



SpeakOnIt Podcast Season 2: Secrets of Well-being  
Episode 3: Physical Well-being

Dannie 0:00

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Kaelyn 0:12

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Jay 0:24

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Kaelyn 0:46

Hi everyone! Welcome back to SpeakOnIt Season 2: Secrets of Well-being. In today's episode we will be discussing physical well-being and body image.

Dannie 0:55

Joining us today are Dr. Michelle Maidenburg and Fatema Saifuddin. Michelle is the author of the book, "Free Your Child From Overeating: 53 Mind Body Strategies for Lifelong Health." Her book guides practitioners, parents, kids, and teens through Mind Body strategies that help them develop lifelong healthful behaviors. Outside of being an author she also has her own private practice in Harrison, New York, and is the Clinical Director of the Through My Eyes Foundation, and is a Psychology Today blogger. Fatema Saifuddin is a current PhD candidate and former YAB member. Although her primary work focus is in the biomedical field, Fatema is a strong activist that works to address the gaps between research related mentorship, and is currently working on programming through her campus's Diversity and Inclusion Office to create a workshop for Principal Investigators at her campus.

Jay 1:42

So to start us off, we will be doing our favorite check in and it is called, "Rose Bud Thorn."

[Rose-Bud-Thorn Song]



Fatema 1:59

A rose this week for me is that my parents flew in, so I'm getting a lot of good home food. Then a bud would be that I have been getting a lot of new amazing data in my lab. I won't expand on that. I have data and I'm gonna analyze it, it's going to be amazing. So definitely hopeful for how that analysis will look. A thorn has been a tool that I made in the lab that's not working quite in the way that I thought it would. So I am currently working on that and hoping that I can correct that little irritation.

Michelle 2:41

I'm finishing up writing a book, so that's exciting. I just actually finished-finished it. So [I'm] writing up the conclusions, which is very exciting. A bud - something that I'm hopeful for. Well, I'm very interested in doing a TED Talk, and that would be really good for the promotion of my book. So that's something I'm looking forward to, and hopefully it will work out. Let's see, a thorn. It's really good that I can't think of a thorn. I guess that's a good thing, right? I can't think of anything. Just that I need sleep. I find myself just going to sleep way too late, and it's not healthy, so I have to work on that. Yeah.

Jay 3:45

I think for me, I'm [going to] flip and reverse this and use my thorn as the first one. I've been off caffeine for the past month and a half and it's definitely been a transition. It's just a very interesting thing of trying to stay motivated and stay energized while going back to back with meetings and classes and everything. So that has been a journey and I'm still trying to adapt to it. I think a rose for this week is that there is some traction in the research that I'm currently doing as well with our community partners. It kind of looks like we're having at least some sort of product coming out of it or on the way towards that. Then a bud is that I have a plant shopping trip planned with a couple friends. We're going to go to a nursery in the area and I'm just probably going to buy all the cute little plants that I can find that are indoor-friendly. So that's me.

Kaelyn 4:51

I guess a thorn would be - honestly, I'm not entirely sure. There are many things that are thorns in my life, but I can't think of one specifically. I guess [a thorn] would be that I have another midterm coming up, even though I just took one like this week - I think - no, last week. Yeah, I have another midterm coming up. That's gonna be fun to study for. A rose this week - something good that has happened was that I received a new housing offer and I got to move into a new dorm with two new roommates. I moved from a double room to a triple room. I thought that was going to be ify because it's another person and smaller space, but I really like both of them. I'm looking forward to hanging out. We have a lot of similarities, so that's pretty cool. A bud for this week is that a couple Berkeley friends of mine have come to Stanford to go watch the Stanford vs. UCLA football game. That's kind of fun to do!



Dannie 6:03

What should I say is my thorn? I think one thing is we went to the police office hours this morning, like one of my project groups for one of my classes, and I think they told us it was gonna start at 10. Then the spreadsheet signup thing didn't start till 10:30. So we all got there early. Then when they finally showed up, they were like, "What," like, "...you've been here since 30 minutes ago?" I just think it was kind of funny. Little things like that can be thorns sometimes, but at the same time, we made the most of it and just took the time to meet together as a group. I don't know, I guess that makes it not as much of a thorn. A rose would probably be that I decided to join the chorus and we have a retreat tomorrow. It's gonna probably take up most of the day, but so far, I don't know, I just really like the people in it. I like the music repertoire and how in-depth we go with learning vocal technique, and things like that. So it feels good to be back with that, because I did choir a lot in high school. It was just such a big source of stress-relief. I loved it - having that as a break between classes and other things. I guess that would also be my bud - looking forward to that tomorrow.

