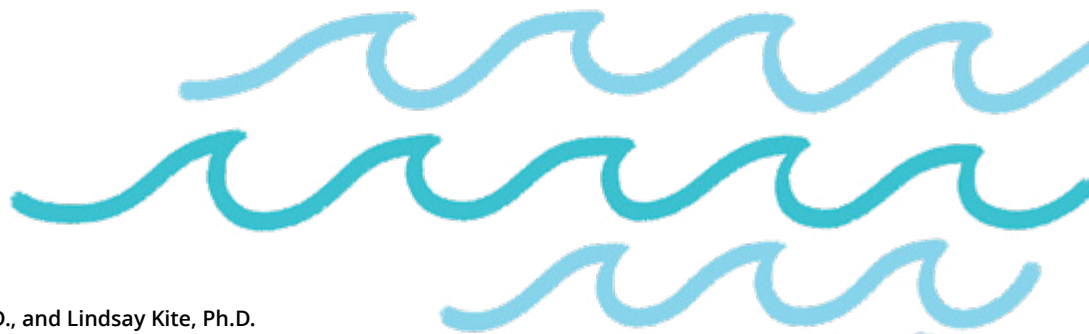




A negative body image may be holding you back, but **you have the power to change the LENS** you see yourself through.

More Than
A Body:
SEEING AS
GOD SEES



By Lexie Kite, Ph.D., and Lindsay Kite, Ph.D.

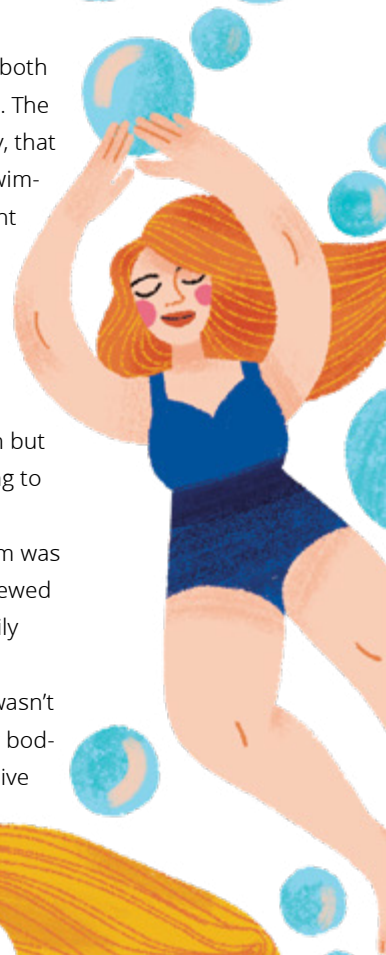
As identical twins, we've always had a lot in common. Growing up, we both loved swimming and joined a competitive swim team at six years old. The heart-racing feeling before each race was exhilarating. Unfortunately, that exciting feeling quickly turned to fear about how we looked in our swimsuits. For both of us, our appearance started to creep to the forefront of our every thought.

In middle school, we each filled journals with weight-loss goals, food logs, and our most beauty-obsessed thoughts—stacked on shelves next to teen magazines promoting the latest fashion and beauty fixes.

