

# Balance365 Episode 49 Transcript

Annie: Welcome back to another episode of Balance365 Life Radio, we have more than enough research to show that diets don't work. We know this yet people still continue to diet over and over and over again. Why? Well, it's likely large in part because dieting is a big part of our culture: diet talk, weight talk, negative body talk. It's everywhere from office conversations to gabbing with your girlfriends over drinks to the marketing on our food, books, and commercials.

Diet culture is often so subtle that it can be hard to even identify. When everyone around you is seemingly celebrating weight loss at all costs and bonding over eating "good" foods and say no to "bad" ones it can be difficult to take a stand against a culture.

On today's episode Jen, Lauren and I tackle the big topic of diet culture: what it is, what it looks like, how it's harmful and how we can begin to dismantle this hurtful, oppressive system. We know that this is just the tip of the iceberg of a very important topic and discussion and we invite you to continue this discussion on the inside of our private Facebook group Healthy Habits Happy Moms. See you on the inside!

Lauren and Jen! We're back with a big, big topic today, are you ready for this?

Jen: Ready.

Lauren: Ready.

Annie: You've got your game faces on, you guys. We're discussing the term diet culture. What is diet culture? Which, the reason why we want to address this is because diet culture is a term and a phrase that we use frequently in our community and in our content and we really haven't stopped to kind of unpack what this is, right? And we're just going to dive right into it because I think we could spend a lot of time talking about this and we want to make sure that we do it justice and who knows, we might have to come revisit this. We'll see how far we can get on our outline, right, but we know that diets don't work and this is not a new topic.

If you're new to our podcast that might be a new concept to you but if you have been around our community and our podcast for a while, you know that diets don't work and the research is there to support it and in fact, the research shows that most people are able to lose weight in the year but the vast majority gain it back with the majority of people gaining back more than they lost within 5 years and to echo the research that's already out there that supports diets don't work, we've surveyed our community and an overwhelmingly amount of our community have tried dieting and they've "failed" yet many women keep dieting, right? We see this all the time, like, people try diets, they don't have success but they keep dieting and why is that? We would offer that it's, unfortunately, part of our culture, right?

Jen: It's deeply ingrained in our culture to diet.

Lauren: Yes.

Annie: Yes. And so what we want to discuss today is what is diet culture, what it looks like, what it feels like, what are the consequences of living in a culture obsessed with dieting and spoiler alert: it's everywhere.

Jen: And yeah, a really good analogy I have is we also live, well I do, personally, where I live, I live in a car culture, a commuting culture, so public transport is not good where I live. You essentially have to have a car to participate in our society and imagine not having a car, how difficult that would make things for you and people would be surprised, like, "You don't have a car? How do you get around?" So if you compare that to living in a diet culture, it's the same thing. It's actually very difficult to not to diet in our culture and it can make your life actually feel harder, initially than participating in the culture.

Annie: Because you feel like you're going against the grain.

Jen: You are going against the grain and our society isn't set up to support people who are not making, who are choosing to not do that.

Annie: And because diet culture is so subtle, it can be really hard to identify what it is and what it isn't and you might not be familiar with the term yet, diet culture, if you're new to our community but I promise you, you have experienced it and I just want to share just, I pulled these out of a hat off the top of my head when I was reviewing for this podcast some of the ways in which you might have

experienced a culture that I think are pretty common. Phrases like "I'm going to be bad and order fries" or how we compliment pregnant women for being "all belly" or tell them how great they are looking after giving birth.

Jen: Yes. Or "You don't even look pregnant" etc.

Annie: Yes. People who lose weight are consistently applauded for and praised without question or you might hear phrases like "I'm on a new diet", "How is your diet going? Have you tried this diet? I lost weight with this diet."

Jen: Yeah or "I'm off my diet."

Annie: Yes, yes, yes, yes. I'm sure many of you listening are probably nodding in your head in agreement that you've heard those types of conversations, you've seen those behaviors and they're so common in our daily lives and these are the examples of what diet culture is, could be or what it sounds like are endless but-

Jen: Yeah, before and after photos are a really problematic thing in our society and some of our listeners might be in the fitness industry and they might use before and after photos and I just want to say that it's not, I know the intent isn't there, I mean you might be coming from a really good place trying to showcase your client's results and the intent might not be there but you certainly are profiting off of the fear that's already there and that's just something I would like our colleagues to sit with.

Annie: Which is difficult because that's something we as a company have struggled with which we have a whole podcast on before and afters and what the consequences of using them can be. We have gone back and forth, should we use them, should we not use them. Because they are effective, I mean, you see them, not even in a professional setting, you know, a girlfriend post that she lost 20 pounds or whatever in a post before and after on just her personal Facebook page and people break their necks looking at it, right?

Jen: Right.

Lauren: Right.

