

Candice Schutter: [00:00:00] Welcome to another episode of The Deeper Pulse and the continuation of the 'cult'ure series.

I want to thank patrons of the pod. Because without your monthly donations, I simply would not be able to carry on doing this work. This podcast is a not for profit endeavor and monthly Patreon contributions, most of which hover right around five dollars a month, they help to cover production costs. And they keep me personally and professionally motivated, knowing that folks out there are listening and benefiting from this work.

So from the bottom of my heart, I want to once again, thank you.

Weekly bonus episodes have continued to drop over on Patreon. Yes, even while I'm ghosting you here on the main feed. The latest episodes of Deconstructing [00:01:00] Dogma include discussions around cognitive dissonance, the science of persuasion, and how and when we choose what stories to share. Also a two-part cult recovery recap where Tracy Stamper and Monica Welty join me to look back on how this series has changed us.

You can access it all at patreon.com/thedeeperpulse.

Okay, on to today's episode.

The stories and opinions shared here are based on personal experience and are not intended to malign any individual, group, or organization.

Now, if you're a regular listener, you know that I've been a bit MIA from the main feed here for a few weeks now. And you might hear it in my voice, I am currently under the influence of a bit of a chest cold. But I'm back. And when you last heard from me in late November, I was feeling a [00:02:00] bit weather worn by the mental and emotional labor that's gone into the creation of this series. And I thought that I was ready to wrap. And in fact, I recorded what I imagined would be the final episode of the series. An episode that I'm still quite proud of, but one that never made it out into the ethers. I'll share more about that in just a minute.

But first, the 'cult'ure series. 17 months, 43 episodes here on the main feed, and another 50 over on Patreon. That's over 100 hours of content, which would be hard to believe if I didn't feel so damn different on the other side of it all. I share more about all that over on Patreon. But let's just say that it's been a lot. And it's included occasional moments of *way* too muchness behind the scenes. Which is why, a few weeks ago, I was pretty much convinced that I needed to press pause on this work, immediately, and indefinitely.

So, as I [00:03:00] mentioned in the lead in, I recorded what I thought would be the final episode in the series. I spent hours drafting the content, finally putting into words an oops-I-done-it-again story that I've not yet shared the details of publicly, and a deconstruction of why this series launched exactly when it did.

Writing and recording the content for that episode was liberating and incredibly cathartic. And it was absolutely the right next step for me to take. When it was complete, I sent a preview link to a handful of trusted friends who helped me to make some final last minute

tweaks and who provided me with the validation, encouragement, and support that I needed to shed that last bit of gaslighting, to trust my voice and my experience. All that was left was to hit the publish button.

But I was feeling ambivalent. And in the eleventh hour, quite literally the night before it was [00:04:00] set to drop, I pulled it. It had suddenly become clear to me that, when it came to this particular story, an audience of five people was all the exposure I needed, at least for now.

So, I broke with the mission of the podcast and the plan, and I chose to stay true to myself. That feels to me an awful lot like recovery.

And in that same moment, I was in the midst of a family health crisis. I didn't have time to work on a plan B. And then the holidays rolled around, so I just decided to let it all rest for a while. And now here I am, six weeks later, feeling like, well, we're just not quite there yet.

There are a few more topics that I'd really like for us to touch upon before we wrap up this series. And this week's conversation, for me at least, is timely.

In a world that is, by the minute, more increasingly outside of our [00:05:00] control, like it or not, it's altogether human to gravitate toward somewhat radicalizing viewpoints, anything that promises solace, solutions, or certainty.

And culturally speaking, at least here in the U. S., the first week of January is go time.

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So many baited hooks, promising health, prosperity, spiritual transcendence. It's cult o'clock in a great many time zones. And if we're not careful, our good intentions can very easily send us wading into culty waters.

And so this week and next we're going to talk about the insidiousness of a troubling year round ideology that many refer to as *diet culture*.

[00:06:00] We recorded this convo as a Patreon extra back in early December. And a few minutes into it, I soon realized that, oh my God, how had I missed it? Was I really about to wrap a critique on wellness culture without taking a more critical look at the body woes that very often lead us into these spaces? It suddenly felt like a glaring blind spot in the series.

Well, maybe not glaring. Back in episode 40 I did spend a little time on this topic in a segment that's about 43 minutes in, that opened with some recent testimonials that I had received from former Org teachers and trainers.

Rather than attempting to summarize it. Let's just listen in again now.