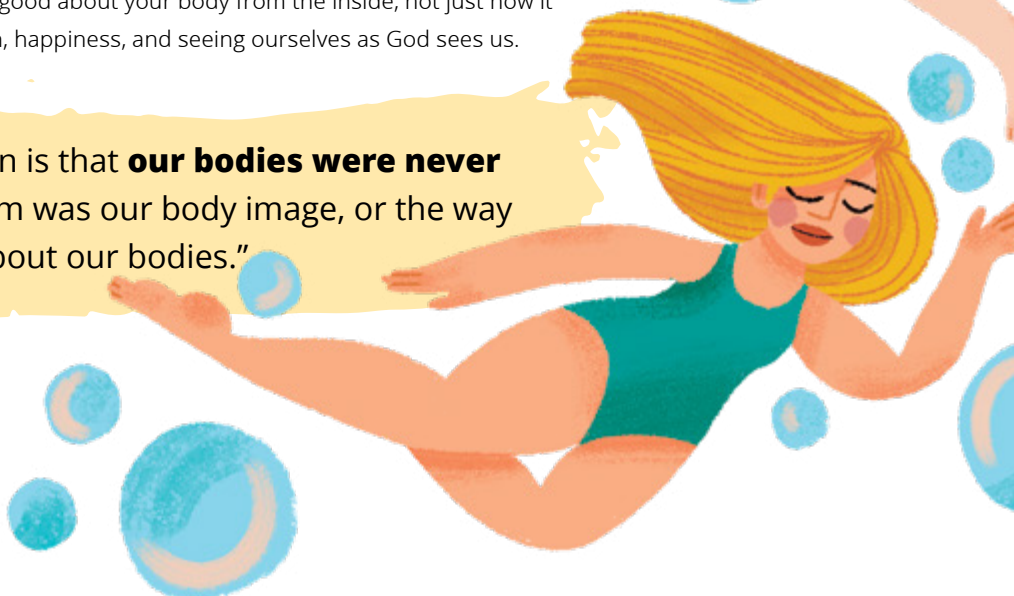
At age 15, we both quit swimming—not because we hated to swim but because we hated the way we looked in our swimsuits. Our years of relentlessly trying to “fix” our bodies simply hadn’t worked.

What we didn’t realize then is that our bodies were never the problem. The problem was our body image, or the way we viewed and thought about our bodies. It had been skewed by all kinds of influences, including movies, TV, magazines, and even friends and family who learned from all of these same sources.

After years of struggling, things changed. We even started swimming again. But it wasn’t dieting or makeovers that did the trick—it was learning how our skewed views of our bodies had held us back in every way. Our research has showed us that developing positive body image—or feeling good about your body from the inside, not just how it looks—is a key to health, happiness, and seeing ourselves as God sees us.



What we didn’t realize then is that **our bodies were never the problem.** The problem was our body image, or the way we viewed and thought about our bodies.”



The Root of NEGATIVE BODY IMAGE

Our culture tends to objectify both women's and men's bodies. It teaches us to see people as bodies (or objects) first and people second, which leads us to judge and value people by how they

Be More Accepting of Yourself

I plead with you young women to **PLEASE** be more accepting of yourselves, including your body shape and style, with a little less longing to look like someone else. We are **ALL DIFFERENT**. Some are **TALL**, and some are **SHORT**. Some are **ROUND**, and some are **THIN**. And almost everyone at some time or other wants to be something they are not! . . . Every young woman is a child of **DESTINY** and every adult woman a **POWERFUL FORCE** for good."

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Oct. 2005 general conference (*Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2005, 29).

look. This leads to negative body image because we are taught that our bodies are the most important things about us and that we need to "fix our flaws" in order to be happy.

So many of us compare ourselves to social media influencers and celebrities who fit all of today's ideals. What we don't see is all the digital editing, styling, trainers, and cosmetic surgery that often goes into getting that look.

The objectifying messages in our culture tell us to think of our own bodies from an outside perspective, as though we were looking in at ourselves. This is called self-objectification. Studies show that when girls are self-conscious of their looks, they don't do as well on math,

reading, or physical fitness tests.

The pain of being objectified and thinking of yourself as an object often leads to eating disorders, anxiety, and depression and pushes people to cope in dangerous ways like self-harm, drug abuse, and unhealthy relationships. It causes people to stop participating in school and sports (like we did), serving others, and pursuing leadership opportunities.

Self-objectification is at the root of negative body image because it puts all the focus on how our bodies *look* rather than how we *feel* or what we can *do*. It prevents us from seeing ourselves as God sees us: as children of our Heavenly Parents with inherent, unchangeable value.



