

Alexis Fernandez-Preiksa

The neuroscience of self-love

How to improve your most important relationship

*For my four grandparents, who are my greatest
example of love. I love you and miss you.*

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Disclaimer

This book was written to offer general advice on ways to improve your self-love and to provide broad information on neuroscience topics and is not a replacement for professional help. While implementing the strategies included in this book can be transformative, nothing can replace speaking to a professional and seeking help from your doctor. If you feel you suffer from a mood disorder or you have suffered from any trauma, this book is only intended to serve as a gentle push for you to go and seek help to aid your healing journey.

Introduction

HELLO AND WELCOME TO THIS BOOK AND NEW CHAPTER FOR you! I am so excited to be able to bring to you a book that combines neuroscience and mindset tools that you can easily apply to your life. My aim is to get you to understand what goes on behind a thought, a feeling, an emotion and a behaviour. You can't change what you don't acknowledge, and understanding key structures and functions of how the brain works will help you make changes to your relationship with yourself and help you increase your self-love.

How does neuroscience connect to self-love? Through science, we are understanding the organ of the personality: the brain. Just like a cardiologist assists with heart health, neuroscience and psychology can assist with moods, emotions and character traits, which are intrinsically tied to self-love. You cannot fully understand the brain without the mind, and you cannot understand the mind without the brain. Therefore, the science of the brain is unique in the sense that you constantly have to marry the science of neurochemicals and biology with the science of behaviour and psychology. They are intimately linked and shouldn't be

separated. Throughout this book, there will be chapters that focus entirely on neurochemicals and connectivity between the brain regions, and other chapters that focus purely on behavioural interventions that will assist with establishing a healthy balance within your brain.

Before you start this book, I urge you to commit to doing each task or exercise as it is laid out. Reading this book from cover to cover without pausing and implementing these tools is not how I intend the reader's experience to be. As you learn, you do. And as you do, you absorb. If you only read, you will take on board a fraction of this information. Don't fall for the trap of telling yourself you will read it again to do the tasks. Commit now and make this the start of your self-love journey. The excuses end here. So, get a notebook and a pen (or something to type on) and let's begin.

I also don't want you to look at this book as just another self-love book. Look at it as your ticket to get further in every single area of your life because, if you commit to reading it and completing the exercises properly, that is what this book will be. Give me (and yourself) your commitment and time, and I will give you the tools to put into practice to make some major changes in your life.

I set out to break things down into digestible chunks. You will first learn what self-love is and how neuroscience is linked to it. Then you will learn how different things, parts of your upbringing and certain experiences, have led you

to become the way you are today. I will then give you tools and hacks to implement in your life and you will see how basic actions can gradually but effectively change how your thoughts are formed and how you experience life.

All the exercises and advice I will give you link back to how you can increase your feelings of self-love by restructuring circuits within the brain and modifying habits you have created. They are all heavily interconnected, and you will see that it takes a holistic approach to achieve true self-love, true self-confidence and true happiness. So go all in and see what unfolds for you over the coming weeks, months and years.

1

What Is Self-Love?



SELF-LOVE HAS MANY DEFINITIONS AND MAY BE INTERPRETED differently by every individual. I see it as accepting yourself whole-heartedly and being happy with the person you are. Self-love is treating yourself with respect, prioritising yourself and focusing on your growth and health because you matter to you.

It is also strongly associated with self-compassion; the ability to be patient and understanding of your challenges, to soothe yourself and be there for yourself when you need to regroup or take a break. It is letting go of having to be perfect because you know that won't change who you are. Who you are is the calm presence that exists behind the chaos that may be going on around you. It is not your achievements, it is not your failures and it certainly is not what people think of you.

Self-love is also something that fluctuates, just like your health. And it is very dependent on the attention you give to it. It is comparable to someone who wants to transform their look by eating a particular diet and training regularly at the gym. You can train all you want and follow a diet to get you to your ideal body; however, if you stop suddenly, then the results will start to fade away. You will be at the mercy of what foods are available and what activity you happen to do and, eventually, you will be back where you started.