Excerpt 1 from Episode 40

Candice Schutter: An ex-Org employee shares:

"The CEO of the company told me numerous times a week that I needed to do sit-ups and squats several times a day to flatten my stomach."

Another former teacher writes:

"One day before filming a routine, a colleague and I were told [00:07:00] to go on the lemonade diet so that we would appear thinner on camera."

Another shares:

"When I called Marissa out for not offering inclusive sizing on the 'I love my body' clothing line, a trainer personally emailed me to say that it wasn't okay to hurt other people. No mention of how the hypocrisy of dismissing larger bodies hurt me."

And another former teacher writes:

"One of the 'souvenirs' from my time with the Org is disordered eating. A friend and mentor of mine often utilized the culture, language, and philosophy of the Org to plant the idea that I was not taking care of myself by eating the foods I was eating. She stoked that fire until I was consumed with fear of food and how it was gonna make me ill, make me fat, and make me less fit. She fed the idea that if I wasn't eating an incredibly restricted diet, a diet that would change by the week from her, that I was not embodying The Practice. I am still working [00:08:00] through all of this, and I think it's going to be something I deal with for my whole life. A milestone of my recovery has been eating birthday cake with my kids this year."

These stories are painful and disturbing, and they are not unique to the Org. Gloria Steinem puts it this way, "perfectionism is internalized oppression."

Indeed. And wellness culture is obsessed with perfection, plagued with variations on the same old patriarchal bullshit. It's just more covert. Body shaming is dressed up in PSAs around healthy eating and wellness, adherence to impossible norms.

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Candice Schutter: In that same episode, I go on to share a bit about my own personal experiences with diet, aka detox culture.

Excerpt 2 from Episode 40

Candice Schutter: No matter how thin I was, I never felt thin enough. Not just at the Org, but throughout my 20 year career teaching dance fitness. I was continually [00:09:00] surrounded by thinner than thin women who felt fat and who were continually micromanaging their every meal. But not the way that my college roommate and I had done it

all those years back when we were buying low fat foods and actively counting calories. No, now it was all very cleverly disguised as master cleansing and detox purification rituals; clean eating of foods that were pretty much devoid of flavor, and in some cases sustenance.

Now, of course there was, and is, some wisdom in all this... steering clear from pesticides, overprocessed foods, and filler ingredients. These are wise moves to be sure. And veganism most certainly has its dietary *and* ethical merits. But more often than not, clean and healthy eating crosses the line into borderline or full-blown pathology, and it operates more like a depriving neurosis, less like a doorway to greater health and wellbeing.

In fact, in [00:10:00] 1996, Dr. Steven Bratman coined the term *orthorexia*, which is defined as an unhealthy obsession with clean and healthy eating. This is very much a thing. Rates of orthorexia are on the rise in wellness communities. And in extreme instances, it can result in nutritional deficiencies and compromised brain functioning. Not to mention the psychological burden of continually obsessing about what one can or cannot, did or did not eat.

And what's more of a mind fuck is how often in the wellness world these obsessive thoughts and emotional compulsions are reframed in terms of personal power and self mastery, when it's very much the opposite.

When it comes to shifting away from a culture that reinforces the idea that thin and healthy is higher up and better than we've gotta get real about what we're dealing with.

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Candice Schutter: I then defer to the real experts, folks living in larger and/or racialized bodies who have suffered [00:11:00] under body oppression in ways that make my experiences pale by comparison. Here's another longer excerpt from that same episode.

Excerpt 3 from Episode 40

Candice Schutter: Enter author and activist, Aubrey Gordon, who describes it this way: "Self-love isn't the issue. Anti-fat bias is."

In a 2020 article entitled, *We Have To Stop Thinking of Being Healthy As Being Morally Better*, she writes:

"As a fat person, my health is one of the primary grounds offered by those who mock harm and reject me. Cruel and judgemental behavior is often justified with an offhanded, "I'm just concerned about your health," as if my health were their responsibility. As if I owed it to them, a debt I'd never taken out and could never repay. And often as many fat people know, trolling often masquerades as genuine concern. That's what makes it so insidious and what can make it so cutting. But underneath its explicit message of caring concern, there's a clear implicit [00:12:00] judgment. You're doing it wrong. You've failed. I've been monitoring your health. I know your body better than you."