Annie: And, you know, again, that's diet culture, where we applaud these people for weight loss or think if they're a better person or more disciplined or of higher moral virtue because they lost weight and we don't even stop to question "Are

they actually healthier? Do they do they feel better? How did they go about achieving that?" like, "Could this person just be sick?" I mean, like, there are so many options other than "this was intentional and they automatically feel better" but let's just define it, right, this is, the definitions vary from source to source but in general diet culture is a society that focuses on and values weight shape and size over health and wellbeing.

It worships thinness and equates it to health and moral virtue. It promotes weight loss as a means of attaining a higher status. It demonizes certain ways of eating while elevating others and it oppresses people who don't match up with the supposed picture of health which disproportionately harms trans, bigger bodies, people with disabilities, people of color and it can be damaging to both mental and physical health.

Lauren: Right.

Jen: Right because they just, they aren't represented in a diet culture.

Annie: Yeah, and-

Lauren: This is not something we're even conscious or aware of, right? The fact that it's so embedded in our culture, is it's just what we've grown up with, it's what we're taught to do and you know, we're not consciously aware of these thoughts or behaviors sometimes, it's just there.

Jen: My social media feed used to be filled with before and after photos because those are the types of pages I followed. Just diet pages, weight loss pages, fitness professionals that were constantly posting before and afters of themselves and their clients and so essentially, anytime I was on social media, which for a lot of women is quite a bit, I was looking at before and after photos and that absolutely affects the way you think and see the world.

Lauren: And how you feel about yourself.

Jen: Yeah.

Annie: And it's in the marketing of our foods, too. I had a FaceTime conversation with Jen about this topic last week and I got off the phone after talking about diet culture, opened up my fridge and here my yogurt says "light and fit", you know, to

me that's ingrained diet culture or you know, we're calling foods "guilt free" or there's guilt, you know, I think-

Jen: It is, it is honestly everywhere and back to the car analogy, it's like, it's like roads are everywhere, if you came across a spot in a city that had no roads to drive down, you would go, "What on earth is going on here?" You just take for granted that roads are going to be everywhere and in our society diet culture is everywhere, everywhere.

Annie: And again, it also, you know, we'll talk about this how it oppresses certain populations in a little bit as well but we're really just seeing one type of body, which we were talking about this before we even started recording, it's thin white women, you know, in the diet industry.

Jen: Of a certain age.

Annie: Of a certain age, yes and that can be really harmful and if you don't stop to question these things, you'll probably just go with the flow, you know, you'll just kind of keep swimming with everyone else.

Jen: I used to model, which I've shared in the podcast before, and I was told at 19 that I was getting old for modeling and that if I hadn't made it internationally by the time I was 21 that I did not have a future in modeling so that is an indicator of the types of models that we're seeing. They are very, very young.

Annie: Babies.

Jen: Yeah. Like most girls go big when they're like 14 and I was told at 14 by a model agent that I had the perfect body, like, I was perfect at that point to be a model, to have a career as a model in women's fashion magazines when I was 14 years old.

Annie: At 14. Yeah, yeah, you're selling to adult women as a 14-year old that's a crazy concept to wrap your head around.

Jen: Yes.

Annie: But, you know, in addition to talking about what it is and what it looks like and what it feels like, I really want to spend a fair amount of time to on why it matters because, you know, before I was familiar with the concept of diet culture,

I thought it was just kind of like on a really individual level, you know, like, I thought like, "Oh, this is just what how this person is choosing to spend their time" and I wasn't really aware of how it impacted our community or our society and Jen, you know, you said on a previous podcast, like, we talk about how we want society to change or how we want our culture to change, well, that starts with us.

Jen: Yeah, we are society, we're part of it.

Annie: We're part of it.

Jen: Yeah.

Annie: Yes, so let's talk about why it's harmful because it's harmful to individuals, it's harmful to families and it's harmful to communities and the first one, which we kind of touched on is it oppresses a large majority of the population on an individual level, you know, just on ourselves, it encourages people to believe that they are less than until they achieve some level of weight loss or fitness goals, right. It makes you engage in self-doubt, you doubt yourself, you feel like you can't trust your own instincts.

It lures you into thinking that you failed because you couldn't stick to your diet plan and oftentimes people that are engaged in that kind of thinking are thinking things like "I can't do this because I look like this. I can't do this because my body is this" and I have personally experienced that. I remember my husband wanting me to go rock climbing and I couldn't, like, I was too worried about could I, am I going to fit into the harness? Is the harness going to hold me? Is this something that my body is allowed to do, like, and it turns out I could have, I just was too wrapped up in thinking-

Jen: You were too big to do this.

Annie: Yeah, the self-doubt that that was my limiting factor, right. And then on a community level, it contributes to a culture that makes it acceptable to treat people as less than because of their bodies, right and in fact, when I was researching this there was one study that I came across that it noted that 15 percent of hiring managers, only 15 percent of hiring managers, would hire an overweight woman for a job. So essentially it's allowing employers to see overweight people as sloppy or lazy and just not hire them.

