

Balance365 Episode 134 Transcript

ANNIE BREES (INTRO)

Welcome to Balance365 Life Radio, a podcast that delivers honest conversations about food, fitness, weight, and wellness. I'm your host Annie Brees along with co-founder Jennifer Campbell. Together we have a team of personal trainers and nutritionists who coach thousands of women daily and are on a mission to help women feel happy, healthy, and confident in their bodies on their own terms. Join us here every week as we discuss hot topics pertaining to our physical, mental and emotional well being with amazing guests. Enjoy.

ANNIE

Hi, friends, welcome back to another episode of Balance365 Life Radio, we have another special guest. On today's episode we have Dr. Ebony Butler, a psychologist and food relationship strategist. That's right friends. She is passionate about helping women survivors thrive in trauma recovery and show up in their bodies and lives in ways that they feel proud of. She specializes in guiding women to develop skills that increase their effectiveness and self care and intra- and interpersonal interactions, including communicating and asking for and getting what they want and need from themselves and from others. I think we can all use a little bit of that, right? Dr. Ebony is specifically interested in issues that impact marginalized communities including minority women and LGBT persons. She has her own podcast and book both titled "Food is Not BAE," which we shared with you a few podcasts ago and we hope that you are enjoying. We are so lucky to have Dr. Ebony hosting a monthly coaching call inside our Balance365 coaching program, which means all of our members can join her for a monthly coaching call on food psychology related issues. And we're so excited that she is here today to share some of her knowledge. I'm super stoked. You can find all the links to her therapy cards, her podcast, her social media and her website in our show notes. Enjoy, my friends.

ANNIE

Jen, we have a special guest on the podcast today. Are you so excited?

JEN CAMPBELL

I am. I can't believe she hasn't been on yet. She's not, I guess not new to our community because she's been doing a bit of coaching. But she sure is a gift to the world.

ANNIE

She is. Dr. Ebony. Welcome to the podcast. How are you?

DR. EBONY BUTLER

Aw, thank you. I'm doing well. I'm excited to be here.

ANNIE

We're so excited to have you. You have, as Jen said, been helping support our Balance365 members with monthly calls where they can discuss specific topics, related to food psychology, and they love you.

DR. EBONY

Oh, well. Thank you. I love them. The questions are awesome. I love doing those.

ANNIE

Yeah. So, we're so excited. We have, Jen you kind of polled the audience or, our community a little bit before -

JEN

Yeah.

ANNIE

- on what questions they had for her?

JEN

Yeah, I polled our Balance365 community and I polled our free community and there was so many questions. We obviously can't answer them all. But I have a few questions centering around relationship with food and yeah, it's gonna be a great conversation.

DR. EBONY

I'm excited.

ANNIE

Are we ready to jump right into it?

JEN

Yeah, let's do it.

ANNIE

All right. Take it away, Jen.

JEN

Yes, so Dr. Ebony, I know, I think there's sometimes some hesitation when we seek out professional help that the person we're speaking to has no idea what we're going through. And you've shared your story on Instagram a couple times. I've seen it. Would you mind sharing that here?

DR. EBONY

Oh, absolutely. So, it's been quite a ride and one of the things that I do value about the work that I do is that I do get to meet people where they are and that I do get to see, I know exactly what that feels like. And I know what the guilt and shame feels like. So I've had my own issues with weight and body image and being impacted by diet culture and just kind of feeling you know, all of the things that you feel when you don't get it right, per se. Well, I grew up in, I'm from Mississippi. And so in my family food is huge. And it's not necessarily anything to do with the health around food. It's the bonding around food, and sometimes that that bonding, kind of the way that it happens, ends up causing a lot of negative health consequences for us because we don't, I don't think my family in particular has a lot of education around food and kind of like how to use food for health. We just kind of use it for one thing, bonding, company, that kind of thing. And so, I actually come from a family who has large bodies, and so I also used to have a large body, and that was normal in my family, that's normal from where I come from. And so, going through college, I kind of realized, well actually it started in high school, I kind of realized that I was larger than many of my classmates. And that was pointed out to me by a dance coach. And she would say things like, "Oh, you need to lose weight" or "you need to stop eating bread" or "you're the largest girl on the team. You don't need to talk on the bus because you still haven't lost weight." Like those things are the messages that I would get from her. And so this kind of followed me like, this is my kind of, I would say the thing that I can remember as being my kind of first introduction into, "Oh my God, my body is not good enough." And going up through college I remember looking at myself on the picture my senior year saying, "Oh my god, I am so bad. Like I'm so fat. I don't know who let me get like this." That was something we used to say. "I don't know who let me get this way. Nobody told me anything." And we will make a joke about it.

[Laughs]

JEN

[Laughs]