In the article, Gordon refers to the term *healthism*, coined by Robert Crawford in 1980. He defines healthism as: "the preoccupation with personal health as a primary, often *the* primary focus for the definition and achievement of wellbeing, a goal which is to be attained primarily through the modification of lifestyles."

Now, on the surface, healthism might not sound all that problematic. But when our value is dependent upon whether or not we fit into certain social ideals, most of which are based on the effed up sensibilities of toxic masculinity, health and behavior modifications can themselves become detrimental to our psychological wellbeing, to our sense of agency, and our ability to simply live and enjoy our lives.

Sonya Renee Taylor, author of *The Body Is Not An Apology* writes:

"Living in a [00:13:00] female body, a Black body, an aging body, a fat body, a body with mental illness is to awaken daily to a planet that expects a certain set of apologies to already live on our tongues. There is a level of not enough or too much sewn into these strands of difference."

"Equally damaging is our insistence that all bodies should be healthy. Health is not a state we owe the world. We are not less valuable, worthy, or lovable because we are not healthy. Lastly, there is no standard of health that is achievable for all bodies. Our belief that there should be anchors, the systemic oppression of ableism and reinforces the notion that people with illnesses and disabilities have defective bodies rather than different bodies."

Wellness culture's obsession with health isn't necessarily healthy. It's culty. Especially when you zoom out and consider who it so often demonizes, marginalizes, and overlooks.

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Candice Schutter: A quick personal story. [00:14:00] I recently revisited my signed copy of the *Org* book. It was published in 2005 when I was working at Org HQ. And at the time we were all convinced that this Broadway Books release was going to catapult the *Org* practice into the mainstream spotlight.

A handful of my former colleagues and I were photographed and featured throughout the book's pages. I'd spent the day prior to the shoot obsessing about what to wear. I settled on a pair of black *Org* pants and a green top. And I did my best to navigate my obsessive preoccupation with food, my weight, and my appearance.

But this was hardly an *Org* specific pastime. In fact, back in the fall of this year, I traveled to visit my mom in Kansas. And one day, out of the blue, she shared with me a memory of her own.

She spoke about the day when I, age 19, called her from college, sobbing in great distress. She waited patiently for me to calm down enough to speak through my [00:15:00] tears, readying herself to hold my hand through what was surely a very real crisis.

I eventually pulled myself together enough to speak, and I shared that earlier that day, I'd decided to go shopping for new jeans. And, I'm feeling both sad and embarrassed to share this next bit with you. The reason I was reaching out to her in devastation was that just that morning, I'd discovered I was no longer a size 4.

Yes, you heard that right. A size 4.

I have no memory of this phone call, but I very much believe that it happened. I share this to illustrate my point, that it should come as no surprise that a full decade later, halfway across the country, an otherwise confident professional contributor at the Org, who *had* made the cut to be included in a company wide photoshoot, was still struggling to believe that she was thin, right-bodied enough. [00:16:00]

The morning of the shoot, I skipped breakfast. I incessantly checked my reflection in the mirror. And in that small studio, I anxiously awaited my turn to step in front of the white backdrop. I fidgeted as I waited my turn, once again ruminating on the fact that I had failed in my efforts to abstain from carbs in the weeks preceding the shoot.

Anxious, anxious, anxious.

And then Seth called my name. I pulled in my gut, plastered on a smile, and stepped into the spotlight.

Why am I sharing all of this with you? Well, to illustrate that body dysmorphia can happen at any size. If you were to right now crack open a copy of that book and look for images of me, you'll find an underweight 29 year old who was blind to her own disordered eating and obedience.

In that moment, all of my nerves aside, I was one of the people reinforcing, [00:17:00] and also benefiting from, exclusionary and oppressive body norms. I had been invited. And so many others had not. Some of whom were my friends and colleagues. They'd attend my classes where, with great sincerity, I'd wax poetic about the importance of loving and accepting our bodies, no matter what.

Hypocrisy of this sort is insidious in the world of wellness. And it's an inevitability when we clamor to secure our place in a social or physical hierarchy, in a game that favors some over others. Some days I'd be gazing longingly up the rungs in the ladder. And other days, I'd be peering down, feeling a mixture of sympathy and relief.

It's pretty ugly stuff. Nothing that I'm proud of. But it's also culturally-sanctioned behavior, the ways that we judge, sort, and demonize bodies, based on color, shape, size, and ability.

Authors Derek Beres, [00:18:00] Matthew Remski, and Julian Walker spend an entire chapter in the book *Conspirituality* sharing a bit of the history behind the "eugenics of wellness" and this pervasive idea that "your physique and posture are signs of your moral character and spiritual development."

