



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hey there my friend, welcome back to the podcast. So excited. Can you believe this is Episode 99? That's kind of crazy. I remember just starting off in the beginning and thinking, "How am I gonna come up with 20 topics?" To even just get to episode number 20. And now I'm doing number 99 and I have more ideas than ever. It's so fun. So fun. I have a really special episode planned for you for next week so don't miss that one. Celebrate 100 episodes. I do have to say, I know I told you guys before in the past, like, "Oh, I hope you don't hear the roofers," or whatever, but my neighbors over the weekend had some shrubs, some large shrubs cut down and the stump grinder people are there today. So you know what that sounds like. And, of course, these shrubs are right between our houses. So it's occasionally been loud, and it might also be loud as I'm recording. So, my apologies in advance if that happens. But, hopefully it won't be a big deal and you'll be able to hear me just fine.

So today I want to talk about redefining what is beautiful. And so I'm going to be sharing what work I've been doing myself on this and how I kind of recognized what was going on for me. And then I'm going to help you to sort of extrapolate how this might be playing out in your life for you. So I think that for probably, I mean, you know, I'm 42 so maybe it's a little different now for girls as they're growing up now, but back in the 80s and 90s, I think it was probably not until about 10 years old, or so for me, that I really started thinking that much about what bodies look like and if I was thin enough, or not thin enough and things like that.

I know everybody has different experiences. Some people were told from basically as little as they can remember that there's something wrong with their body or that they were too heavy in lots of different ways, but for me it was probably around that kind of pre-teen kind of time, bodies started changing, things were changing. I always think about it kind of like around 4th grade, I feel like is when I just started noticing things.

I know there's research now that girls as young as six, usually around six is when they start having their body image issues, so I do think things are a little bit different now for our young girls. My daughter's five and a half, I have to tell you, I do have to think, I have to manage my thinking around her and that, right, because right now she's so carefree and not a care in the world, and if I'm not managing my mind what my brain wants to do is think,

"Oh, poor thing, she's only got six more months and then it's all downhill from there," right, or something equally uncomfortable for me, and so I just catch myself thinking that and just know she's got her own journey and I can be intentional about what I say and how I respond to her, and just know that I can't control what she thinks about herself. I'm not nearly as powerful as all the ad messages that our young girls are getting. But not looking at it, like in a way of just give up, like "Well, sucks to be her." You know that kind of thing, but instead just being intentional and not making a whole lot of drama out of something that doesn't even exist yet. So, anyway, as an aside.

So, probably around that kind of 5th, 6th, 7th grade time is when I started noticing, I think just more about other girls my age, like how our bodies were kind of different. You know, definitely around 5th grade there's some girls who are totally developed and others who aren't, and so I think it's normal to be comparing and looking and wondering and just seeing what's going on with your own body. But then, I think it was probably around 13 or 14 is when I started getting into more of like the Seventeen magazine kinds of stuff, and I'm sure many of you can relate. I certainly wasn't 17 when I was reading that magazine. I was little bit younger than that. Just reading the articles and looking at all the ads and here these young women, young girls in these beautiful pictures. You know, of course, I didn't know that they were Photoshopped. I had no idea.

And so I really started to develop my idea of what I find attractive in a woman. Like if I think of an attractive, beautiful woman, what do I see or think of. And all of us do this. We all create our preferences, right. An easy example of that is some people think that blonde hair is the most beautiful, and other people think that brunette hair is the most beautiful, and other people think that red hair is the most beautiful. And who is right? It's just whatever you decide you like the best.

But what's so interesting is hair is just hair, although we do have a lot of drama about that, at times. Me included. What is interesting is that we decide on shapes of bodies, as well. And so when I was in middle school and in the early teenage years, early high school years that waif look was in. So, some of you are going to remember that model, Kate Moss. She was considered like the designer's muse, she was like the top model in that timeframe for that waif look. Like she was incredibly thin, basically like a sack of bones. Like had very little muscle mass and I was just incredibly thin.

And I think that was just naturally how she was to a certain extent. I think a lot of models smoke a lot, do drugs and other things to starve themselves, anorexic to get themselves to look the way they do. But I think that naturally that was just her frame to be just very slight.

And so everything talked about how just glorified that, right, how beautiful she was and other models were similar. And then around the same time was this other trend in the modeling world that was dubbed Heroin Chic. And I don't mean "heroine" like the female version of a hero, I mean like "heroin" like the drug. And so they were basically glamorizing the look that people who are addicted to heroin had. Now people who are addicted to heroin don't care about eating food, they care about doing heroin. So they will always prioritize doing drugs over eating food and so, generally they're very, very, very slender, very low muscle mass, just very, very thin people.