Jen: Yeah and so you don't see the person or their skills or their education, you see the body.

Annie: And we've talked about that, or talked around about that, you know, about how what it looks like when you go to McDonald's and sit and have you know a cheeseburger and French fries versus what it looks like when a larger body goes to McDonald's.

Jen: Yes, thin women can post photos on social media of eating like a whole pizza and be proud of it and people will high 5 them and I think there's even, I read a blog post a couple years ago, I can't remember the author now but basically it showed comments under this photo of a like a thin, gorgeous girl eating a huge pizza and there were males saying "Oh, that's so sexy" and then next to a photo of a really large woman eating a whole pizza and the comments were "That is so disgusting."

Annie: That's just heartbreaking and eye-opening.

Jen: It's awful. As far as going, "Hey", like trying to address the diet culture we live in and your everyday behaviors and the way you talk and think around it, like, that's really what we're trying to address here, right, like there are people that are seriously hurt because of some of your unconscious everyday behaviors that contribute to upholding a society that oppresses A lot of people in our culture.

Annie: And you know, I have no doubt that there are people with hearts of gold and good intentions that are engaging in diet culture like

Jen: Absolutely, I mean, there's probably still areas of my life if I really dug in, I mean, that's all part of our work, right, is unraveling that.

Annie: Yeah, it's oftentimes not intentional. It's just, you know, what you've learned, what people of before you have done, what you've seen other people do, what you've heard other people say, you know, I remember, like, early as a trainer talking about concepts that I, that would make me cringe now in terms of diet culture and it's like, when you know better you can do better and that's part of what we want this podcast to do today is just start creating some discussion and awareness about what diet culture is and how it impacts our lives.

Jen: Yeah, I even recently have been thinking about something. So I love LuluLemon leggings, they are my favorite. They fit me so well and they're really

good quality, I love them and recently a bigger woman called me on shopping there. She said "You are supporting a company that will not carry my size and has openly had the founder talk about that they don't cater to women my size" and I felt really uncomfortable and that's something so I'm just, full disclosure, being open about my own journey but I'm really kind of sitting with that and going like "Am I going to be OK with that that they don't carry over a certain size and I'm going to keep shopping there or can I keep shopping there but bring it up to management, write letters, like, you know, what can I do?"

Like, because I don't feel good about that and then the other one was Victoria's Secret which I have vocally and openly called out that company for years and years now of their objectification of women. And they recently went public on record to say that they don't make larger sizes because that's not their market and they don't want to sell to women in that market and I have not supported Victoria's Secret for years and years but that is just something for us all to think about, right, like would you would you keep supporting a company that said they don't want to sell to black women?

Annie: Right.

Jen: Like that's not their market? Or disabled people? Sorry, our store is not wheelchair accessible because we don't want, we don't want people who are in wheelchairs in this store.

Annie: Yeah. When you take it out of the terms of bodies and when you put it in that context, it's a no brainer, right?

Jen: Yeah and I mean that is part of living in a diet culture that we all so, we don't even think about that oppression of larger people, right, so, you know, and as soon as you take it into that context of color or ability then it's like "Oh, wow, no, that's awful" but then you bring it back to bodies and you're like "Is that awful? I don't know. I have to think about that." Because it's just so ingrained that you really have to think about it. So those are some thoughts I've been sitting with lately just being honest with our audience that it is a journey and you will continually realize that there are ways that you contribute to supporting diet culture.

Annie: Well, I mean, yeah and just again, all the ways that it shows up in your life. I mean my drink of choice used to be a skinny latte from Starbucks or like eating skinnypop popcorn, two things that I really enjoy I hate the name.

Lauren: Yeah.

Annie: Why did they have to be named that? And you know, so can we just call it nonfat lattes?

Jen: Yes.

Annie: Like yes, yes i can. I don't have to engage in that or I can stop buying that product as you noted or I can call it something else or you know, my light and fit Greek yogurt, sorry, Yoplait. I don't like the name, I like your yogurt, I don't like the name. In addition though to, going back to how it's harmful, oppressing individuals and on a community level, it also hurts, as Jen noted ,people of color, those with disabilities, people live in poverty because they're just less likely to be able to access the tools that some people believe can "cure" or address some of these health-related issues or size-related issues such as health care, gym memberships, nutrient-dense food and in fact, I went back and reference Linda Bacon's book Body Respect, which is a great book if you haven't read it. And she notes that social and societal differences account for the largest part of the population's health, even more so than behaviors, biology or genes so really, like the culture, the socioeconomic status that you are brought up in, you're raised in that you're living in, plays a bigger, way bigger role than what you're choosing to eat or-

Jen: Yeah, I often say, like, if you are going to be talking about the health of our society and losing your mind over obesity rates, you better be bringing socio-economic conditions into that conversation and letting me know what you are doing to bridge that divide in socio-economic situations across your culture because you cannot stand on your platform and talk about how everybody just needs to eat healthier, you know, what I mean? Once you start understanding the big picture you start to understand actually how useless-

Lauren: Like all you need to do is buy all organic produce, lean meats that are grass-fed, get the special bulletproof coffee drink and you'll be good to go, right?