This culty indoctrination goes back centuries, and it long ago contaminated the wellness waters we swim in. Because if you zoom out far enough, you'll find that *purity* isn't just a dietary requirement. It's an insidious and exclusionary ideology.

And just a quick side note here. I shared that early story about my time at the Org. But there is nothing novel or extraordinary about that experience. the Org is no different than countless other wellness companies out there who are, in many ways, profiting from systemic disparities and fatphobic rhetoric.

But I feel like I'm beginning to talk in circles here, because this is a massive topic. And so I want to be clear from the [00:19:00] get go, my guests and I are not authorities on this subject. In fact, as we'll remind you more than once, we are white skinned, cisgendered, able-bodied, thin-privileged folks who possess the resources, and therefore bandwidth, to spend two hours sitting together deconstructing our experiences. It's quite literally a privilege to bring you this conversation.

And I want to be clear, we've all suffered from diet culture. I don't want to minimize or diminish our experiences. But I also want to note that we've had a way easier time than a great many of our friends and colleagues who, due to social determinants and or genetics, were simply unable to comply with wellness cult's so-called standards.

And honestly, if I had more time and way more resources, I would devote an entire series just to this body stuff, because there's so much here. But I'm producing this pod solo, and we can each only do what [00:20:00] is within our own wheelhouse. And my wheelhouse is featuring heart led stories.

Which brings us to today's episode.

Tara Wike is an American expat living in Denmark with her husband and son. She's a leader in the design organization at The LEGO Group and moonlight's teaching Org-inspired movement classes, having recently left the Org after decades of practice. In both work and private life, Tara is passionate about creating inclusive products and experiences. Her recent recovery from disordered eating has inspired her to actively support body diversity and fight anti-fat bias, both in fitness spaces and in the broader culture.

I'm so excited to welcome Tara to the pod.

Longtime friend and 'cult'ure series wingwoman, Tracy Stamper, also joins us for this conversation. And Tracy and I have really enjoyed getting to know Tara in the past few weeks. She's an activist and a force of nature. [00:21:00] And her approach to this topic is a breath of fresh air.

And I was quite honestly caught a bit off guard by just how much I was able to personally relate to so much of what she shares in this conversation. In fact, and spoiler alert, Tara's willingness to share so openly led me to a personal breakthrough. If you listen to the end of today's episode, you'll hear it happen in real time.

Here's part one with Tara Wike.

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Candice Schutter: Tara Wike is here with us today, and we're super excited. We're going to be having a conversation around body image, purity culture, detox and diet culture in the wellness industry and how that's informed by a much larger culture.

So, big topic. And Tara is brave enough to show up here for this big conversation. And thank you so much for joining us today.

Tara Wike: [00:22:00] Yeah. Thanks for having me. It's great to be here. Um, and I just want to express my gratitude for the work you've done so far. It's very brave. And it's important. So I want to make sure that that's being said. Uh, inspired me to be a little bit more vulnerable about this stuff. That's how we take these big steps. So.

Candice Schutter: Together. Yeah. In tandem. Exactly.

Yeah, for sure.

And, and, you know, you, uh, reaching out to us around this topic has made me braver in terms of looking at my own journey with it. And, um, exploring many of the many resources that are out there. Thankfully lots of conversations are being had around all of this.

We want to say from the get go. And I'm speaking for all three of us here. None of us are experts in the arena of all the things we're about to talk about. But we have very specific lived experiences that overlap that we want to discuss.

So our experience is a very specific experience. And it is not meant to [00:23:00] generalize or to say this is the experience of everyone.

And part of the reason we want to have this conversation is to invite maybe some of you who've had experiences outside of our norm to converse with us.

Tracy Stamper: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: In a much larger conversation.

And, on that note, I I've spoken to this before too, that the wellness world that at least I've occupied, I'll speak for myself, is so insular and so homogenous. Like almost everyone looks and lives like me. And so that's one of the issues, right? That's one of the issues with us even deconstructing it in this container.

However, we have to start somewhere.

Tracy Stamper: Mm hmm.

Candice Schutter: And where we can start is with our own experiences.

So any thoughts on that before we go any further.

Tara Wike: Well, I think part of this exploration. And yeah, we, we're not experts, but we are experts in having our bodies in our culture, our broader culture, and the, you know, smaller cultures that we've been parts of. And part of those explorations are also [00:24:00] recognizing where your biases and your blind spots are. And, you know, saying, okay.