Kaelyn 7:06

To start off, let's go ahead and define physical well-being. As described by the National Wellness Institute, physical wellness, or as we're calling it well-being, can be described as how one recognizes the need for regular physical activity and learns about diet and nutrition. Although this was the original definition of the dimension, I believe a better definition could be taken from Iowa State's Student Wellness Center, which defines physical wellness as the ability to maintain a healthy quality of life that allows us to get the most out of our daily activities without undue fatigue or physical stress. Additionally, it also means living responsibly and taking care of your body and recognizing that our daily habits and behaviors have a significant impact on our overall health, wellness, and quality of life. Michelle, what are your initial thoughts when presented with this concept?

Michelle 7:59

I think it really has to do with a particular person in terms of how they see their own wellness. I think what we tend to get into is being too specific on the definition. What ends up happening is people get into a kind of a spiral of feeling like they're not doing enough because they're not subscribing to whatever the definition is, and that varies from person to person. It has a lot to do with our energy level, our abilities, and so forth and so on. I think that's why people don't stick to wellness. Sometimes I do talks and workshops, and I'll ask people, "How many of you have lost," you know, "...weight over time?" and everyone's hands inevitably go up. Then I'll say to them, "How many of you have kept it off," you know, "...to sustain it over a period of time," and all the hands go down, inevitably. I think the reason for that is because of this self-deprecation. We constantly find ourselves in self-deprecation, and then we give up. Anything that you really



want to do well, you have to put a lot of practice in, obviously, and it has to become habitualized. I think it could be very uncomfortable, obviously.

People have this inclination that they're supposed to be doing it a certain way. So they give up because they don't like what they're doing or it is particularly uncomfortable. What I try to reinforce with individuals [is that] it's so important that you build yourself up incrementally so that you're not injuring yourself or feeling depleted in some way, right? [It's also important to] take your individual preferences and needs into consideration. That is critical. Let's say you want to do cardiovascular exercise. Not everybody is going to go run three miles, that's not fun for everybody. So if you like to do Zumba, [or] just do movement, or yoga, or whatever it is - just find the thing that works for you. Getting back to the point - I think everyone needs to define it [for themselves]. It also has to be connected to their values. I think people do wellness, for different reasons.

Michelle 10:39

For example, in my book when I talk about kids or adolescents or teens, what parents tend to do is they'll say something like, "Oh, you know, you have to eat well, and exercise. You have to live a long life," or etc. and adolescents and teens are not taught to think about longevity. Like, that's the last thing on their mind, according to them, right? They're invincible, they're going to live forever. So it's not really speaking to what's important to them, and what their value is. So it has to be significant to the person, and I'll just give you a very quick example. I had somebody I was working with and we talked. We were trying to identify what her value is around wellness. We're kind of going, and I actually came up with a number of values that I identified that tend to be most important to most people. So as she was talking, I asked her whether or not her functioning is impaired because of the wellness. Does she not attend events because of people being there, or feeling insecure, or whatever the case is. She said that because lately she's gained some weight, she'll avoid social situations.

She said that she feels really sad about that, because she isn't seeing her friends as often as she'd like to and all of that. Then I said to her, "Wow, you're really compromising a value," and she said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Independence. Like, it's actually impairing your ability to be independent - to do the things you want to be doing." She looked at me and tears came streaming down her eyes. She's like, "I didn't even - I never thought about it that way. I never connected my wellness to my independence." What I know about her, because I have a relationship with her, is that it was so critical to her - her independence. I knew that was going to speak to her. She was going to really be able to relate to it when I kind of formulated it that way to her. Then she was like, "You know what, like when I think about my wellness and when I'm actually behaving on behalf of my best self, I'm gonna take that into consideration. I'm gonna



ask myself, 'Is this taking away from me being my best self or any critical values that are important to me?'" That really helped her.