DR. EBONY

"Nobody said anything." That was...so I lost weight, I went on a diet to actually become skinny because skinny is desirable. Skinny is beautiful and I was actually reinforced for

the very thing, like, I had more opportunities to date and more people wanting to talk to me and I was more desirable, I was not only just the pretty friend anymore, I was the, the fine friend, and those kinds of things. And so I kind of threw myself all into it and was going to be skinny by any means. And that also meant that my relationship with food still was very toxic. Because all I knew was restriction. All I knew was eating and what I needed to do to be skinny was to restrict, and when I say restrict, I mean like really limit the type of food that I would eat. And so if I did well one week, a reward myself, and I had this kind of system set up where I would reward myself on the weekends because I did good and I was a good person. And if I did not then I was bad and I was a bad person. I carry the shame because guilt is day in and day out. And that went on I would say for years, I will say that that was launched or largely probably about 14, 15 years of my journey. And I'm still trying to untie myself from that today. And so about two years ago, I decided to do bodybuilding. And the mindset that I had at that time was, I felt like I was out of control of my weight, because I couldn't move weight as fast as I wanted to. And so I was like, I'm gonna go into bodybuilding because that's the extreme thing to do if you want to [unintelligible], right? So I went into it, and it completely turned my relationship with food upside down. It turned my relationship with my body and food upside down. And I really started to feel like I felt probably about, I'd say, seven years, eight years into my journey. So the work that I had done to even try to feel better about myself, regain control of my relationship with food, completely came undone during those two years of bodybuilding, and so I would say I'm still kind of, I would say I'm on the tail end now of trying to dig myself out of the bodybuilding mentality. Just at the beginning of this year, I stopped weighing all of my food, I would weigh every single thing that I put in my mouth. I did that since 2017, there was nothing that I ate, especially while I was home, that I didn't weigh and measure. I would even travel with prepackaged food that was weighed. And so it was at the beginning of this year that I was like, "You know what, I'm not gonna weigh my food anymore. There's some things I need to work on my anxiety around food." And so when I hear people talk about the relationship with food, I was like, "Y'all, this is something that is ongoing. This is not something that's just going to happen. Because you have all the information, and you have all the resources, like this is constant work." So that's where I am now with just allowing myself to reconnect with my body and understanding what my body is saying to me. Understanding that weight, like really, like we say, weight doesn't matter, really sitting with the discomfort of the number on the scale, and not allowing myself to get on the scale. And that's just the phase of where I am in my life. Right? Now, and I recognize that that's going to change, but when I'm healthier, and I feel like my mindset is healthier, that's when I can go back to kind of doing the things that I love and training for muscle composition and those kinds of things. But right now, where I am now, I need to work on my anxiety around food and the thoughts that I have around food and the ways that I've played validation on the scale and the number and those kinds of things.

So sitting with that discomfort of the numbers going up, up, you know, and then kind of fiddling with what that feels like, my clothes get bigger, you know, I mean, to get a different size, quote, pair of pants and dress size and that kind of thing. So that's where I am now. And I want to just kind of encourage people that that changes and we go in and out of those phases that I like, I think people think you get to a place and bam -

JEN

Finish line. Yes.

DR. EBONY

You go in and out of the phases. So yeah, that's been my journey.

JEN

Yeah, I you know, and we, Annie and I, both had similar experiences. I didn't weigh myself for four years, actually, when I was kind of trying to repair my relationship with this. Until one day, I thought, "Hey, if I keep saying and telling women that the scale is just a number, why wouldn't I get on it?" So then that's, you know, next phase of my journey right? But definitely disconnecting from it was the right step for me at that time. And I love how you've acknowledged we go in and out of phases, right? And it's all about being very intuitive to what you need and any and every season that you're going through.

DR. EBONY

And I couldn't listen to that, I couldn't kind of tap into that intuition or that intention. When I was still doing things are very systematically invariable [unintelligible], like I was completely just doing things out of habit and not connecting that to, "Does my body want all that chicken right now? Or am I just eating chicken to eat my, to hit my protein goal? Do I really want a sweet potato today?" Or, like, "Am I ready to eat that, or am I just wanting that because that's what my trainer said I need to eat? Do I even want to eat now?" Because I was eating every three hours I was eating like every two and a half hours and I was like, "I'm really hungry right now." So for me, the work that I need to do right now is just like missing to my body, when is my body hungry? When is it not? Am I hungry just because I'm supposed to eat, like what rules am I abiding by that actually have nothing to do with what my body is telling me? So learning to kind of tap into that to get where I am.

JEN

I love that. And so another thing I want to say is just, I know everybody probably heard already, but you're a food psychologist and you have a an education in psychology, and I mean, we're all vulnerable to this culture that we live in. Right? All of us. And we have

a couple therapists in Balance365 actually, we have some physicians, we have nurses, and I'm just saying that to normalize to everybody that all our living, even those of us in you know health care professions, we are all living in this same diet culture, and we're all vulnerable to that same conditioning.

DR. EBONY

Absolutely. Like, I tell people, it's the same as if a surgeon breaks their arm. They're not immune to breaking bones, they still have bones just like the rest of us, a family physician getting the flu. They have an immune system and organs just like we do. They are not immune to all of that. And so just because we have developed a skill, because that's exactly what it is. We've developed a skill in a trade. And that doesn't make us immune to the impact of a huge culture, of one that we were born into. We can't escape that, it's everywhere. And so to think that just by virtue of having a skill and the education that you would somehow escape, that is not realistic. So I appreciate you pointing that out.

JEN

Yeah, and we do phase one, as you know, in Balance365 is called diet deprogramming and we say that too, you know, women, they get tired and they go, "When am I going to stop getting triggered?" When, you know? And it's like, you just integrate it into your life. It just never ends. So you have awareness. And then you have situations, unpack, situations, unpack, situations, unpack, and that's what diet deprogramming is.

DR. EBONY

Yeah. And I love that and it's really about kind of, how do you manage these things when they come up now? They don't go anywhere because they're memories. How do you manage it, though? That's what we kind of want to focus on and kind of going forward, it's not that we are ever going to undo the messages that we learned when we were younger. We're never going to unhear them. So how do I respond to them when that cartoon comes up that I remember watching on Saturday morning and eating my cereal and then I want cereal, but then there's this message that comes in and says, "No cereal," or "Bad"? And yeah, you know, it's like, kind of like all of these things, like it's how you manage that and what you do to respond to that.