Jen: Right, it's elitist, it really only helps-

Annie: Privileged people.

Jen: People in privileged people, right, helps or harms, that's a whole other question because if you already have those privileges, you know, somebody is just making you anxious about not being privileged enough or perfect enough then, you know, it's, anyways so yeah, I mean, part of our work, if we really do care about the health and wellbeing of our society is about how to raise children up out of poverty so that we can see them with better outcomes in life, right?

Annie: And just, again, going back to the definition of diet culture, you know, that it promotes thinness and equates it to health and moral virtue, like, you know, I'm not any better or worse than someone that's going to the gym or that has a gym membership or that eats organic bananas than is, you know, than someone that eats conventional bananas, like, but so often we do, we praise people that have those behaviors, that have access to those services or memberships that's like, they're doing something right, right? They're just better.

Jen: Yeah but people love to hear that, like, people love to hear, people love rags to riches stories and so you, like, even I look back on myself, you know, I am a thin, white woman, like I have so many privileges in our society because just because of those things. I was born Caucasian and thin.

But I even look back on, you know, the way I used to pat myself on the back, like, as if I was just this, like, awesome hard worker and it's not that I didn't work hard for certain things, you know, for my education, for everything that I have today for, you know, that I do work out and consistent with exercise but you know, there was a time in my life where it was an elitist thing almost, like, I thought I was, you know, just extra special for whatever reason but it turns out I actually was born with a headstart in life that a lot of people didn't have and for somebody to start a health and wellness company and grow it to what we've grown ours to in the last 4 years as a fat woman of color, now that is hard work. Do you know what I mean? Like, there's just certain privileges that the 3 of us have that allowed us to, that people will take advice from us online because we're all thin.

Annie: Yeah it's that this is a heavy topic.

Jen: It's uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable for us to acknowledge our own privileges, like it really is but it's so important in order to, if you want to see more equality in our society, like, women, we talk about it all the time, wanting equality

with men and that seems to be an easier conversation to flow. But then, you like, let's talk about all equality, right, and then that means it's easy to sit back and be a victim of inequality but like what if you are a perpetuator of inequality, like that is uncomfortable.

Annie: Yeah.

Jen: But that is so important. We expect men to do it, right, we want men to do it.

Annie: To be able to objectively look at our behaviors and say, like, "I could be potentially contributing to the problem" It's like-

Jen: Yeah like here are small ways-

Annie: It's hard to face.

Jen: Here are small ways. Yeah, exactly.

Annie: Absolutely. OK, so backing up, how it's harmful. It oppresses a large majority of the population, I mean, when we say large, like, that's pretty much everyone except for thin white people, I mean, which is, like, that leaves a lot of people out, that's really exclusive.

Jen: Yes. So just if, people who are struggling understand this, if you go do a google image search of and just type in like "health and fitness" you will be met with images, 99 percent of the images that come up are, like, thin white people.

Annie: Yeah.

Jen: I feel like I need to do that real quick.

Lauren: I'm doing it right now.

Jen: OK just to make sure I'm right.

Annie: I just, as you know, as a personal trainer I know that I've searched personal trainer images it's all white men.

Jen: Or if you type in healthy women, so I just typed in healthy women on a google image search and I'm scrolling to the scrolling, scrolling, I saw one black woman, one, rest, oh here's a woman laying in a bed of fruit with a tape measure wrapped around her waist. So yeah, it's just thin white women, that's all it is.

Annie: Yeah and that's not, that's not true representational, truly representational of health.

Jen: Absolutely not. You feel, then, the idea of diet culture is that you have to be a thin white woman to be healthy.

Annie: Yeah.

Lauren: Right.

Annie: And that so far from the truth that it's ridiculous. OK. Moving on. Another reason it's harmful, one of the many reasons diet culture is harmful is that our kids are catching on quickly to this culture, the the new normal of these behaviors and conversations. We've shared these statistics so many times. I'm going to share them again because, like, it needs to be heard again and again and again.

Over 80 percent of 10 year olds are afraid of being fat. 80 percent of 10 year olds are afraid of being fat. 53 percent of 13 year old American girls are unhappy with their bodies. The number grows to 78 percent by the time they reach 17, by middle school 40 to 70 percent of girls are dissatisfied with 2 or more of their body parts and I mean, that's just 3 of the many alarming statistics. And inside of Balance365, Jennifer, you share an observation from author Jan Jacobs Brownsburg, do you remember this, when you wrote about this? How she had been studying girls diaries.