Jay 13:08

I really loved that you were emphasizing the concept of values, in terms of talking about well-being as a whole. Like you were saying, this definition does get a bit specific, and at times it can impact people's values in terms of, "Okay, like, what does this mean - regarding me personally." For me, when I see this or like relooking at the definition, or rehearing it, I think it places a lot of pressure on the individual level and it doesn't really look at social and or environmental factors that come into play that can affect your physical well-being. Do you have access to a gym that you can have? Can you pay the gym fees? Are you able to have fresh groceries? Are you able to cook with these fresh groceries? Are there things that you are comfortable cooking? It's something from your cultural component, like you grew up eating the stuff to help you kind of push your well-being in terms of continuing along with the process. Like you're mentioning Michelle, a lot of these habits that we need to build up to maintain our well-being are incremental. This kind of makes me think of New Year's resolutions, for example, and how people tend to go big or they go home. It's usually because they make these huge goals, and then if they fall off track, or if there's one little tiny slip up, they're like, "Eh! I messed up week two of this resolution. I'll try again next year because it's not too big enough." I think that also comes into play when discussing smart goals or other ways to kind of help your progress along.

Kaelyn 15:01

So for marathon training, on the first day you don't start running like 5, 7, 8 miles - you don't even run miles. You start off with minute increments. You run for like 20 minutes, 30 minutes, 10 minutes, 20 - you keep going back and forth until you get strong enough to be able to do the mileages. I thought that was really interesting too, because I know later on in my training for a marathon there would be one or two days where I would miss practice due to some school complication. I just wanted to quit training for a marathon in general. Even though I had run for like two or three months, I missed one practice that was like two or three miles and I just thought I was failing and that I couldn't run it - I just wanted to quit. I think the only reason why I stayed was one, because I realized it was stupid to just quit like that. Also, I wasn't attending those practices just to train for the marathon. I was attending it because it made me feel better in retrospect. It helped me cope with a bunch of other things going on in my life. So Michelle, [in line with] what you had said earlier about recognizing your values, I think being mindful in what you do and the reasons why you do it is really important in order to maintain your physical well being. Yeah, that's just my thought.

Dannie 16:29



I want to add on to the running thing because I think that's really true. I know whenever I get back into running, I just put on music and just tell myself to run for 20 to 30 minutes and I don't time it at all. It definitely makes it easier to get back into it. I think sometimes just making it seem like you have to live up to a certain standard - or if you're going to do it at all, it has to be for an hour or something - I mean those unrealistic expectations can probably do more harm than good. If you're trying to get into physical activity just because you want to be as fit as your friend or someone you saw in a magazine, that might not be the right motivation to get you started. I think it's all about starting from where you are exactly, and just being present to that.

Fatema 17:09

What really resonated with me during your response Michelle, was you speaking about your friend and her saying, "Oh, I gained weight and I feel like I don't want to go out anymore or see people," and I definitely have that same sort of anxiety. Even growing up - not putting aside what we see on social media, and how that affects our behavior and things like that. Just culturally speaking, there's always this idea of, "What will other people think? What will other people say?" Your aunts coming around and being like, "Hey, you look a little chubby today." Yeah, things like that. I think it's taken me a really long time to grow out of the need for validation from the people around me and I can't say that I [have] fully grown out of it. That's definitely not true. It's just a continuous work in progress. I think what really changed - especially this year - is that I learned to value my own needs and my own time, and recognize where I get my energy from. For a really long time I got anxious and more depressed in college and stuff. Then I started to think that I didn't like being around people and that wasn't true, I actually get my energy from people. I recognized that this year and seeing myself go out and socialize more I was like, "This is what physical well-being is for me personally." So I think I really resonate with the idea of choosing your value and choosing to value yourself before the things around you.

Jay 18:45

I do think the cultural components in terms of parents, aunts, uncles, grandmothers, grandparents, etc, making those commentaries - because at least from my opinion, it doesn't really initially come off as like a malicious intent sort of thing. It's kind of like they're trying to look out for you in the best way that they can. Physical appearance is just one of the things that they can see. So they're looking at you and you got a little bit of chubby cheeks, they're like, "Oh," you know, "...maybe like you're eating a bit too much. Maybe you can impact your health in terms of your cholesterol, blood pressure, etc, etc. So we kind of want to watch out for that." I think for me, coming from a first-generation situation, our medical care and insurance were definitely things that we were consistently being conscious of. "Okay, how often do we need to see your provider? How often do we need to pay the co-pays and etc." So I think that was one way that they were trying to keep track of our health. On the flip side - I am pretty sure I'll have to pull up the study - I think there are studies that show that when parents are consistently



making those [comments], it actually makes it a lot more difficult for kids to lose weight. In fact, it [has] the opposite effect. Children, unfortunately, are gaining more weight because of the consistent - I'll say nagging because I can't think of another word - the consistent nagging at some points really kind of chips away at people's self efficacy, and their ability and self worth and image to be able to motivate themselves to potentially lose weight.