But don't let this get you down; working on your self-love becomes easier and easier to do. Just like someone who has transformed their body through eating well and training

hard, or someone who has put in the time and effort to get a degree or qualification, this kind of lifestyle is something that gets embedded into you through your daily rituals and routines. Before you know it, it not only becomes part of you but also becomes something that you love, so much so that when you don't do it, you feel like you are going without. What I want you to do is implement these tools that I am going to give you and make self-love a daily habit, working on your mind the way you would your body, and soon it will become a part of you.

Know that self-love is the foundation to a successful life in every area: relationships, career and general happiness. If you love and respect yourself, it becomes only natural to want to treat yourself better, to eat well, to move your body, to improve your relationships and to believe in yourself to go far in your career. I would argue that if you prioritise self-love and a healthy mind, everything else will fall into place. Do this first. Focus on your self-love journey first because once you get this down pat, not only will everything else fall into place, but it will also fall into place faster than you expect. When you truly love and respect yourself, your capabilities change, your resourcefulness increases and you begin to move mountains.

What is promising to know, and essential that you remember, is that a thought is literally a chemical and chemicals can help make physical changes in the brain. These changes will give you a different life, a different way of perceiving things

and a different way of thinking altogether. Your journey to self-love should be a multi-pronged approach through your actions, beliefs, routines, experiences, self-talk, external statements, external relationships and self-forgiveness. You can't change one thing and keep treating yourself poorly in other areas and expect your brain and beliefs to change completely. The more you do, the better the results. Even if you only implement half of what is recommended in this book, you will still see some significant changes in your life.

2

Your Future Self Is Your Current Self



MOST OF US ARE REALLY GOOD AT THINKING UP IDEAS FOR OUR future. It's not only easy to think of these things but it is also exciting and it feels good. But when it comes to taking the plunge, to starting AND following through, you choke. Why? Because you put way too much responsibility on your future self. You lump all the hard or unpleasant tasks onto the you of tomorrow. Then tomorrow rolls around and you think, 'WHOA, slow down, I'm not in the mood for that amount of action right now, I'm tired!' This is the trap you fall into. Thinking there is a version of yourself somewhere out there in this world that will be willing to do the ground-work to becoming a self-loving legend, with no protest, no procrastination, just enthusiasm; that they will be keen to do what you are not willing to do today.

Ask yourself this. If you are not willing to action that thing RIGHT NOW, what makes you so sure that your future self will? If you can't demonstrate now that you can change something or if you haven't done so in the past (and stuck to a goal), where is the evidence that the future you will want to? If you don't feel the drive or the motivation now, your tomorrow self probably won't, and the you that will exist in three weeks from today won't either.

As part of this love of procrastinating, humans have a compulsion to look at the future through rose-coloured glasses. We think our motivation will be greater than it is now (hence why we start next week). We think we won't feel as hungry, we think we will be in the zone, we think our

energy levels will be through the roof, and we think that our confidence will arise out of thin air so we can go and kick ass at work. I'm not saying these things are not possible. You decide what is possible. But to make these decisions for your future self without taking a drop of action now is setting yourself up for disappointment.

Your future self is your current self. The actions you take now and the thoughts you have now determine who you will be in a week, a month and a year down the track. It is the shit you action NOW that determines your future self, not what your future self will do, because that person will never exist if you don't bring them into reality today. Look at who you are now. You are a result of the past you, your actions or inactions, the goals you achieved, the things you procrastinated on and never did, the thoughts you had about yourself.

I am telling you now, your brain will avoid discomfort at any turn; it is a protective mechanism, so let's not get mad at the brain for making procrastination feel like a good idea (more on the science of this later) and just expect that from yourself. If you are resisting something now, why do you think you won't resist it tomorrow? Stop thinking of your tomorrow self as someone different to the you of today. This is why we procrastinate. Firstly, to avoid discomfort, and secondly because we think it will be easier for our future self to do it. And despite it never working for us, literally ever, we still choose to believe that delusion.