JEN

I know there was a woman, if she's listening, Amber, she said, again, had kind of asked questions around, "When does her mindset switch?" So when does her first initial thought become one of growth, like a growth mindset instead of this fixed mindset or victim mindset? And I don't know if anyone has the answer to that, your first thought may always be that childhood programming or inner programming, but it truly is, as long

as you can keep counteracting that with the woman you are or the woman you're becoming, then that's really your best step forward, right?

DR. EBONY

Yeah, yeah. If we can't determine kind of like what our mind is going to do. Our mind even works while we are asleep, right? So it just tells you just how powerful it is, like, when we're even in our most vulnerable kind of unconscious state almost. We are not in control of what our brain does. And so to think that we're going to always be paying attention to what our mind does is not realistic either. And that's the immense amount of pressure placed on yourself to think that your mindset is automatically going to be reprogrammed with messages all the time. And so when I'm working with people, I kind of let them know that we need to do something about these expectations that you have, and that your mindset or a mindset shift does not mean that the first thought that comes out is positive, it means that you are aware enough now to recognize that it's there, so that you can change it, so that you can redirect it and challenge whatever is coming up. Not that it's going to automatically always be positive, because that's not a realistic view. Right?

JEN

Yeah. I've shared previously on the podcast that I really struggle with victim mindset, like my first thought is always like, I am powerless, sinking into despair as Annie knows from [laughs] working with me for five or six years. Someone's got to pick Jen up off the floor again. [Laughs] It's Annie. And so it's just something I've grown aware of. And here comes, here come those thoughts, challenging them. "Is this really true? What options do you have in this situation? What is your best step forward?"

DR. EBONY

Wow, I have, I'm smiling because I had a session with my therapist the other day, was it last week? And we were talking about kind of like the way things have been going with business and that kind of thing. And I was just like, "I just don't feel excited, like, I'm supposed to be excited and all these worried thoughts are coming in about what are people gonna think and are people gonna really like what I'm doing? Are people really gonna appreciate it?" So even with all the skills that I have, and all of the training, those still come back. And so I want people to be compassionate with themselves around kind of the messaging that's deeply ingrained in us, like it's gonna show itself and the work to do is then kind of work with somebody or find, like you said, use both questions, to be able to challenge that.

ANNIE

This feels really familiar to people who think that Jen and I don't have bad body image days. And we're like, "Oh, no, no, no, no." [Laughs] We do, we can manage them and we can navigate them better. We have more tools in the toolbox to do so."

JEN

I've even developed the skill to sit with those uncomfortable feelings, instead of feeling like I gotta get rid of these somehow. It's just sitting with uncomfortable feelings. So next question. I don't want to get too stuck on any one question, because I have so many. I don't want to keep you all night. How would you define an unhealthy relationship with food for anyone listening?

DR. EBONY

Yeah. So first, to define an unhealthy relationship, we got to kind of think about how do we find a relationship with food. So our relationship with food is the connection that you have and feelings that you have, or you, a group of people, object, thing, concept, that connection between those things, the way that you feel towards those things, and many times when we're in relationship, it's the way other people are feeling and reacting towards you and engaging with you. So when we're thinking about a relationship, when people don't really think that we have a relationship with food, it's like, no, you're interacting, you're feeling, you're engaging. It has an impact on you, it elicits some emotions. So what I would say is an unhealthy relationship with food, I would define it in many of the same ways that I define an unhealthy relationship with a person. If it's a relationship and makes you feel powerless, out of control, worthless, undervalued, shame, guilt, if it kind of speaks to you in a negative way and makes you have this negative narrative about yourself or reinforces that negative narrative about yourself, it's toxic. If it doesn't allow you to have a counter argument against it. If it doesn't allow you to begin to challenge or ask questions of it. If you feel like you're walking on eggshells, that's typically an unhealthy relationship. And that's what that's what people, that's with food. So what I would tell people is to kind of think about what that will feel like with a person. And now think about times when that has shown up for you with food. When do you feel powerless? When I can't choose what I want to eat. Or when I've eaten something that I know is bad for me. Why does that feel bad for you? Because we're not supposed to eat fat. Why are you not supposed to eat fat? Because...And then we kind of dig through the messages and where those came from. And then kind of like, when do you feel like you're walking on eggshells, or when I go to a party, and everybody's watching me or when I go out to eat, and I don't know what to choose, and I'm watching to see what everybody else chooses. And I ended up getting a salad and I can't really get what I want because I'm thinking people are going to judge me. All of those are unhealthy relationships and patterns with food because they don't allow you to elevate. They don't allow you to grow. They don't empower you. They don't allow you to have a

voice. They don't allow you to advocate for yourself. And so those are the things that I would say indicate an unhealthy relationship with one, where you just feel like you have to shrink yourself in order for that relationship still to kind of remain.

JEN

That was powerful. And you didn't even read that, you just said it off the cuff. [Laughs]

DR. EBONY

[Laughs]

JEN

That was awesome. So it's like, "Hey, you're in a relationship with a narcissistic piece of cake over there." Yeah.

