

# THE BODY IS NOT AN APOLOGY

## THE POWER OF RADICAL SELF LOVE

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One of the most impactful, difficult, and underexplored ways we form early messages about our bodies is a result of abuse and trauma. Not only have we grown up in societies that shame difference and judge by the metric of body-based oppression, but many of us grew up navigating personal physical and sexual harm. These memories can shape how we understand touch, pleasure, pain and whether we experience our bodies as sites of safety or danger.

When physical and sexual abuse happens in our childhoods, we are far more likely to personalise the harm, believing we must have done something to cause it. Survivors of abuse may often come to see their bodies as bad or wrong, blaming themselves and their physical form for the violations they endured. This internalisation can set survivors on a lifetime path of body shame. In black feminist scholar Bell Hook's book *All About Love*, she notes, "*Abused children have been taught that love can coexist with abuse*". This shapes our adult perceptions of love. As we would cling to the notion that those who hurt us as children loved us, we rationalise been hurt by other adults by insisting that they love us. These rationalisations do not only apply to the relationships we have with those who hurt us in the past and present. They can also characterize how we relate to and practise loving ourselves.

We may justify our self-abuse and self-loathing by proclaiming it as "just the way it is," seeing abuse, neglect and hurt as inevitable both externally and internally. Radical self-love returns accountability for the harm done to us back to the perpetrator and invites us to reclaim our victorious bodies.

With radical self-love, we welcome what may feel like an entirely new possibility, one that author and pleasure activist Adrienne Maree Brown encapsulates perfectly when she says, "*I touch my own skin, and it tells me that before there was any harm, there was a miracle.*"

