

## Background

Dr. Jennifer B. Webb is an Associate Professor of Psychology and Health Psychology at UNC Charlotte. She has a PhD in Clinical Psychology and an MA in Psychology from the University of Southern California, and a BA in Cognitive Neuroscience from Harvard University. She is the author of numerous articles on body image, binge eating disorders and weight bias, and has received funding from the NIH, UNC and Duke University in support of her research.

## Research

Dr. Webb describes her work as studying “the positive psychology of eating, body image and weight particularly among ethnically-diverse young women during the developmental period of emerging adulthood. We strive to better understand what promotes healthy approaches to food intake like intuitive and mindful eating. We integrate Eastern-based approaches like self-compassion and mindfulness in understanding how to cope effectively with body dissatisfaction and other body-related stressors.” Her lab also uses a Health at Every Size philosophy, experiencing and expressing a positive body image and engaging in health-promoting behaviors regardless of one's weight, size, and/or shape, examining the effects of weightism in the everyday experiences of weight-related micro aggressions. “We also study the effects of internalized weight bias on body image and eating in weight-diverse female samples,” she notes, and “investigate the associations among Yoga, body image, and eating behavior.”

## Relevance

“My lab's work draws from health psychology, public health, women's health, feminist psychology and has the potential to stimulate research-informed activism in the contexts of promoting greater health and well-being for members of marginalized groups.” These groups include ethnic minority women and women experiencing the oppressive forces of weight stigma due to their body size/shape/weight not conforming to Western culture's narrowly-defined standards of acceptable physical attractiveness. “We want to empower women from diverse backgrounds to practice self-compassion and body appreciation and bolster adaptive ways of relating to one's body and to the process of eating. These life skills are vital at the individual level to effectively counteract the negative messages that young women and girls are continuously exposed to in the media and can promote more group level agency to constructively challenge these broader cultural forces' promulgation of stereotypical representations of ethnic minority and size diverse women. We also want to continue to join with others in the effort to promote greater awareness of the fact that the practice of Yoga is literally for EVERY body and is not meant to be a practice that is exclusively meant for those with a specific stereotypically thin and lean body type. Approaching Yoga with mindfulness and self-compassion can be a powerful vehicle for promoting personal growth and committed action that transcends an emphasis on what the body looks like but rather on how the body feels and functions.