Improving BODY IMAGE

In our research, we found that a key to improving body image is what's called "body image resilience." Being resilient means being able to bounce back from difficult experiences. Our objectifying culture might create trials and burdens for us, but with body image resilience, those trials can be opportunities to grow and improve the ways we cope. We can become more knowledgeable and compassionate and feel better about our bodies *because of*

how we respond to that pain, not *in spite of* it.

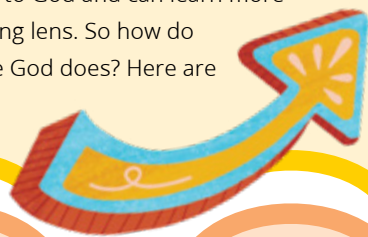
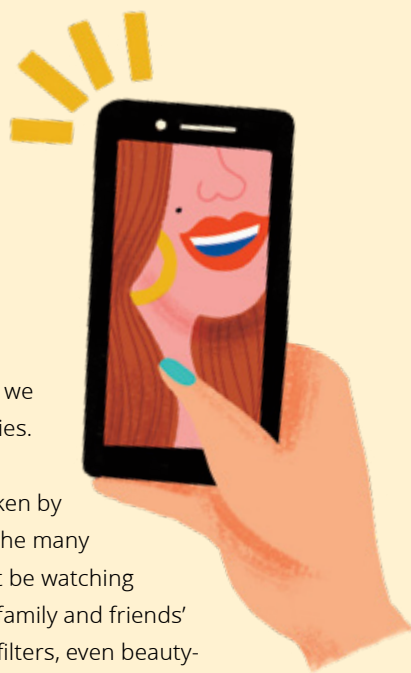
To develop body image resilience, we first need to recognize and reflect on the ways distorted messages about bodies have shaped our views of ourselves and others. We can then practice new strategies to grow in response to those views and painful experiences. One of those strategies is to understand our divine identities as children of loving Heavenly Parents.

Seeing MORE CLEARLY

Let's start with recognizing and reflecting on the distorted ways we are tempted to think about bodies. How many times have you seen yourself in a picture or video taken by you or someone else? Think of the many lenses through which you might be watching yourself grow up: the lenses of family and friends' cameras, your own cellphones, filters, even beauty-enhancing apps.

The Apostle Paul taught, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). The glass Paul described was like a cloudy or opaque mirror. We may also see ourselves "through a glass darkly" if we look at ourselves through mental lenses that have been distorted by our image-obsessed culture and determine our worth based on that warped and limited view.

But Paul's words could imply that we could one day see ourselves as God sees us. We are known to God and can learn more of who we really are through that loving lens. So how do we clean our lens so we see more like God does? Here are four things you can do.



4 Tips to Clean Your LENS

1 See your body as an instrument, not an ornament. Think of your body as a tool for experiencing life the way God intends, not just something to be looked at. Focus on how you feel and what you can do.

2 Try a media cleanse or fast. Try taking a break from media, and then take inventory of what you're viewing when you go back. Do the images you see or the accounts you follow spark your body anxiety or shame? Do they objectify people? If so, you have the power to unfollow, unsubscribe, and fill your feed with goodness.

3 Take responsibility for your own thoughts and actions. Regardless of what anyone else wears or does, you can decide to view them as a person, not an object. Respect others' agency to make choices that are different from yours and treat them with dignity.

4 Join forces with others to see more and be more. Ask friends and family to join you in rejecting objectifying media and conversation. Speak up about the importance of seeing ourselves and others as more than a body, and back it up by how you talk about yourself and others.

Seeing AS GOD SEES

Our Heavenly Parents want you to be happy and understand your value, power, and potential in this world. The Holy Ghost can help us to see "things as they really are" (Jacob 4:13)—not through distorted lenses. You can contribute so much to this world that is in need of you—not just a pretty vision of you, but *all* of you—regardless of your physical ability or appearance. We are all more than a body, and when we can see more in ourselves and others, we can be more. **NE**

The authors live in Utah, USA, and New York, USA, and run a nonprofit organization promoting positive body image.



We are all more than a body, and when we can **see more in ourselves and others**, we can be more."