Jen: Yeah, yeah it's in the 1st chapter of Balance365.

Annie: And you read her book and you noted that she was writing about how girls, she was studying girls diaries and how these girls were writing about a desire to better themselves and she notes that the difference was pre-war, they were talking about being the self development was focused on helping others and putting more effort into school or reading and by the 1990s bodies had become a preoccupation, that they were writing about.

Jen: And appearance and makeup and fashion and yes so this is also such a hard conversation because what if you really like fashion, you know? Where Hilary McBride pointed out in our of the last podcast we did with her. You know, are our interests and beliefs and you know, all of that, is that who we are or is that shaped by our culture? And so-

Lauren: It's messy.

Jen: It's very messy, right and but yes, so basically that book looked at what girls valued and how they wanted to better themselves 100 years ago versus today and that there are there's just been a dramatic shift in values over the last 100 years where I think most women would say "Gosh, like, you know, I wish, I wish my daughter was more focused on school than boys and makeup and all of that but that's the culture we live in" Like, you can say one thing as a parent, "Hey, this is where you should invest your time and energy as a girl to be successful in life, to be happy, to be fulfilled" but when you have a whole culture and society telling them differently, they'll stop listening to you.

My Mom, my mother was so amazing at that, my mom was so ahead of the game in the nineties raising me in the 2000s. But, you know, I was surrounded and I was in a culture that clearly valued bodies. I remember when Britney Spears' first single dropped in she had the, I remember just crowding around the CD in the CD insert, like the first friend who went and got the CD, they would pull the insert out and we would all just-

Annie: Read the lyrics and look at the photos.

Jen: Yeah we were just surrounded, like, looking at these photos of Britney Spears and she was wearing a little skirt and it was just, like, everything right and yeah, and we even see it in Healthy Habits Happy Moms, our own Facebook group, where we want to so badly want to see this shift, we see, once in a while women might come in and post a before and after photo, they may be new to our group or whatever, they don't understand the culture in there yet and even when that happens it will get so much attention.

Well, I noticed the other day that a woman posted in the last year she has added in a couple habits and her triglyceride levels are back down into a normal healthy range and it did not barely get any engagement and I look at that stuff and I think, even in our group, it's so depressing because it's like that is what health is, like, those are the things we should be celebrating. We don't know what that picture means. We don't know if her blood pressure is through the roof. We, it's just, yes so, it's just, it's so depressing to me. I'm like Society doesn't care if people are healthy, they care that they're thin.

Lauren: Right, like stop framing it as health and wellness, right? It's thinness that you are celebrating but back to the the diaries of the girls thing too, we talk about all the time how women say in our in our Balance365 group, like, I have all this time and mental space that has opened up since I stopped focusing on my body and dieting and like, I kind of see that in this this study from this author, like, where would we be if we weren't so focused on ourselves and our bodies, like, where would we be if we were all still trying to better ourselves in other ways?

Jen: Right, would fighting for equality with men still be a conversation? Like imagine if women took all the time and energy they put into their bodies and their appearance and put that on equality-

Lauren: Or any issue.

Jen: Any issue, getting politically active or you know, yeah.

Annie: Which is a great segue into the 3rd way I wrote down why it's harmful is it keeps us from living our lives and as we've talked about, our conversations are consumed with diet talk, weight talk, body shaming. On a really small scale, we hesitate to eat kids cake at birthday parties or we hesitate at going out to eat with a girlfriend because we are fearing putting on weight or deviating from our meal plan but I know the 3 of us have talked about that we could not have started this business if we were still eating, breathing, living diet culture. Like we wouldn't have the capacity for it.

Jen: I did a talk for a women's studies class last year via video through, I was just asked to do it remotely basically so I filmed it in my home and it was for the University of the Saskatchewan, a women's studies course and I did my 1st year of university at the University of Saskatchewan and at that time I wanted to be a doctor. When I started university I wanted to be a doctor and I had to basically drop out by my 2nd semester. I had to move down to part time studies because I was struggling with an eating disorder by then. It just, it was my whole life, it became my whole life. I was starving, my B.M.I. was 17, I was running on a treadmill for like one to two hours a day every morning, not eating, it just it consumed me and that might be a more extreme result of living in a diet culture is actually developing an eating disorder but there was a study done in the States, I think the University of Southern California and they surveyed 10000 women and 65 percent of women report having disordered eating behaviors. That's huge.

Lauren: I had the same experience and I think it's, I think maybe getting a diagnosable eating disorder is rare but struggling with disordered eating and having it take up your life is not rare.

Jen: No it's very common.