DR. EBONY

It's only narcissistic because of the people, what people have told us about that cake. Right? It's only because of the things that we have learned about that cake. And so what I really love about the relationship with food is I get to have real conversations with people in like, it's a real person. Because when we're talking about food, they're kind of like, "Oh, that makes sense." But then when we put it in terms of it being a person, they're like, "Oh, right. Makes sense." Because we all have been in relationship with people when we felt taken advantage of, we felt like we didn't really have a chance to hear our voice heard, or we didn't...People didn't like the person, and we had to break up with them when we couldn't bring them around because of other people's opinions, and that kind of thing, where we had to get validation from them. So being with food is very much the same way. It's like, "Well, doughnuts are bad." Why? "Because my trainer said I couldn't eat it," or, you know, those kinds of things, and then really working back from there to understand kind of like, "Okay, so how do you see it? If you didn't have anybody say anything about the person you were dating, would you still date them?" Well, yeah. "Would you still eat that?" Well, yeah. "And how does that make you feel?" It makes me feel free. And it makes me feel like I can have a choice. And it makes me feel like I'm having fun, and those kinds of things. And so we just kind of keep connecting and going back and forth from person to food relationships and drawing the parallels.

JEN

And I think we often talk about this in terms of restriction, as far as when you're restricting because of that relationship with food, but we also see often in Balance365, and I'm sure you see this in your clients. There's also the binge eating, like, there's like, I can't stop, I can't stop eating this food. And that is, you know, just sort of the other end

of the pendulum but it's also not a behavior that I would say is part of a healthy relationship with food.

DR. EBONY

That's toxic, right? Because a scarcity mindset, and anything that we feel like is going to be taken away from us and that we're extremely limited with, we're going to go all in, is scarcity mindset. I called it like the Last Supper kind of effect, right? So you're telling me I can't have it. So I'm going to have all of it. And I kind of liken it to when you were talking, the thought came to my mind. We used to always joke when we were younger about people who were children of pastors and preachers and deacons in the church. And then when they went on to college, they were like, "Whoo, I am finally free. I am doing all of the things. I am drinking all of the alcohol, I am doing -"

JEN

Yes.

DR. EBONY

"I'm saying all these," because you were restricted so much. And so this is the other end and the result of that severe restriction and those rules and that rigidity. And so when you do that with food, the same thing happens. It's like you can't have it. So when I can, I'm going to get all of it because at some point I won't be able to, I'm kind of like hoarding it.

JEN

Yeah, it's so funny that you use that as an example, because Annie and I have used that as an example in this podcast before. And I say, "Hey, the solution isn't to move back in with your strict parents -"

DR. EBONY

That's not the solution.

JEN

Yes.

DR. EBONY

That is not the solution. The solution is to learn how to behave in ways that actually make you feel good. And they're aligning with you, not as a direct kind of like reflex of that rigidity.

JEN

Yeah, totally. So can you share, I know we touched on this earlier that often this kind of messaging and the thoughts that keep coming to us that we keep acting on. They come out of childhood, and this was probably one of the most common requests we had for you to touch on. And I know you've talked with Balance365ers about it because Nicole, I'm not sure if you know who I'm talking about. She said, "She is amazing at this." So what are some common experiences women may have in childhood that lead them to struggle with their relationship with food as adults?

DR. EBONY

Oh, my gosh, I love this because I love kind of like talking about childhood, drawing the connection with how we act in our current life, the messages that we get around food. So some common ones are when you sit down to eat, kind of being told what to eat and being told when you're done. So those are things that kind of set the tone for how you engage with food. So for me, I was taught that I wasn't full until my plate was clean.

JEN

Hmm.

DR. EBONY

So I've learned that a very early age to disconnect the fullness in my body. And you know, what that was saying to me. And I learned to rely on my mom's kind of punishment or reinforcement of what when I was four, because of what my plate looked like. So from a very early age, I began to associate fullness with a clean plate. Even now, in my adult life, if my plate is, even if I'm full, I find myself sometimes still eating because my plate has to be clean, and I'm doing this out of habit. I find myself doing this most when I'm at a restaurant. Because the other message that we learned in childhood is that money is scarce. And so money, wasted food is money wasted. And so because money is scarce, resources as you need to eat all of your food, because then if you don't, then you're ungrateful. And so I'm always wanting to be grateful, right? I'm always wanting to be appreciative. And what better way do I do that than to show you that I ate all of my food? That is also shown when we go to other people's houses. When people offer you food you eat, because not to not eat is rude. Right? When you go to functions you eat because to not eat would mean that you're not grateful for the person who cooked you're not appreciative of their offering to you. Also, it shows up in kind of like weight, body size, even as kids, males are taught that they can eat whatever they want. At least that's how it was in my household. "Oh, give that boy more food. He's a growing boy. Give him more food, but the girl, you need to wait because you're not a husband...You know, you're not going to get married if your waist is too big." So tying dating to body size, tying moral judgments to body size, being told that I'm a woman, and basically sending the message without saying that I'm supposed to look a certain

way in order to be desirable, or in order to be good enough. Also, I grew up in a house where my dad got the biggest piece of the pork chop, like, he got the biggest piece of pork chop, he got the biggest piece of chicken, he was served first. So as women, one, we're supposed to serve men, and then two, I'm supposed to get what's left. And oftentimes that needs to be little so that he has enough. And so all of these messages kind of play out. They played out in my life as an adult, they continue to play out when I go back home, I find myself serving the males in my family first, making sure they get the best serving and the best offering of the food. And so these things continue to show up. And we don't recognize these things are happening for us. And so when we're trying to stick to a diet, we oftentimes blame consistency and discipline, and that's not really what's happening. We're really consistent and really disciplined people. The thing is we're not taking into account those messages that are still at play that we've internalized. "Eat all your food. The kids are going to starve."

JEN

We're consistent and disciplined with those messages that we received in childhood. Yes.