Candice Schutter: That's right.

Tara Wike: This, you know, this wasn't great. But I didn't realize how much I was benefiting from X, Y, and Z. And at least for me, that's been a big part of, of it. You know, opening my eyes to, oh, this, this sucked for me, but wow, look at how much it sucks, you know, for these other people. And, and that kind of inspired me to take on more of an activist stance, realizing that I had suffered from this paradigm. But, not nearly as much as a lot of people had. And that because of that I should step up and, and speak out.

Candice Schutter: Well said.

Tara Wike: I think this, this is a, it's a, whatever, middle aged white lady, thin passing thing everywhere is that at the very least we can do is open some doors and then step away.

Candice Schutter: Well said. Well said. Yeah.

So on that note, let's start, Tara, if you don't mind, just with you introducing yourself and maybe how you even found the podcast. [00:25:00] And then a little bit about why you feel compelled to even have this conversation with us, like what led you here today?

Tara Wike: Right. Okay. Well, that could go on for hours. I'll try to be a little bit concise.

Um, so, I am many things, one of which is a former Org teacher. And been involved in that for, I found it 20 years ago, teaching for maybe the last, uh, nine, 10 years.

And, um, had my own experiences around body there. But of course, you know, I had a body my whole life like we all do. And, um, grew up in the culture we all live in. So, you know, learned that certain body sizes were preferred over others and certain lifestyle choices, eating, moving, uh, were preferred over others. And that was, a lot of that was amplified in my family of origin, in my home. It was definitely a big thing, what especially women's [00:26:00] bodies looked like were indicative of someone's, uh, moral value, good, good or bad.

And when I look back now, I had a, a very typical body. I didn't sit on any extreme. But it felt quite extreme. And I went from little kid loving to move around and move my body and have this free relationship with movement. And, uh, I don't know if I ever had a free relationship with food because that always had a moral value. This is good. This is bad. But the

movement part was always, was always pretty good. And I did gymnastics and dance and all of these things. And I progressed through dance. And I got to the you know point where you would go on in pointe shoes in ballet. And that was kind of where people got weeded out or the you know, the instructors, okay, this is you're gonna stick with this if you're really serious. And, and I was basically told, yeah, you don't, you don't have the right body to do this. So you should probably just do something else.

And, you know, I was a little kid, so I took it, I believed it. And I said, [00:27:00] Oh, I guess I'm, I'm not a dancer. I can't dance because of the way my body looks, so I'll go play softball. Alright, here, here I go.

And, um, and that was sort of where I first learned that, you know, certain bodies are allowed to move in certain spaces and, and others aren't.

Um, and so, you know, on comes puberty. And we're all getting the messages from magazines and TV and whatever about what we're supposed to be doing with our bodies and how they're supposed to look. And, um, pretty type A person and took that very much on board as a project. So eventually when my body went through puberty, naturally got larger as they do, um, that was a problem. Because our culture likes to tell you that you should still look like your 16 year old self. Um, and, uh, and so got really interested in doing what I thought was the right thing. It was all about being a good girl and doing the right thing. And keeping things in check. So monitoring what I was eating and monitoring how I was moving my [00:28:00] body.

And meanwhile, I still love to dance. But dancing was now something you do after a few drinks at a nightclub. And movement and exercise was something you do, you know, something that hurts and makes you sweat a lot and burns a lot of calories, right? Those are two very different things. That's not, one was not for the other.

And, um, so and that pretty quickly turned into more of an obsessive relationship around exercise in particular. I was never particularly good at dieting, because I love food. And, um, I'm actually really grateful for that. But I was thinking about it all the time.

Candice, I was re listening to your episode 40 and you talked about, okay, I always wished I could have been orthorexic. But you know, I just didn't get there.

I, I think, there's an element to that. And, and there's a lot of research around it too, this mental component. Whether or not you're actually practicing restriction, the fact that there's judgment on every bite of food that you eat is going to affect the way that you eat. You know, a lot of us who think we're emotional eaters, that's just a [00:29:00] response to mental restriction. It's just a, the body saying, oh, you're giving me a signal that this might be the last time I'm ever going to eat this because it's bad. So I better get it in while I can, you know?

Candice Schutter: That really landed for me. I just want to take a minute with that.

Tara Wike: Sure.