Lauren: Yeah I remember coming home, in my senior year it it took up my entire life. I wouldn't go out because I had to come home and I had to do my workout and I had to eat my broccoli, like I could go out and eat. I had to come home and yeah, just the same way that you're describing. It took over my entire life.

Annie: I am just scrolling on Instagram, I swear it was Erin Brown wrote, had a quote or shared a quote at one point about how all the possibilities and opportunities that have been missed because women were worrying if their thighs were too big.

Jen: Yeah.

Lauren: Yeah

Annie: And that hit home for me. I mean, everything from rock climbing to saying no to opportunities to speak or present or share or work with a client or you know and I think about some, just in the health and wellness world, some of the women in our community that have even expressed, like, I have a really an interest in helping other people, becoming a personal trainer, becoming a nutritionist, getting the certification but will people want to take advice from me because I look like this? Which is anything outside of the norm and that's really sad, that's unfortunate, really unfortunate so I want to do our part to break that, right?

Jen: Yeah and the messy part of this conversation is trying, talking about weight loss in the context of it not being about diet culture. So that is a really hard conversation to have because we are all about body autonomy and letting women decide what's right for them and for some women, fat loss is part of their wellness vision. And so, you know, but in within Balance365 constructs you would understand that it's behavior change that leads to sustainable fat loss etc, etc, etc, we have many podcasts about this. And so that is just really and that's why chapter one of Balance365 is diet deprogramming because you really have to untangle what it is, what is driving these thoughts, right? That is something

really tricky to untangle so where we talk, you know, Annie has lost. Annie used to be a size 22 and now she's a size 12, is that right, Annie?

Annie: Ish. Yeah. Depending on the brand.

Jen: Yes and so for, Annie getting healthy, ditching diet mindset, ditching disordered eating, cultivating healthy habits that she can stick to resulted in losing 10 dress sizes which is amazing and I will celebrate that with Annie. I do not think of Annie as a better person than when she was a size 22. I think she was just as worthy. Annie may not have felt that but, and that is the whole problem in our society that we actually believe we are more worthy when we're smaller. However, on the flip side, me doing all those same things, ditching dieting, ditching disordered eating, ditching and actually cultivating healthy habits that work for me in my life have resulted in me being about 20 to 25 pounds heavier than my leanest weight. And so that is a really important thing for women to understand when we talk about Balance365 and we address weight, we are there to help women become a healthy weight and that is going to look different for everybody.

I am not interested in any way in supporting a woman in figuring out how to live life at a weight that is not healthy or sustainable for her. I am not interested in giving her a bunch of diet tricks that make sure, you know, that allow her to be super lean certain times of the year, that's just not where our focus is and so Balance365 really, you know, the conversation is more about, is not about what losing weight, it's like what is a healthy weight for you and the thing is in Balance365 so many women have dieted for so many years they don't even know what that is. Like they haven't been able to maintain their weight for 3 months, let alone figuring out what maintaining their weight for years and years even looks like for them and I know I didn't know. I was just constantly going, you know, because I was constant dieting, disordered eating, rebounding.

I was basically slingshotting to below what a healthy weight is for me and then right back to above and below and above and I was just slingshotting back and forth where once I found my, you know, what's healthy for me was basically smack dab in the middle of that and that is what I have been able, that I maintain my weight for the last 4 years through, you know, even some very stressful seasons of life, like because this is actually what's healthy for me, but that can be a tough pill to swallow for women because for some women that weight is actually heavier than what they are now and that's terrifying for some women.

Lauren: And I think it's hard for us to communicate that in a diet culture, right, like it's hard for us to communicate we're going to help you get the size of body that's right for you. It's not always weight loss, sometimes it's weight gain, sometimes it's, you know, you're pretty much the same weight but you have more freedom, you know, to eat the way you want.

Annie: Because in diet culture weight loss is equal to a higher status.

Jen: Yes, always. Yes. So in a diet culture weight loss is always the goal, right.

Annie: Right.

Jen: Yes but we do, you know, we've got women who have lost significant amounts of fat inside our program but for them, being in those larger bodies was a prison for them because that was not the right weight for them, it was well above what was healthy and sustainable for them and a person gets to that space because of diet culture, because of the constant yo-yoing of diets and every time they diet they lose 10 pounds and they put on 35. They go on another diet, they lose 10 and they put on another 35 and at some point those women, fat loss becomes it isn't about diet culture anymore, isn't about worthiness, it's about reclaiming the body that they were always meant to have had they never gone on a diet at all.

Lauren: Right and going back to diet culture, our culture is to blame people with larger bodies, right, that it's their fault that they are in a larger body when it's diet culture that put them there.

Annie: Exactly.

Lauren: Many, many times, right? It's because of the dieting that they're in a body that's larger for them and obviously, that's not universally true but in a lot of cases.

Jen: Yes.