Dannie 20:30

Sometimes the comments aren't helpful. Sometimes they can reinforce unhealthy behavior too, because I think what you want to do is probably encourage people to do what's good for them and not just motivate them to fit a certain aesthetic. [This] is sometimes the approach a lot of friends and family take with good intentions, but they just don't even know what they're doing. In my family, I've never really felt shamed at all for gaining weight or losing weight, because I know I have over the years. I grew up pretty athletic. Then I quit swimming in like seventh grade, so I probably gained some weight in eighth grade. Then I did some more sports in high school and got into running and that was fine. I know that my grandmother was always concerned about me - probably the most when it came to gaining weight in college, because she just saw that in my future for some reason. She was like, "Now when you go to college, don't gain the freshman 15." I luckily didn't end up doing it, and I think it probably could have had to do with the fact that I started running a lot and I also went vegan before my first year of college.

I don't know, things were also pre-portioned because of COVID, so it could have been a combination of things. People definitely look out for each other that way in my family. The women are always either going on diets - not to put y'all on blast - but I would say no eating disorders or anything like that. [They don't] shame other people, but there's always that [sense that] it's really important - especially for women and I think women of color maybe, but just women in general - to always stay in shape and there's not the same pressure on the men. They're not going on diets as often. They may not be as in shape, but they will be like, "Oh I'm biking again or like playing tennis again." It's like, "Okay, that's great," but for women they cannot be overweight or it would just be such a bad thing. At least that's what I see in my family. I remember my family will check up on me or they'll see me on a video call when I'm away and they're like, "Oh you look great. You look like you didn't gain the freshman 15."

Dannie 22:13

I guess it's supposed to be a compliment or something. I'm not too sensitive to it, because of the way that I was raised. My self value or self worth was never really placed on my weight. I feel good about it, because I think for me, it just means I'm taking care of myself. I know that I would still be worthy - invaluable - even if I had gained weight. I don't feel like they would stop loving me or see me differently because of it. So I think it's just important for people to remember that when people are giving these comments, just know [that] they are saying this because they care



and it wouldn't change the way that they see the person they're talking to, like if they did change somehow.

Kaelyn 22:54

Prior to COVID, I was running - I was just more active prior to COVID. I'll open a little bit, but I'm like 5'7" and I weighed like 126 before COVID. Now I am like, 145 right now. My parents asked me - after I went through my physical - they asked me, "What is your weight?" I told them my weight, and then my parents were like, "Oh, wow," like, "...you need to like..." I don't remember what they said, but all I know is that it was a little hurtful. I was like, it's still a normal BMI, and I know, Jay, I think you mentioned like, the BMI index has its flaws. So I don't know. My BMI was still normal, but it still hurt because it was like, "Oh, okay, I guess I need to lose weight." There was a period of time where I wouldn't eat as much as I would or I'd do these weirdly intense workouts. It probably wasn't - well, I know it wasn't the best. I was able to - throughout COVID and the quarantine thing - I was able to learn that it's okay, I am healthy. As long as I feel healthy, it doesn't really matter what anyone else really says. It's difficult to understand that and know your self-worth and everything. It's just a little difficult, but it's important to kind of remind yourself to do that. I wish there was a way that I could always remind myself of all the things that I learned in life. Yeah, it's really weird. I think I did that with college essays. I reread my college essays, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, like, wow, I'm so wise." Yeah, I wish there was a way to do that.

Fatema 24:43

Physical well being correlates a lot more with my mental health than anything else. There are just an enormous amount of stressors for - especially for the BIPOC community, especially over the past, I don't know, decades in America, and the past couple of years - outside of like even the pandemic - have been extremely stressful for a lot of different reasons. I'll bring up one specific event. While I was still at UT Austin, as a student - this is around the time that the Muslim ban came out-- my family is Muslim-- and we had a lot of - I think my idea of myself, the way people perceived me, and like how I saw the world and my community at that moment really became fragmented. I didn't understand why these changes were happening to a certain extent and that I wanted to fight them, but I was so overwhelmed and so stressed out by the emotion of seeing my environment change in such a way that I think that definitely affected my physical well being. I know it affected a lot of other people's physical well being as well.

