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## Reclaiming our Body Authority: Five Ways to move from “Bodylessness” to “Bodyfulness”

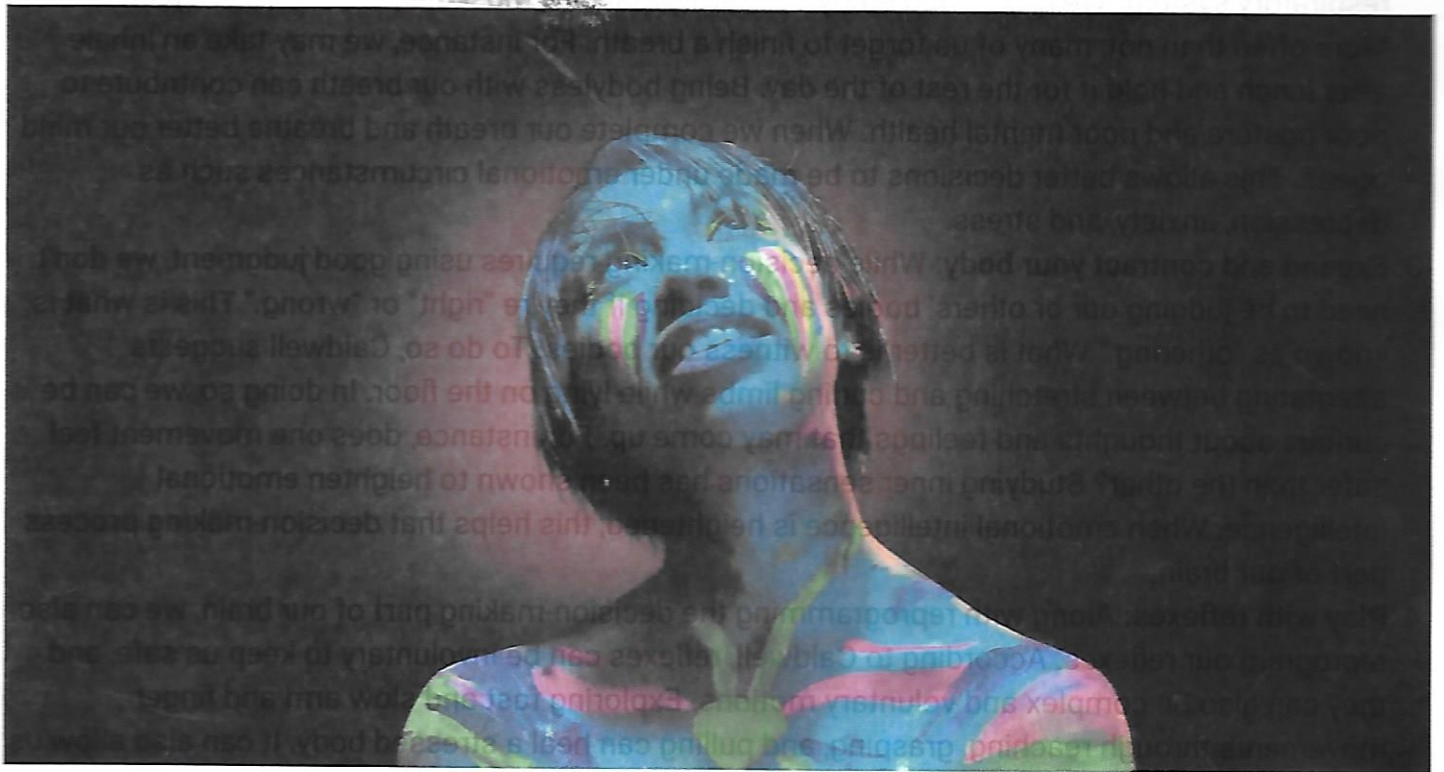


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### Bodyful Authority

We know the practice of mindfulness is ubiquitous: in phone apps, streaming services, wellness centers, schools, and offices. But mindfulness is connected with a few other words that somatic counselor Christine Caldwell calls “Bodyfulness and “Bodylessness.” The article “Why Bodyfulness Matters to the Mind” introduces the concept of bodyfulness along with a few breathing exercises, while this article introduces ways to move from being bodyless.



### Bodyless is Being Human

While it's important to know that bodyfulness is checking in and reflecting on body sensations and its systems, it's equally important to know that its shadow self, bodylessness, is ignoring, hating, "othering" and treating the body as an object. Because we are human, we've all experienced some form of bodylessness at times. In these times of imperfection, how do we reclaim our body authority so we don't pass negligence and violence on to others?

Here are five ways we can move from bodylessness to bodyfulness:

1. **Check in with body sensations before decision-making:** To move from being unaware of our body to being aware and reflective of the body, this is a great exercise Caldwell offers. Listening to your body may tell you that you're moving with or against your choice. For instance, when choosing to invite a relative over to visit, notice how your breathing is when contemplating. Is it consistent or does it become more anxious thinking of this person's energy?
2. **Lie or sit with one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest:** Noticing your breathing pattern in the moment is one of the best ways to become more bodyful. Using two hands against the diaphragm and ribcage is a common way to check in with multiple body systems, not just the respiratory system. We reflect and study our cardiovascular, muscular, and nervous systems. More often than not, many of us forget to finish a breath. For instance, we may take an inhale after lunch and hold it for the rest of the day. Being bodyless with our breath can contribute to poor posture and poor mental health. When we complete our breath and breathe better our mind opens. This allows better decisions to be made under emotional circumstances such as depression, anxiety, and stress.
3. **Expand and contract your body:** While decision-making requires using good judgment, we don't need to be judging our or others' bodies and deciding if they're "right" or "wrong." This is what is known as "othering." What is better is to witness our bodies. To do so, Caldwell suggests alternating between stretching and curling limbs while lying on the floor. In doing so, we can be curious about thoughts and feelings that may come up. For instance, does one movement feel safer than the other? Studying inner sensations has been shown to heighten emotional intelligence. When emotional intelligence is heightened, this helps that decision-making process part of our brain.
4. **Play with reflexes:** Along with reprogramming the decision-making part of our brain, we can also reprogram our reflexes. According to Caldwell, reflexes can be involuntary to keep us safe, and they can also be complex and voluntary motions. Exploring fast and slow arm and finger movements through reaching, grasping, and pulling can heal a stressed body. It can also allow us to question our reach when it comes to habits. For instance, fast and repetitive reaching may be linked with addiction, a constant and immediate want.
5. **Be bodyful towards others:** From reaching out towards air to reaching out towards loved ones, being bodyful is about studying and listening to all bodies. One practice Caldwell discusses is about absorbing as many details through communication as possible. She guides us towards noticing what one's face, voice, gestures, and posture are all telling us, what they are all feeling. Instead of analyzing, we notice in order to form impressions.

These techniques begin with an individual and enable us to pass on the empowerment behind bodyfulness towards the rest of our community.