So I remember seeing runway pictures of these fashion designers having their runway shows and how they would put makeup on these young women who are so thin and basically putting makeup on to make them look like these heroin addicts. It was probably not a very proud time for the fashion industry. But that is what they were glorifying.

And so, in that time, I decided that thin, low muscle volume legs were what was attractive. Like that was what I thought was a good looking body, good looking legs. I liked how they looked if that person was in a swimsuit, I liked how they looked in jeans. I just decided that that was good. Right? Like that was the way that someone should want to look.

And then, of course as we do, we immediately compare and what I wanted to resist at the time was that my body is pretty much the exact opposite of the waif look and that it's essentially physically impossible for my legs to look like that. Like I would not just have to like starve myself, I would have to be cachectic, like truly ill for my legs to even remotely look in that way. I, for real, can gain almost 15 pounds of muscle, and this is confirmed by body composition testing, just from lifting weights for three months. Like I am somebody who can put on an incredible amount of muscle very quickly and it's just who my body is. Right? It's just the way I am.

And I'm sure that this kind of body was heralded as something that was amazing back in the farming days in Germany. Right? Like, I would have probably been a magnificent farmer's wife carrying all the milk jugs and all this other stuff. But I had this belief that looking like that wasn't good. And so there have been times, in my life, when I wasn't as muscular and as strong. Interestingly, like where I wasn't exercising at all, and my calves are still huge, but I had so much muscular pain. My body just hurt all the time, and then when I would get myself back into shape, and I would exercise more and build up muscle mass again, things felt so much better. It's like I need all that muscle mass there to hold all my joints together properly.

So what I'm building for you is this idea that it's really not possible for me to look like this waif look, or not necessarily that extreme, but just a very ... I want to go with like thin person, but it's not even thinness, right? It's just someone who does not have a lot of muscle mass. It's just very small in that way it doesn't build muscle mass very easily.

So I have recently realized that all of this has continued to be an on-going issue for me, in that I can work on accepting myself and my own body, but I was still believing that that thinner, less muscular body that those thinner less muscular legs are better, that they are the ideal. The way I picked up on this is that, as I noticed my thinking, right, I've talked to you before about being the watcher, or the observer of your thoughts, so as I do that, as well, what I notice is ... and I just have these little thoughts, these fleeting little thoughts when I'm just out and about in different places, just with people or random people walking down the street, and if I see a woman who has that body shape, that body habitus, I have a little thought of, "Ooh, that's good. Look at that. That's so nice. I wish I could have that." Like a little tiny pang of jealousy, maybe, also just kind of like a longing or yearning for that, and the only way that I was able to identify this is just from identifying what my thoughts are and what my emotions are.

So I was basically working to try to have better, more accepting thoughts about my bad legs. Like I didn't realize that I was trying to, as I've talked to you guys before, have a positive thought about a negative circumstance. Like what's someone's leg shape is, not someone my leg shape is not a neutral circumstance for me. Right? Like that is very neutral for somebody else, but for me I think that there's a good leg shape and there's a bad leg shape. Of course I'm not going around talking about this. This isn't something that's superficial in my thinking, but deep down this is what it amounts to.

And so as I've worked on accepting my body, as we all do as we get older, whether we're overweight, whether we're at our natural weight and thin, when no matter what, there are changes to our bodies and so much of my work, as it is for so many women, is working on accepting and loving my body exactly as it is. I identify this. This deep down belief that those legs are better, and when I really started thinking, "Like where did that even come from?" It was so obvious, it totally came from that trend, that fad in the fashion industry. And it's just the way I've been thinking ever since then.

So I was thinking about the word "beauty" and "beautiful" and I was thinking, like, what is the actual definition of beauty? You know, I'm thinking that thin, those tiny legs are really beautiful, then other women think, who have those legs will say, "Oh my legs are such toothpicks. I'm so embarrassed of them." So what is that definition of beauty.

So I checked out Merriam-Webster and the definition of beauty is the quality, or the aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses, or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit. I thought to myself how random is that that I would decide that what gives pleasure to my senses, when looking at a female body, is how small the circumference is of the legs. Like, that's so random and weird, right?