I think it was very much therapy, my friends, things like that, that helped me get back to being myself and get back to feeling like I was physically well, and that I could do things further from there. I don't know what we can do to make sure that we don't have stressors. Like that's not possible, right? We're always going to have some form of stress. I think recognizing that our mental health is so important to our ability to be well and not fatigued, and to be able to work



and continue doing things - we have to put ourselves first and take time [for ourselves]. For me, especially when I'm super stressed out, I sleep a lot because I need to literally sleep the stress off. Sometimes you have to sleep a fever out, or like sweat a fever out, I'm sleeping the stress off.

So that definitely has worked for me in a lot of different ways. I guess to answer the question of what are some of the experiences that I've felt related to physical well being as a person who is BIPOC, I would really say that most of my experiences are centered around environmental influences rather than it just being like food and things like that. I feel like my behaviors towards food, or my behaviors towards exercise or doing things, all changed because of environmental stimuli. I just need to - we - everybody has to figure out their own path, and a way to deal with those different types of stressors and have a very supportive community, which definitely isn't always present, but then you have to become your own supportive community. That is a long and hard process, so keep going.

Kaelyn 28:25

Yeah, I was really able to relate to what you said Fatema, because with college, it was really, like - I live like 30 miles away from my school. It's not a big - it's not like I'm homesick, but just having to go to bed in a different place, and especially since I had some roommate conflicts - there were some little disagreements. I was kind of staying at my friend's place and then I would spend some nights at my dorm, and then I'd go back home. It felt like every night I was sleeping at someplace different, and it wasn't exactly home for me. I couldn't do the things that would make me happy. People change too. You can't spend a lot of time with people that - like let's say your running buddy. There goes my physical wellness, like, "Oh, if she's not going, then I'm not going to go." I guess with what you had said too, through your own experiences, I think you're trying to also say that learning to love yourself in a way where you can be independent and do the things that you love, is really important. I realized that I do need to be more independent. I think that I should be able to go outside on a run by myself. I don't need a community. I mean, it's great to have a running community, but I should learn how to be able to sit down and be happy with myself and do the things I love, because not everyone's going to love everything you love. You can't have a buddy to go with you every place like. So [it's important to] just see your self-worth and love who you are.

Michelle 29:57

So there's definitely a cultural component to this which we definitely have to take into account. I remember when I did a focus group, and I also did some work with families using my book when I first published it, and it was really amazing. What came out of it - because it was a parent-child diet - that was fascinating was that it improved communication - which again, wasn't necessarily expected from doing this kind of work. It was a backdrop of what happened. The reason for that



is families realize - and there was a particular diet that I have in mind of a mother and a daughter and they happened to be African American.

The daughter was complaining and she was a young adult. She was complaining that the mother constantly puts her down and speaks to her in a pretty derogatory way around food in general. I saw the body language and I stopped and said something like, "Oh, how do you think your daughter's taking in what you're saying right now? How do you think that feels? How do you think that impacts her," and all that. The mom stopped and she got teary eyed and she said, "That's the way my mom spoke to me. You know, it's kind of a tough love," particularly around food, you know, particularly around food. "You're so fat. You have a fat, you know, butt. Whatever! She used to kind of -," and she recalled all the things that her mother used to say to her and I said, "How did that feel - when your mother said that to you?" She said, "It was pretty horrible." I said, "But, you're kind of doing that to your daughter." She said, "Well, that's all I know. I'm so used to it. I'm so used to hearing it. You know, that's what we do." I said, "But it's harmful and hurtful."

Michelle 31:48

The other thing which is also fascinating from my research is that I was looking at teasing, fat shaming, etc., and the majority of the prevalence is within families. It happens most often within families, which I think is also pretty interesting too. You would think kids get bullied outside, in school, and etc. They do of course, but it is most prevalent in families. So I thought that that was kind of important to mention. I think the difficulty with food and wellness and exercising is - if we're talking about drugs and alcohol, if we're talking about other substances, we could abstain from other things. We can't abstain from eating and food. We are constantly around it. We're socialized around it. I think across cultures there's always some traditions around food. We celebrate, I think across cultures too, around food. It becomes confusing in terms of monitoring ourselves or getting a sense of what's appropriate and what's not appropriate, or how we want to look.