Annie: Yeah, I feel like we could spend hours talking about how this harmful on so many levels. But I also want to leave some time and some space to talk about how we can kind of start to change it and the first one, I feel like this is our answer to everything on changing everything is just creating awareness, like, you know, like, we've talked about this in so many pockets on various topics but just

opening your eyes and paying attention to what is diet culture, where you see it, where you experience it and where you hear it and just like start listening, start paying attention. Because as Jen said earlier, once you start seeing it, you'll realize it's everywhere.

The second thing is break up with dieting. And I want to be clear that you don't have to be on a diet to participate in diet culture, like that's key. Like this isn't just something that people who are dieting are participating in. But also that giving up on diet culture doesn't mean that you're giving up on your health. Like there are other options. And one of the ways you can start breaking up with dieting is to question the rules that you've been taught, the "rules", right?

The foods that you've labeled as good and as bad, your relationship with exercise, like what does that look like, are we exercising to punish ourselves, because we hate ourselves, because we think when we're thin our life is going to be perfect and we're going to have the perfect body and people who weigh less have less problems. And this can take years, like this is, I mean, as Jen mentioned earlier when she's talking about some of how her decisions she still is kind of wrangling with, like, we've been in this and we've been doing this sort of work for almost 4 years and we're still, or if not longer but specifically with our company for for almost 4 years and we're still, like, kind of wading through the mud, like it's cloudy and it's messy and it's muddy and it's like, is this health? Is this diet culture? Is this supporting where I want to go or is this, like, disguised, a wolf in sheep's clothing, so to speak?

And then also vote with your dollars and your energy. Just a simple refusal to feed the diet industry, buying products that support it, whether it's food, systems, magazines etc. You know your yogurts, your places you're shopping, where you're buying your clothes.

Jen: And this stuff works. It can feel hopeless but, like, we are seeing a shift, like we are seeing a shift and people are getting really loud about it and companies are paying attention. Because we are seeing, we have never had so much, we don't have a lot of diversity but we have never seen so much diversity in the media as we do today and that is from the work of all of us individually just throwing those pebbles into a pond which eventually make a wave.

Annie: One of the places I really like to shop is Aerie, even, I don't know if there's an age limit on Aerie.

Lauren: I really like Aerie too.

Annie: I really like it and every time I go in there there are, you know, they've openly declared that they have stopped photoshopping their models, there's often disabilities, women with disabilities in their marketing. There is, you know, not maybe as large of a variety of body types and skin colors as I would like to see but it's more so than it was, you know, 3, 4, 5 years ago and just to circle back to LuLuLemon, obviously anyone that follows me knows that I love my Lululemon and I'm an ambassador for them and I would say the same thing for them too, following them on social media, they are carrying additional size ranges, like, they're, I think they're moving, what I see from them is-

Jen: They're moving

Annie: They're moving in that direction.

Jen: And the thing is so, it's understanding too, I remember, Annie, we had this talk right so the political party that I have traditionally voted for in Canada frustrates me to no end and so much so that actually our last federal election I did not vote for them and that's sometimes is a stand that you have to take as a person but there's another choice is to get involved in that industry or those companies or that political party and try to make change from within and so as far as Lululemon I don't know if I'm going to stop shopping there but I am thankful for the awareness that my friend brought to me to say, "You know you're supporting a store that doesn't even want women my size in there" and that just stopped me in my tracks and what I am definitely going to be doing is going in and saying "This is how you make people feel, people I love and what do you have to say about that?" and that will be escalated.

I recently took a stand at my local pool, so this is just another small example but I shared this on social media, I haven't shared it on our podcast yet but there's a swim club at my local swimming pool and I witnessed this male coach probably in his late teens, early twenties talking to a group of probably 11, 12, 13 year old kids making fun of people who are over 200 pounds and just the way he was, it was awful and I was sitting in the hot tub while he was doing this with the team and I'm sitting with my kids and after they left I really had a very, I addressed it with my children, like "That was not OK," etc but then I'm not going to stop going to the pool, like that is a place that we enjoy and frequent.

What I did do was I went to management and told them that this had happened and they were so thankful and now they will work, because the swim club is an external club that comes in, so now they will work with the club to make sure the club understands that this is a body-inclusive environment and that is not OK. So there are ways of, you know, there are certain brands you might love, you know, etcetera but until they are like that Victoria Secret, I mean Victoria's Secret stepped up and said: "No, we are not changing." They basically said, "We do not want big women in our stores." I will not shop there anymore, that is my choice but I haven't shopped there for years. If you have followed me long enough on social media you'll know why.

Annie: You've had some runins with Victoria Secret.

Jen: They know me but so that's just a choice you can make. You don't have to walk away, it doesn't have to be this break up, it can be like "Hey, I support you and I love you guys, I love your brand but here's what I need from you to keep supporting you."