DR. EBONY

Yeah.

JEN

Yes, I love that. We've heard, I mean, we've heard many stories over the years, as I'm sure you have, and you know, everyone else in the family getting dessert except for her as a little girl because she was too big and her mom had her on a diet and you know, etc, etc. I don't want to demonize moms or anything. I know that's a reflection of what was going on for her mom. But it just becomes a cycle that becomes things we internalize and take into our relationship with food. And that's a big one. We have to eat all day, right? We need it to survive. So your relationship with food is a big deal. You're showing up all day.

DR. EBONY

And to be fair, our parents were impacted by diet culture as well. It didn't just -

JEN

Totally. I think it's almost worse at times.

DR. EBONY

The messages that they received in, oh my goodness, but even the size of clothing at that time like we have, we still have a long way to go in fashion with being inclusive of

clothing sizes, but then, even then, like the clothing sizes, were not kind of inclusive or a variety, like oh my goodness.

JEN

Yeah, totally. So our members have been raving about their calls with you. And one question that was asked is, do you have any steps you suggest people work through for getting to the root of their own hangups? So like, and then, what do you do with that? So you, you know, you get to the root of it, where that message comes from. What kind of process would you go through to find that and then what do you do with that information?

DR. EBONY

Yep. So I love telling people when they come in, because by the time people reach the steps of coaching or the process of therapy, they're really in the place of desperation, like, they're like, I need results, like, give me something because I've been doing this too long. So what I tell people when they come to me is, the first thing we're going to do is nothing. And literally, we're going to observe, I'm not going to tell you exactly like something else to do, so that you set yourself up to fill it that. So one of the first things that we do in this process is to just observe, you really take a look at yourself from a dollhouse perspective almost. Where you can see all the rooms, the tiny rocking chair, the small carpet, the little people, and you really just observe yourself from that perspective without judgment. When we observe ourselves, we're able to notice our patterns. We're able to figure out when we're doing things, which context we're doing things, what our emotions are, what's going on at that moment for us and what makes this moment different from that one. And what we're doing is just gathering data, we're exploring, and I say without judgment, because that's the most important piece, doesn't really solve things for us. It's like putting a stick in a wheel, it really stops the process for us when we're judging. We're like, "Oh, that was so stupid." You immediately cut yourself off from further exploration because nobody wants to feel guilt, or shame. And so if we can do it without judgment, and just notice that I'm doing that. "Ah, the reason I ate that was because of this. Or the reason that I overdid at that point was because of this. Oh, so this is what's happening for me." So that's the first thing is just become really curious. Really observe it, and write that stuff down, like take note of it. The next thing to do is to choose the lowest hanging fruit, because what we want to do is allow you to have, when we need you to feel like you're mastering something, because when you master something, you're more likely to want to go to it again, you're more likely to want to show up again. I mean, that's human conditioning. When you give a dog a treat, you're shaping behavior. The more wins you have, the more likely you're going to show up again. So start with the lowest hanging fruit. We like to do, as ambitious people, is we like to start with "What's the most unrealistic goal I could have? I'm gonna do that."

And then, when that doesn't happen, then we feel like, "Oh, nothing works," and like, no, it's not that it doesn't work, you did not develop your skill, your tolerance, your understanding of what it takes to actually get there. So instead of reaching for the highest thing, let's start here. So instead of going to confront your parents, if their parents are still around, instead of want to confront parents, the first thing we can do is observe where it's showing up, and then learn skills to sit with like you said earlier, I'm learning to sit with that discomfort. So let's choose the emotion that's easier for you to sit with. Because if you try to go confront parents, then we run the risk of being blamed, being rejected, getting in trouble because some of us still carry that, so what's the emotion that I can sit with most? Well, I can sit with disappointment most. Okay, let's work on disappointment instead. Without needing to change it, all I can sit with, I can sit with my anxiety because I'm working on anxiety and therapy, I can sit with my anxiety a little bit. Okay, let's look at those moments that brings up anxiety for you. And let's work on building coping skills in that area. And so this takes time. And that's what the process looks like, and each time we're able to deal with and see wins as we deal with those emotions, then we can go on to the next emotion, or the next situations, that's a higher state. And so then we build confidence in ourselves, we feel empowered, and if I can sit with that emotion, and I can talk to that person about how that made me feel, or I can eat that cake and still go on about my day, then man, what can I do when I show up at this party? At my high school reunion, I think about the skills that I'm building there. What we want to do is we want to go straight for the high school reunion and do all the things and then leave feeling like amiss about, or even not going. So basically observe. Start with the lowest hanging fruit. We want to build confidence, we want to get you wins so that you can keep showing up to tackle those larger things.

JEN

We have a phase in Balance365 called, it's observing. And then another thing we point out to women is impulsivity is something you won't get, I guess can be part of their character, but dieters are often incredibly impulsive. So part of observing is learning to sit with impulses and not act on them. And that can be quite a challenge for many of our members. But it's all, if they can see the big picture, it's all about, I don't know if unlearning is the word, but unlearning these impulsivities that they have. Yeah, so yeah, I love that. So, another thing, this is taken right from your website, you specialize in helping women increase their effectiveness with self care. Can you dive into that issue a little bit more? And just before we even get going, Annie and I see a real resistance to women prioritizing their own wants and needs. And so this will be an important thing for everyone to hear.