Again, I don't have to get into social media. [There] was actually something that came out last week. I'm not sure if you saw it, but Facebook did a study and it showed that Instagram, according to their study, is detrimentally impacting the self-confidence of teen girls. They show that the numbers of depression, anxiety, and also suicidal ideation and suicide in general, has increased incrementally over the years, and that one of the variables is actually social media - looking at pictures, comparisons, and all that. So we're also getting a lot more information that supports the fact that these things are detrimental to the mental health of our youth. That's why there's a huge prevalence of eating disorders and other mental health issues that are related to food. Just wanted to jump in with that, because that just came out in the last couple of days.



Dannie 34:34

One thing I've heard is that sometimes eating disorders have to do with wanting a sense of control in one's life. I don't know, maybe this could be a question - What are some other things people can do to help them feel that? I don't know if there's necessarily like a one-size-fits-all or one thing that they can do that will just work. I don't know if that's a good question, but what are some other things they can do?

Michelle 34:59

Well there's systemic issues around this, right? We're talking about social media, we're talking about policies, right, within schools. I actually just posted an infographic just the other day. It was a thing of french fries from McDonald's, and a cup full of fruit. It showed that the french fries are 99 cents, right, and a cup of fruit is \$5.99.

Dannie 35:30

I think there are a lot of underlying causes of that, but it almost suggests to me - the prices almost suggest - that the french fries are less consequential than the fruit. It's like the fruit is a commitment, you're committing like \$5 for that instead of like a few cents. When it comes to your body, the french fries are taking a much bigger toll and I guess companies just want to profit and that's why they're able to be so competitively priced. It's not supposed to be telling you which is a better option, but that's a real thing I think a lot of people deal with. I think that could also be a BIPOC topic as well, because people get influenced by marketing - more than health information in schools. That should probably take precedence over all the other information that's coming their way. That's a big thing, I think.

Jay 36:19

There have been studies that show that there are increased marketing and advertisements for unhealthier food options, particularly in food deserts. Unfortunately, food deserts are primarily where Black and Latinx families are located. If you take into consideration low income and parents not having enough time to cook, and then fast food [options] just being like Michelle was saying, like 99 cents for french fries versus \$5.99 for fruit salad, as a working parent who's on the run, you're going to probably go for the cheaper option that's really quick. You can feed your kids and move on with the rest of your day. From personal experience, that's how my parents and I - or that's how my brother and I and my parents ended up surviving for a good part of my childhood. That's what we depended on to be able to become financially stable later on.

Regarding the BMI thing, I want to put in a quick clip about my issues with BMI. BMI was not made by a physician, it was made by a mathematician who was looking at the ideal body weight for a white man, but we're still consistently using BMI a lot in clinical settings. It's sexist and racist, because, again, it was looking at European men, and not taken into consideration for



women. So something definitely needs to be done with that. Regarding body image, I was recently reading something about objectification and how it kind of ties in with body image. I think there was a study conducted on [college] women where they're placed in - basically, they were taking tests, but they were put in swimsuits, and one was more revealing than the other. Basically, the women who [had] more skin showing and etc. - they were too focused [on their] self objectification in terms of like, "Am I showing too much skin? Is my fat - Do I have muffin rolls?" etc, etc. They ended up performing a lot worse in comparison to their control group. I think that comes into play with the idea of body image and also with fat phobia, as we were briefly discussing, which is consistently being afraid of being called fat or being perceived as fat. Just to highlight, fat is just an adjective, it is not a way for you to kind of identify - well it can be. I'm going to step back and just say it's typically used as an adjective.

Jay 38:59

The negative connotations that we typically bring from it is from societal pressures within the United States. For example, in history for the longest time, bigger bodies, curvier bodies, these were bodies that were considered healthy. It wasn't until I think World War II, where more affluent countries were coming into power, with food and with services, that it got flipped and reversed, and people were saying it's skinnier bodies that are the healthy option, and bigger bodies are the ones that are less attractive, and etc. Of course, the racial tie in with that is that for most, especially for women of color, they're a bit curvier than white women. It was a way for them to be able to take that body image and kind of instill the concept of what being healthy - what being the idealized individual - is within society. I think it's really important for us to be able to kind of step away from that. Like Michelle and everyone else was mentioning, internalize and kind of self reflect and reframe, like, "What exactly does it mean for me personally, to be physically well? Is it to be able to have enough energy to go about my day and do whatever tasks that I need without struggling too much? Is it for me to go outside and feel sexy?" If that's something that's good for you, go for it, but it's kind of like, "What are your values? What exactly do you want reflected internally and externally?"