Annie: Which is actually a conversation that I have had many times with my local Lululemon store and they're all about it. They are they are game to do whatever they can to help support that as well, I mean, they acknowledge that like "Yeah, we would love to be able to dress all women and like how can we make our voices heard and what actions can we take and how can we be more inclusive and more welcoming to men and women of all varieties even while in this very moment we only serve pant sizes up to a 12 or a 14? What else can we do, how can, you know, how can we start to create change?" and you know, these are the tough and sometimes uncomfortable conversations we need to have.

Lauren: Well and I think too it's sometimes even more impactful than boycotting, right, to have Annie in they're saying, like, "Look, this is how what you're doing impacts me, impacts these people, right?"

Annie: Right. Yeah and in addition to refusing to feed the diet industry, kind of along the same lines as to build your life online and in real life with people, books, music that support how you want to feel and hopefully that's not a part of the diet culture and my friend Meghan talks about nourishing her body and when she first told me that nourishment was one of her core values, I kind of rolled my eyes because I thought she was going to give me this like elitist version of how she eats paleo.

Jen: Green smoothies.

Annie: Yes and what she was talking about, how she defines nourishment is what she puts in her ears, what she puts in her body, how she moves her body, what she reads, what she consumes on social media, like those are all the ways in which she nourishes her body and I love that definition and you know, just like Jen said earlier, you know, her feed used to be filled with before and afters and I'm guessing you've unfollowed.

Jen: No, I don't see any of that anymore. It's jarring to me when I see before and after photos now, I'm like "Oh, where did that come from?"

Annie: Yeah and it's like, it's OK, sometimes, you know, unfortunately like the saying "fences make good neighbors", you know some of your friends might be really heavily engaged in diet culture still and you might have to unfollow or set some boundaries.

Jen: Yeah, I say "It's not personal, It's about me, not you" right, like, "You go ahead and post your before and after photos, it doesn't serve me and if I saw the odd one now I'd be fine but I recognize it's a slippery slope, right, if you have, you get on Facebook for 15 minutes and you have 16 before and after photos come through your feed, like eventually, eventually, that becomes our reality, like, it just does so yeah, curating your environment is so important.

Annie: Yeah what else do you want to add before we pop off? I mean, I know this is such a heavy topic and there's so many aspects and components to diet culture but I just really wanted to kind of throw something out there sooner rather than later for our community who might be new and might be struggling with the concept of diet culture and because even it's so subtle sometimes I miss it, you know, sometimes I don't even realize that what I just participated in was diet culture, what I just bought was supporting diet culture.

Jen: I would say it's OK to like get to the awareness stage and start noticing and making small changes in your life, one thing that I feel very passionate about is not overwhelming women and feeling like they have to be the only crusader for this cause, like, we really have only so much time and energy and number one needs to be taking care of you because you will never be able to take care of others until you can take care of you and us three going from the awakening to the taking care of us to making sure our cups are filled to starting this company to

becoming crusaders that was a years in the making process, right, like, I didn't realize one day diets don't work and I have been part of this machine that exploits women's vulnerabilities for my whole life to the next day starting a podcast and talking about all these issues, like, I mean, we're talking years so don't feel like you have to do all the things in one day but you've got to make sure you're taken care of first.

Lauren: Yup.

Annie: The awakening, that sounds-

Lauren: I like that too.

Annie: I was like "Whoa, yes! Sign me up for that"

Jen: Stay woke, friends.

Annie: Stay woke to diet culture. That should be our new hashtag.

Lauren: Hashtag.

Annie: Hashtag stay woke to diet culture.

Lauren: Tag us if you use it.

Annie: All right this was and can be a really heavy topic but, and it is serious, like this is detrimental to our individual and cultural health and especially our children who are just unknowingly, you know, being exposed to it. We had a really great podcast on boundaries where we talked where Jen made the analogy that compared it to secondhand smoke and diet culture is the same way, you know, like that's, you know-

Jen: Just blowing smoke in your kids' faces all day long.

Annie: Yeah and we don't doubt the intentions or love that a parent would have for their children, so creating awareness to how harmful this can be is, you know, the first step to really making some steps in the right direction but if you want to continue the discussion, if you want to discuss what is diet culture, what it isn't, is what you're experiencing or what you're participating in part of the problem or part of the solution please join us inside our private Facebook group Healthy Habits Happy moms 40000 women that would be happy to continue this

discussion inside there and the 3 of us are in there too participating as well so if you have more questions or if you're still confused or if there is something that you want to talk about that we didn't talk about in this hour, let us know we're here, like this is just, I have a feeling this is just going to be an ongoing topic.

Jen: Yeah this was the tip of the iceberg.

Annie: Yes, the tip of the iceberg, exactly All right, well thank you ladies, it was a good chat.

Jen: Yes.

Annie: Alrighty, bye bye.

Jen: Bye.

Lauren: Bye.