DR. EBONY

I love this question, because something just happened today that I saw on Instagram that I'll kind of lead this into. So, as women, historically as women, we're taught to be the caretakers. We are, I think naturally, just by way of nature, we are nurturing. I think that's a part of who we are. I think we have an intuition. That's just who we are. I think in society, though, that is kind of turned up several notches to where we're almost expected to be that, and I mean every single woman is expected to do that. And to be that. So I think we have this pressure to be all things to all the people is in our messaging. When Pete when women give birth, the bounce back. "How long are you going to be down for?" "Oh, your bounce back was great." "Get that body back." We're taught, you know, things around summer, "What is your summer body going to look like?" I don't see men being told what their summer body is going to look like. And so all of this messaging around who you are, and what you should do to show up for other people, even in your summer body, like, have a summer body because people on the beach need you to show up in a certain way, you know, so all of this messaging is around doing what is comfortable or is necessary for other people. And so when we go to do things for ourselves, we are oftentimes feeling really guilty. We're oftentimes feeling really selfish, about, anytime, I can't tell you the amount of women that I've talked to, even my own friends who feel guilty for being away from their children for too long, or even feeling guilty for having negative thoughts about their children, or having negative feelings about their lives being changed and they should be happy because, again, the messaging that we receive as society is that children should bring you joy. Nobody really wants to talk about the ways that having children completely turns your world upside down. And that that's not all the time a joyous occasion. All the way to, if you have a miscarriage, the question, what did you do? If you have a miscarriage, what would you have done differently? As if this is your fault. So something that I saw on social media today was that women who have periods, that's not an excuse for an attitude, written by a male, tweeted, periods are not an excuse to have an attitude. So all of this messaging that we receive in society, especially from men, about who we should be, what we should be, how we should show up, creates this guilt inside of us when it's our turn to take care of ourselves. And so most of us don't know what self care looks like. And we want to do the fluffy self care too. So self care is not all fluffy. I enjoy those fluffy moments. I enjoy those bubble baths. I enjoy a nice glass of wine, I want all the chocolates, I want all of those things. And self care is actually getting in there and doing the work and sitting with those yucky feelings, sitting with that selfishness without acting on it. Take time with yourself, allowing yourself to feel all those emotions, getting to the root of where you learn that you can take care of yourself. This is what self care is. And another thing that we bring up, and I did a retreat with some other women, is also being who we are as women in our totality. That means also being sexual beings, a lot of us are changed around men, and women especially. And so taking care of yourself in those ways as well, and what that looks like. And so doing that exploratory

work and having those conversations around, what would you be or what would this look like? Because I think we just need to get comfortable and normalize that we're allowed to show up in many ways, and that self care can look many different ways. And it doesn't always have to be bubble baths, because I think that ties into the prettiness and the fluffiness, that women should be.

JEN

The pedicures or the, yeah.

DR. EBONY

Yeah, it just kind of reinforces this idea that women should be really, really tender, really kind of dainty and to do all the things beauty wise, and that when we do our deeper level work, that's not acceptable. And so I look at self care and kind of like, I like all the fluff stuff, and we'll leave that to people who are good at that. But when you're working with me and self care, I want to really get into kind of like dealing with those things that we're told, that we can't do, like doing the journaling, taking the time saying no setting boundaries, asking for what you want to need. That's what I mean by self here.

JEN

When we, like boundary setting, that came up today in Balance365, it's come up a couple times with this member about, she's very close with family, certain female family members, they constantly comment on her body and her weight, she cannot ask them to stop, like, there is just this real resistance. Women have boundary setting, and I think it's sitting in that discomfort and we are so used to taking on discomfort internally, to make sure everyone around us is taken care of.

DR. EBONY

And the messages around, I'm pretty sure it's difficult, for her sounds like there are some blocks there for her. And I'm pretty sure her family has done a really good job of making sure she doesn't step out of line, making sure that she doesn't have any wiggle room to ask them a question in any way. And so when we talk about kind of like boundaries, it's really difficult to place boundaries around things where you're being like, we call this systemic, where there's this systemic thing that's happening, right? It's almost like working for an employer and asking for something, and then not really being targeted for, what's the word I'm looking for, retaliated against, because you asked for this thing, and then you have the threat of being fired. So the system is really set up for you not to make any waves. And so I'm pretty sure that the family system has been structured in a way that it continues to create this space where she can't ask for what she wants and needs. That's not going to be welcomed.

JEN

Yeah, and I guess I can't speak for her, but I know families, you respect your elders. That's what you do. You do not even, as a child, like, mom speaks, that's the word. You don't challenge it. You don't. And so we'd be good girls, and we, no matter how old we are, we could be 35 or 75. And we still respect our elders. Right? And that kind of the message that -

ANNIE

And this came up in a podcast with Deandra, another Balance365 expert panel coach, Jen, if you remember, that a lot of times women, she was talking about how women will bite their tongues so to speak. They won't say anything. Because they don't want to make anyone uncomfortable. They don't want to upset anyone. They don't want to make waves. And I think she described it as like an internal bomb. Like we -

JEN

Yeah, we're swallowing a bomb every time. Yeah.

ANNIE

Like we will take that on. We will like make ourselves so uncomfortable and hurt.

DR. EBONY

And when I was saying the family, I'm talking like, kind of generally speaking I think that a lot of these systems, and in a lot of things, when we see women kind of be silenced in their voice, comes from systems that have also impacted a family like patriarchy, and bigotry and misogyny. So even them being victims of all of that, and then they, you know, can't even move out of their own, they've been impacted. So they're like collateral damage almost. And then them not being willing to move or kind of binge on that, and not even being aware that they have been impacted by these larger systems that have silenced when the voices in so many ways or even voices of anybody, the voices of children, the voices of outsiders, like what voices of therapists and doctors, like it's just gonna look so many different ways.