In some cultures the more plump you are there the better. But I just somewhere along the line decided this and defined beauty in that way, for me, and then now for decades having using that against myself, essentially. Right, it's kind of like, "Well, you're never going to be good enough because your body looks like this." And what's so ridiculous about that is it's just completely something that's not achievable for me. So then, by definition, I'll never achieve it, right. I'll never, in that framework of thinking, I'll never be able to think positively.

So we just kind of think that we just like what we like. That's what I was thinking, right. Like we just are like, "No, but I just find that more attractive than something else." And that's totally fine as long as it serves you. Like in this case, it was just an opportunity for me to very slightly put myself down on the regular. Like I didn't even realize it was happening, because if those tiny legs are the ideal, and it's physically unhealthy or impossible for me to look like that, then by default, I'll never be happy with my leg. Like it doesn't matter what I do, or how much I work out, in which ways I exercise, how I eat, none of it. Like I won't ever be happy.

What's interesting ... I just want for full disclosure, I'm still working on this. I am certainly not going to tell you, like, "Now, do these five steps and then you're freed of it forever." I am still in the processing stage of this. I am in the stage where I'm noticing. So what I'm not doing is asking myself to change my opinion, or my views on what is beautiful.

I'm not asking myself to look at a woman's legs who are more like what I would consider to be the ideal, and wanting myself to be disgusted by them, or something, right. I'm not asking myself to do any of that. What I'm doing is I'm just noticing when I see another woman and I have a thought about how nice their legs look. I'm just noticing it. Like that their calves are small, or that their thighs are narrow. Like the whole thigh gap business, right. Even very thin women don't have thigh gaps.

But, regardless, that I'm asking myself to tell myself one thing that's nice about my legs. So by doing that I'm flipping my compared despair thought into a thought that feels true and believable about me. So I'm interrupting the model that creates the result of me thinking something is wrong with my legs and, instead, replacing it with a new thought and that thought creates a new result for me.

So what I'm working on right now is acceptance. I would like to believe that my legs are awesome and they're amazing, and they're the best. But I'm not quite there yet. So I'm working on acceptance of them and believing that there's nothing wrong with them, that they are not somehow bad or somehow should be different. No. They are the way they are and they should be that way because are my legs today. And thank goodness they still work, right. So great.

But I'm going to keep believing that my legs are awesome until I believe it. And so you can do this work, too. I know so many of you have similar thoughts, and maybe it's not about your legs. Maybe it's about your neck or your arms or your butt or your stomach, or like your earlobes or something. I mean, literally, right. Like where do you quietly compare and then despair? Where do you think you're just telling the truth about your body, not realizing that it's totally just a thought you thought so many times about yourself that you believe it.

And so in my coaching groups we often talk about what our opinion is of ourselves, and not the superficial, "Yeah, I'm totally awesome," like 'hello' opinion, right, because most of us superficially are like, "Yeah, I'm pretty amazing. Like yeah, what's the issue. I have a good opinion of myself." But really deep down what you believe about yourself. That's what we want to know. And so for many women it's pretty alarming what's there when they figure out what they really believe about themselves. Like they didn't have any idea that they believed this about themselves. And then once they realize it, this is what I find in my clients, they want to change it right away. They're like, "Oh my gosh, I believe that about myself? That's horrible. How do I fix it?" Like they want to change it immediately.

And you really can't rush this process. But you really can see it for what it is. It's totally arbitrary, like if trends had been different, I bet I wouldn't have this leg thing. But I guarantee you it would have been something else. Right. We decide something about ourselves when we are young and we're not emotionally mature yet, but then, as we mature, we don't re-examine that belief. Like, as I got older I wasn't thinking to myself, "Does it make sense for me to keep thinking about legs in this way?" We don't look at it and ask ourselves, moving forward, do I want to think of it this way? Does it serve me? Does it make sense?

So now we're grown-ass women who have a 14 year old way of thinking about ourselves and we just think it's the truth. Right. We just think that this is just how it is. And we don't recognize, or realize that we actually can change it so that we aren't constantly, or very frequently having negative thoughts about ourselves basically against our own will. Right. We don't want to think negatively about ourselves but then we do it and we have no idea how to change it.

So doing this work of changing your beliefs about yourself is seriously some of the most impactful work you can do. My clients' lives are forever changed for the better after we do this. And it's such an important piece to the weight loss problem. Right. So be sure not to gloss over it like it's not a big deal. It actually is everything.

Alright, have a wonderful week and I'll see you next time for Episode Number 100. Bye-bye.