

"This book is a jailbreak from cultural inscriptions meant to keep us locked up, shut up, and conforming." —LIDIA YUKNAVITCH, author of *The Book of Joan*

Fat, Pretty, and Soon to Be Old

A MAKEOVER FOR
SELF AND SOCIETY

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Diet culture is working on us even in childhood. Can you recall the first time you went on a diet? The first time you were aware of someone else being on a diet? The first time you heard a medical professional discuss dieting?
2. What does appearance conformity mean to you? How do you make a conscious decision to conform (and why)? In what ways do you non-conform and how do you feel the impact of your non-conformity?
3. People talk about “health” all the time. When did you first realize that health wasn’t just about looking “well?” How has your health been influenced by social forces such as sexism or racism, homophobia or ageism?
4. Do you find that you avoid terms like “fat” or “old?” Can you imagine using them as “neutral descriptive terms?” Why and why not?
5. How does “pretty” translate into behavioral expectations in women? How does a “pretty girl” act? In what ways do these behaviors reinforce gender roles?
6. How do we benefit when we judge someone based on their appearance (especially if their appearance is seen as less “good” than our own)?
7. Have you noticed how the media associates attractiveness with positive attributes and ugliness with negative attributes? Can you think of examples of characters in books or films? How do we also do this in our daily lives?
8. Think about hair! How is your hair part of your core identity? How does it express (or suppress) things like gender, race, sexuality, sexual orientation, etc?
9. Have you ever changed something about your appearance for a lover/partner? How did that go for you? For your partner?
10. What role does consumer culture play in appearance privilege? Do you know how much you spend a year on appearance-based products or services? (During the recent quarantine orders, did you have any realizations about the importance of things like haircuts and pedicures in your life?)
11. Has your fear of judgment about your appearance kept you from activities that pique your interest? Or have you had the experience of being the “fat one” or the “old one” (fill in the blank) at the yoga class, dance class, concert, etc.?
12. Try re-reading “Coming Out Fat” and substituting “black” for “fat” and “white” for “thin.” Where does it work and where does it not? What’s happening there?
13. What might it look like to “practice loving bodies and experiences we were taught to disdain?”
14. Have you ever pre-rehearsed come-backs to common insults, as the book suggests? How did that go? Can you choose a predictable fatphobic, ageist, racist, ableist, etc. comment and try it now?
15. What small things can you do to change common narratives about appearance in your household, with family members or with friends?