JEN

I think that often, and this is kind of a place I got with some forgiveness I had to do, is that without the awareness of the system that we're all in, you're trying to help your children get by in life, and so when you are putting your daughter on a diet, a parent isn't thinking about the trauma that will bring to her. She's thinking about, "How do I help my child succeed in this world?" Because without the awareness of that, we live in this horrible fat phobic world, or maybe even a feeling of powerlessness over it. I think the intention is actually, I don't know if good is the right word. But the intention comes from a

place of love and wanting to see your child thrive. And I think we're now learning, you know, as this generation that's unpacking a lot of this, we're learning like, it is so harmful, and we're the generation that saying, "No, the system has to be burned down," right?

DR. EBONY

That's right. It comes from a well intended place, like people are well intentioned, and it's survival. I know that, you know, parents know the feedback that they received about their bodies and they don't want their children to have to suffer in the same way. So it comes from a well intentioned place without understanding the direct consequences or negative impacts that is going to have on them.

JEN

Right. So one last question here is just, I wanted to have a quick discussion for everybody listening is what's available to women when they start doing this work, like, what's on the other side of that?

DR. EBONY

That's a really good question. Theoretically, here's what I would like to believe. I don't even know if this is true. But here's what I would like to believe. I would like to believe that on the other side of this is empowerment and unapologetic living and presentation, I would love for us to be able to get to a place where we are accepting a large part of us, are accepting exactly who we are, it doesn't mean that we stop working or working to improve ourselves, but I live in this world where I feel like it would be such a great feeling to just have complete body acceptance in not only my body, but other bodies. And just to see a body is that, just a body, and not to see your body as old, as a fat body, that's a skinny body, that's a good body, that's a fit body. Like, I see it as just a body, no more so than we see your chair as a chair and a shoe as a shoe. And I feel like that's so freeing. I feel like that's so empowering. I feel like that releases so much of the shame and guilt that we have towards ourselves and a lot of the discord that we have within ourselves and with other people. And I just see this world and I fantasize about this world where women just feel so empowered and whatever body they have in their ability to kind of show up in that without thinking that how I'm showing up, I'm completely being rejected for carrying around this rejection all the time. That doesn't exist right now. I don't know what world that feels like. You know?

JEN

It's a lot of baggage to carry. And I think most women don't know how heavy it was until they set it down.

DR. EBONY

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's a lot to carry. When I was talking to somebody else earlier today, and we were talking about being a black woman in a fat body, and just everything about you is directly rejected by the world that we live in. Everything about you, your hair is rejected, your skin tone is rejected, your gender, however you choose your forward facing gender is rejected. And then throw sexuality in there. Depending on what you identify as, or your preference, you are rejected. And so we just have so many things like walking outside of the door just feels so heavy, it feels so heavy, it's always have to think twice about our presentation. And that kind of thing is just, it's a lot to deal with, and to be able to live in a world where we don't have to carry that, I don't even know what that feels like. I don't even know. Like, what I feel purposeful in, that kind of world, because I derive a lot of purpose and my mission is around helping to kind of dismantle some of that stuff. And so what will my work look like if I didn't? So you know if we didn't have to carry that, so all of these things come to mind.

JEN

Mm hmm. That's awesome. Thanks for sharing that.

ANNIE

Yeah, that was beautiful. And I think maybe maybe my kids, my kids' kids, my grandkids, will get to experience that.

DR. EBONY

Yeah. Yep. Like, even with just the hair movement now, like, I'm excited that relaxers have kind of phased themselves out. Because when I was younger, we all have relaxers, like we even had kind of like curls and those things and that people aren't able to kind of show up with their natural hair and their natural state. And we're getting to a point now where that's just commonplace. Like, that sounds so weird for us to have to get to a place where hair is just commonplace, and it's not looked at as threatening or violent or that kind of thing. And so I would love for us to get to a place where like, "Oh, yeah, the runway has bigger bodies on it. Like, the sketchings are bigger body people, like there's a variety." I mean, we're just not there. So I'm hopeful that it'll somehow happen. For people coming up to me that definitely want to do the work for legacy purpose. I don't know if I'll see it, but and I, as I said that I was like, this must have been how my ancestors felt about the work that they were doing. It's like, I don't ever see it, but at least people coming after me will be free and you kind of have some sources of freedom, you know.

JEN

Mm-hm. I love that. Thank you.

DR. EBONY

Yeah.

JEN

This was an awesome episode.

ANNIE

Dr. Ebony, real quick, do you want to share about your your therapy cards?

JEN

Oh, yes.

DR. EBONY

Oh, absolutely. Thank you.

JEN

We started talking before we started recording and they're flying off the shelves.

ANNIE

Yeah. So if you want in on it, you got to get in. Right?