Dannie 40:36

Yeah, I didn't even think a lot of these beauty standards affected me growing up. If anything, for some reason, I thought I looked more like them. I thought I looked more like the people in the advertisements. I had the reverse of body dysmorphia. Instead of thinking I looked bad, like I thought I looked more like the ideal standard than I actually did, especially as I got older. It was between seventh and eighth grade that I gained a little bit more weight, and my mom said that was around the time in her life when she also went from being skinny to being a little bit more curvy and not the skinniest girl in her class anymore. Up until seventh grade, I was also pretty skinny. So I think during that shift, I don't know, my brain just didn't catch up. A few years after that, I was just thinking I looked like everyone else in my class. I went to a predominantly white



high school, and a lot of the girls were like - I don't know. I mean, I think there was definitely a range of body types, but I just wasn't even really aware of what I looked like. I didn't celebrate it enough, and I wish that I did. I wish that I was able to see more people who looked like me also and more representation, because it's different. That's what's so beautiful about the world. I mean, there's diversity, there are different body types, and we really can't just hail one over the other, because that doesn't really make sense. If we are doing that, there's a very conniving reason for doing so. I think it has to do with clothes. I'm not really that into fashion, my brother could speak more on this and other people I know. I think what you wear can have a huge impact with how you see yourself too, Like, if you have a good group of friends or family you can go shopping with and they know what looks good on you, or they can help give constructive feedback and be like, "Oh, that really accentuates this or that really fits you well." It's not just the trendiest thing. What looks good on you? What makes you feel good? It can be any size, any color, as long as you're just shopping for yourself and you're shopping because you want to be able to put your best foot forward into the world. I feel like that can be a really positive thing, and not to be superficial, but it does have a big impact on the way you move through the world and the way that people see you. I think the biggest thing is you feeling good in your clothes, in your skin. That's something that you can cultivate, and it's not necessarily going to come directly from people telling you what's trendy, or what's popular. It's like, just celebrating you for who you are and what you look like and accepting all of you.

Fatema 42:53

The way that my body image changed, I continuously had sort of a bad idea of what my body image was growing up. Until these past couple of years it's continuously been negative. I think one of the big things that helped me change my mindset around my body image was one, being in an area where I felt like I was seeing more diverse groups and more diverse body types and things like that. The other thing is that I realized a lot of the people that I think are the most beautiful people in the world didn't have a versatile body type or whatever. Almost all of those people told me that they had a negative body image and I was just like, "What in the world are you talking about? How do you not see yourself the way that I see you," right? For me it was just shocking for them to tell me that like, "Oh, I don't feel like I look good. I feel like I need to be wearing this or I need to [choose] my clothes because this one cinches here and this one accentuates my butt," or something like that, you know?

I think that was the point - I had a huge long conversation with my sister about this because she's the person I love the most in the world. I think she's absolutely gorgeous. She just had so many negative feelings about her body image and I was like, "This is not okay." I wanted to stop talking about body image the way that I [did] because I didn't want that to affect her anymore. That is really what motivated me to change. I don't think we require validation from our community to feel good about ourselves, but it is so important that our community changes to fit



our needs as well, and to support each other. I want to be part of the community that helps make sure that the people that I love and the people that are in my community continue to feel good about themselves as well.

Kaelyn 45:00

I would struggle with my body image during COVID and still now. I'd just be at home and there'd be no reason for me to dress up or do anything and I just roll out of my bed in my sleeping clothes, hop on a zoom and attend school, and feel like, "Whatever, okay," and I guess like having to do that every single day sort of made me feel like, "Oh my gosh, like, I don't feel that great," partly because I wasn't like moving and being active. I just felt like I wasn't pretty, or I just felt kind of like a sack of potatoes just kind of rolling around the house, just doing nothing. There would be a couple of times that my way of reminding myself that I'm pretty, that I'm hot, or whatever it is - I would just like take a shower, get dressed, do my hair, dress up. It's really weird, but I don't know, it just made me feel really good, I guess. I'm like, "You know, I am not a sack of potatoes. I'm beautiful. I'm radiant," and whatever that is. I don't know, it was kind of a refresh, like a clean slate to start off the day or the next morning.

