheet for Change: My Positive Appearance-Oriented Activities

Ratings are 0 = None; 1 = Slight; 2 = Moderate; 3 = A lot.

[illegible]

own research findings confirm the advantages of being a Flexible Groomer. For example, we found that women who are versatile in their use of facial makeup feel more in control socially than women who are rigid in their use of cosmetics (Cash, Rissi, and Chapman 1985). Further, women who always wear lots of makeup, no matter what situation they're in, underestimate their unadorned attractiveness (Cash et al. 1989). Their makeup is more a mask of self-imposed concealment than an optional and enjoyable adornment. Flexible grooming offers you choices and the affirming experience that you are acceptable with a variety of looks. It provides opportunities for pleasure and playfulness.

As a Flexible Groomer, Kristin's basic goal is to enhance her appearance in ways that express her individuality. She uses cosmetics in moderation, and she isn't reluctant to explore a new look from time to time. When selecting clothing colors and styles, Kristin wears what delights *her* eye—rather than conforming to the dictates of fashion or what best camouflages the thighs she's not so fond of. About once a year, she changes her hairstyle, simply because she experiences this as a refreshing change. Kristin doesn't depend on other people's compliments to enjoy her appearance. In fact, only a few friends know where her beloved butterfly tattoo is located. She doesn't aspire to be a flawless beauty; neither does she try to neutralize her looks. A Flexible Groomer like Kristin isn't afraid to look less than perfect or afraid to experiment.

Becoming a Flexible Groomer is possible through two parallel paths of action: First, keep using the lessons from Steps 6 and 7 to lessen your self-defensive grooming. Keep on Facing It and Erasing It! Second, carry out Affirmative Actions that provide positive appearance-oriented experiences. Learn to use the mood-altering tools of adornment—like clothing styles, fabrics, colors, cosmetics, hairstyles, jewelry, and fragrances—to enjoy your appearance. Don't work at it! Play at it! Flexible Grooming is fun.

Deriving enjoyment from your grooming activities doesn't mean you are a vain person. It just means you accept the body that's yours. What could be bad about that? Creating mastery experiences might involve figuring out how to put your clothes together to achieve a certain style you like and always thought you could never even attempt. It might involve learning how to apply makeup more effectively or how to do your hair in an easier-to-manage style. Be mindful of your motives, though. Mastery at concealing "defects" or at emulating a movie star is not healthy mastery.

Examine the Appearance-Oriented Activities that you listed on your Positive Physical Activities Helpsheet. Carry out a couple of these activities each week. Remember to record your experiences on the following Helpsheet. Enjoy the good times!

AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS: AFFIRMING YOUR CHANGES

We began this chapter by recognizing that we each have an ongoing relationship with our body and that an unhappy body-self relationship requires positive experiences to promote positive change. You composed your Writing Wrongs letter of apology to your body and began to create rewarding experiences with it. In earlier Steps of this workbook, you've made genuine efforts to change the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that interfere with your acceptance of your body.

Now it's time to reflect upon and appreciate the body image improvements that you have accomplished. This is a truly important Affirmative Action. I want you to take some quiet time, at least an hour, to contemplate this. Please be especially mindful and specific in your review of how your

Self-Discovery Helpsheet: How I've Improved My Body Image

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

experiences of your body have changed. How are you different in how you think, feel, and behave? This is not an invitation to think about what you haven't changed yet. In the Self-Discovery Helpsheets, write about each of the improvements, however big or small, that you've made in your relationship with your body. In your narrative, be sure to express how these improvements feel.

FINAL WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

In our lives, our personal views of reality often hold us back, preventing us from becoming everything we can be. In the popular movie *Forrest Gump*, Forrest didn't understand that he wasn't supposed to be able to do all the things he imagined he could do. So he lived his dreams in accordance with what his mama taught him—that "life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." She also taught him that "you have to do the best with what God gave you." So, despite his limitations and the challenges that life brought to him, he happily lived all of his aspirations. Just as Forrest created a successful life for himself, creating a positive relationship with your body is ultimately up to you.

What new Affirmative Actions can you dream up that would enhance your body image? Sorry, no suggestions from me on this one. Just be aware of your intuitive insights about what would be helpful to you. Challenge your creativity and put your innovative ideas into action. Be forever mindful of the good times that you have with your body.

In the following Afterword of your *Body Image Workbook*, I will share important tips to help you preserve the gains you've achieved and for handling any unforeseen challenges that may arise in the months and years ahead. So please keep reading!