DR. EBONY

Yeah. So I created, this is called my therapy cards and it's created with black women in mind. Anybody can use them, they were specifically created so that black women can have access to the resources that are so very often limited within the field of mental health, as we know the field of mental health hasn't done a great job of being kind of accessible to people of color and that kind of thing. So I wanted to be able to create something that people could feel like, allow them to do that, do good quality work. Like I said, I'm all for the affirmation cards. I'm all for the self care cards to tell you to say something nice to yourself. But I really want to get into when I say this, why don't I believe it? Like, what's coming up? For me that's stopping me from actually doing the work. And what I also wanted to do with these was to create more access. These cards don't replace therapy, but they definitely help us begin to have the conversation when there's a large stigma in the black community that exists around getting help. And I mean, when people ask me why black women? Because black women are people who carry the stereotype of being strong, far more than anybody else. And so for us to go get help is super kind of, it kind of creates this idea that I'm weak if I get help, so we need to start having that conversation that it's okay to go get help and it's okay for me to look inward to be able to myself, and that's why the cards are created, to give women,

black women a voice to say, "Okay, I can do my work. And I can let go of that role, or that stereotype," it's almost a blessing and a curse of being strong. "And that I can also let my hair down and do the work that is necessary for me to improve. And I can say, I am not okay," and be okay with that and have everybody else deal with that. But to be able to look at yourself and do that self exploratory work, I think is so meaningful, especially for people who are on the fence about therapy, like being able to have these cars and say, "Oh, I really have an issue with forgiveness. So I'm going to seek out a therapist to be able to ask specifically, what work can we do around my hang up about forgiveness? So now I have a voice. Now I can advocate for myself," because one of the things that I hear is, "I don't know how to choose a therapist," or, "How do I know if a therapist is a good fit? Well, if I know some things about myself, and that stuff has been brought out in the cards and brought to the surface, then I can go find a therapist or somebody to work with where I can ask specifically, 'Hey, don't worry with forgiveness,' I got hangups around letting some heaviness go, I need to learn coping skills so that I can tell people who are not used to working with me how to actually work with me. And not that I always have to do the work." But I need us to be educated consumers, I need us to be able to advocate for ourselves, because in this system, largely built around the medical model, it's largely been the authoritarian is the doctor, you are the patient, you do what I say, you don't really have a voice, but we need a voice because we need to be able to feel like we are partners in the process. That is empowering for us, especially in a system where we have not been given that space and the power differential is so unequal and is so imbalanced, that if we go in and say, "Hey, I want to be a thought partner and come up with some strategies around ways that I can work through this forgiveness thing that I've got going on with my parents," you know just imagine how much more fruitful that work can be once you begin to uncover those things.

JEN

Totally. You had an Instagram post that was so good. You said, doing your work is an act of resistance.

DR. EBONY

Yeah. Yeah, it is, because we're not supposed to write words. We're not supposed to be doing these things. Like, everything that we're doing now is resistance, is probably protesting like, "No, I'm going to get the help, I'm gonna go to therapy. I'm going to say I need help. I'm going to not be strong." Like, all of that is a direct protest against everything that we're supposed to be, or kind of like, how people look at us meantime.

JEN

Right. [Laughs] Awesome.

ANNIE

So where can they, where can they find those?

DR. EBONY

Oh, yeah. So mytherapycards.com.

ANNIE

Okay. We can link to that in the show notes if people want to snag them. They've gotten, just from following you on Instagram, it looks like they've gotten quite the press, too.

DR. EBONY

Yeah. They've done really well. [Laughs]

ANNIE

You're pretty popular. [Laughs]

DR. EBONY

Yeah. I mean, it's a good thing. And it's also kind of like activating my anxiety here. Because I kind of had this idea. It's like, "Oh my god now," because psychologists, and y'all probably know this from coaches, like, your friends will never know what you do. Like, we can go into a hair salon and see our people work and be like, "Oh, that's what they do." But as a therapist, my friends don't ever get a chance to see what I do. They only know that I'm going into session. Nobody can ever see me work, right? So this is a very vulnerable space for me, because I'm putting my work out there for people to see, when people normally don't get a chance to see me work on this. They're working directly with me. So to kind of think about people's ideas and thoughts around this really kind of like, I'm glad it's getting out. And that's the whole purpose of it. But I'm kind of like, my anxiety, it's like, "Oh, what are people going to think?"

JEN

I always, well, I mean, I get pretty anxious about those things as well. And there's another psychologist, I follow Dr. Jody Carrington. And she always says, and she swears like a sailor. Like she just, and people comment about it, and she just replies. "Well, I can't be for everybody." Or, "Thanks, sweet one. I can't be for everybody." [Laughs]

DR. EBONY

Yeah, I appreciate a therapist who can curse, because that goes against everything that we're taught, and like, "You should do this," and goes directly against this idea of

professionalism. It's also rooted in patriarchy and misogyny. But then that's another topic. [Laughs]

ANNIE

Yeah. No tattoos, no nails, keep your jewelry small and close, conservative and [laughs] yeah.

DR. EBONY

Yes. [Laughs]

ANNIE

Well, you so much. This was a joy. I hope that our listeners are going to get as much out of this as our members have been in their coaching calls. I'm certain they will. So thank you for helping support our community. We just cannot say enough rave reviews about you.

JEN

Yeah, and we will link to everything we talked about, we'll link to your social media profiles, we'll link to your website, we'll link to your therapy cards in the show notes. So anybody that is interested in following, go check her out.

DR. EBONY

I appreciate this so much. Thank you both, I love the conversation and being able to kind of connect and do work together.

JEN

We will meet up one day when the world is, yes.

DR. EBONY

We say when outside opens back up. We'll be able to -

ANNIE

[Laughs] It's gonna happen, friends, right? [Laughs] All right. Thank you.

JEN

Thank you.

DR. EBONY

Bye-bye y'all.

ANNIE BREES (OUTRO)

Hey, everyone, if your mind has been blown while listening to this podcast, just wait until you work with us. Let us help you level up your health and wellness habits and your life inside Balance365 coaching. Head over to balance365.co to enroll in next month's coaching round. See you on the inside.