I think it's really important to take the time to sort of make yourself feel good before you leave the house. I think there is this one person - some influencer - I know many influencers would do this. He would speak about how before you leave the house every day you want to be in a good mindset because as soon as you - if you take a step outside that door with a negative mindset, you're going to be carrying that throughout your whole day. You need to have your mindset in check and everything like that. One other thing I kinda wanted to note was that since we're talking about physical image and everything like that, and like being pretty and looking really nice, I guess there was this one - I'm not sure what you'd call it. There's this woman named Rupri Kaur. She's really famous for her quotes and inspirational messages that she sends out. There is this one quote that I found that I can read or I'll just summarize it. She basically just apologizes to all the women she has called beautiful before she called them intelligent, or brave, or anything of the sort. She's like apologizing that she made it seem like what we as women are born with, that is our defining characteristic. I think it's just really important, because we are more than just pretty, we are radiant, we're clever, and we're everything in between.

It also brought me back to this whole poll that I saw one time. There was this one poll on Instagram for some news thing, but it asked, "Would you rather have your daughter be born clever or pretty," and the majority chose pretty over clever. I thought that really said something because, we're more than just, I guess, quote-unquote "a pretty face" for the world to look at. I told my friend, and he told me, "It's the unfortunate truth. Apparently as women we're able to get further in this world by being pretty," and I was like, "Huh."



Fatema 48:25

I love the fact that you brought up Rupi Kaur and the poetry that she wrote. I did Speech and Debate when I was in high school and there's something called slam poetry. And there was one that I saw - I put the link in the chat for y'all if you want to see it, but it was called, "Pretty," and it was performed by Katie Makkai. I can't remember who actually wrote the poem, but it was so amazing to hear that as a high school student. This woman was speaking so powerfully and saying, "Am I pretty? Is this all that I am? No, like I - like my child will not be pretty she will be everything else, but pretty, right?" I absolutely love that.

Jay 49:17

We've touched upon a lot today. With all these in mind, I'm just wondering, what are some coping strategies that you guys have for folks before we sign off?

Michelle 49:30

I think we really have to be cognizant about how we're communicating. We have to be cognizant about advocating for equality, and that includes accessibility for everybody, equally - that's really important of course. The new book that I'm writing right now, where I just finished, is on a lot of self love, self compassion and self acceptance, self efficacy, like you talked about. Just being able to not compare ourselves to other people and to subscribe to a certain standard that we tend to do. Our mind does that, so we really have to fight up and challenge ourselves individually as well. I think on every level, whether it's at the micro or the macro, and systemically to really make change.

Fatema 50:28

I think it's changed a lot over time, but this year, what I realized is that what helps the most is choosing what you want and who you want to be, and then just doing it. Even if you know - there's this thing in Indian weddings that the wedding is more about all the girls that are coming than the bride herself, because they're trying to get all the other girls married off. So whenever I go to a wedding my mom dresses me up in all the glamour and tries to make sure all the aunties see me. My idea behind that is wear whatever it is that your mom tells you, but then dance the way that you want. So have fun with it, have fun living.

Kaelyn 51:18

One of the coping strategies that I'm still trying to figure out is learning to have discipline in my life. Being able to have more control of doing what I want to do because I want to do it, not based on any other determinants or factors in my life - like the environment I'm in or the people I'm around. Just learning to be more independent.

Jay 51:46



For me, I think it's a lot of self love and self maintenance, and focusing or internalizing like, "Why am I making this effort in order to be physically well? Is it to appease wider society? To fit those specific body image and body type that's been told, or is it because I want to be able to keep up with friends and like be able to do all the fun stuff that we have planned without huffing and puffing or necessarily making it difficult for everyone else to enjoy it."

Dannie 52:26

I would like to take away - this is inspired by our conversation today and also Michelle's book - but just be mindful of the eyes through which you see yourself and other people. It's almost like the same vision whether you're seeing all the greatness and the potential, or if you're just seeing the lack or just what needs to be worked on. You can work on things and make improvements, but looking at it with loving eyes is a lot more productive because it's just going to be coming from that pure place. It's going to last longer than any trend or any fad because it's just going to stick with you if you really cultivate that. That's what I'm going to work on and that's what I'm going to take away.

Kaelyn 53:09

It looks like this is it for today's episode. I want to thank Dr. Maidenburg and Fatema again, for joining us today. For our audience, please stay tuned as we dive into the other dimensions of well being for the season. Bye!