Candice Schutter: Say that again. It conceptually landed, but I want it to land deeper. Say a little bit more about that.

Tara Wike: So, you know, restriction is effectively the goal of a lot of diets. Whether it's restriction on the time that you eat or the calories that you eat or the type of foods that you eat or whatever. There's physical restriction when you're literally, you know, reducing your intake. And there's mental restriction, which is when you just have a mindset that this that I'm doing right now is right or wrong. Or I shouldn't have this, or this is too much. Or if I do this, I better work out tomorrow. Or, you know, that part of it.

And that changes your relationship to the food that you're eating. Um, and so a lot of times, there's a woman who does a lot of work on, on binge eating [00:30:00] disorder, and emotional eating. Isabel Foxen Duke, I think is her name.

Um, and, there's a lot around what causes that. And in most cases it's restriction, physical or mental. And, and it's as simple as that. You know, we want to believe that it's because we have an addictive personality or because this is our way of coping with trauma. Or you know, we want to put like a big label on it. But no, it's because you're an animal and your body needs food. And you know, it this is an epigenetic evolutionary response to the thought, or the reality, that there's scarcity in your food supply.

Candice Schutter: Yes.

Tara Wike: It's as simple as that.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Tara Wike: And so what they've found is that when you, when you eliminate or do your best to reduce the restriction, whether physical or mental, the urge to binge goes away.

So, you know, I can't say that's true across the board. I'm fortunate I did not suffer from that disorder. And of course everybody's story is different. Caveat, caveat, not an expert.

[00:31:00] But you know, I find that to be intensely true for me. Because for me, when I went through a recovery process, which I'll get to. It wasn't about, you know, I had never shrunk my body. I wasn't in a stereotypically anorexic body and that needed to be refeed. I just needed to change my mindset around it.

Um, but that wildly changed my relationship to food. So while my body maybe didn't look any different, my anxiety levels, um, and, you know, just general happiness, really, really changed drastically when I was able to recover.

Um, so I want to get back to where the Org came into my life. Because, uh, I think that's pretty relevant. So.

So right. I had become somewhat of a compulsive exerciser. And at least had the belief that that was what I should be doing and that was the right thing to do. And, uh, I was living in Seattle at the time and I stumbled across a studio that had [00:32:00] a poster of a woman in just pure bliss. Just, you know, arms up in joy. And peaked my curiosity so I went and tried it. And it was this, you know, movement class. It was pretty hippy dippy for my tastes at the time. There, it was like real dark. It was only Christmas lights lighting the studio. And there was definitely some like sage burning going on before class and, and.

Candice Schutter: Oh, we know.

Tara Wike: Oh, yeah.

I was a very judgmental, like, 25 or 26 year old, who was a gym bunny and just happened to stumble into this class. And I gave it a shot, because I'll try anything once. And, you know, it was around the corner from my house, so I thought, well, let's just give it a shot.

And there it was, this invitation to move and sense my body and, and have a little bit of freedom. And it was suddenly overlapping with this joy that I would get going out dancing, but this was a movement space.

So you know, I was this kind of [00:33:00] hipster at the time, I hate to admit. But I started dragging some of my friends to this class, because I was like, you're not going to believe. It's like, it's these old ladies and they free dance. And.

Candice Schutter: They were probably like 40.

Tara Wike: Right, exactly.

Probably younger than I am right now. But I was like, you guys, you've got to come. It's like this, and I kept calling it the coven. I was like, it's this coven of old ladies, and they're just like burning sage and, you know, shimmying and like making noises. And sometimes they roll on the floor and like, you know.

And I, this was me whenever there was, whenever there was a free dance, I was like, arms crossed, like, uh, no, I'll wait this one out. Super judgy.

But I kept dragging different friends to it. And I was like, I'll bring this friend next week, and then I'm gonna drag her. She'll think it's such a hoot. And then eventually my then boyfriend now husband said to me, yeah, you know you like that class, right? You're not just going ironically. You wouldn't go to a class, like, eight [00:34:00] times just to prove how weird and hippie it was. Like, do you actually like that class.

And I had to, I was like, Oh my God, he's right. I'm like, I like this weird hippie lady class. Like what am I, you know?

Tracy Stamper: What's happening?

Tara Wike: Um, but I just couldn't deny it. And I just kept going back. So I just, I just kept going back. Um. And I still had this relationship with movement. I still had to run. Or if I ate too much, then I would certainly have to go do a cycling thing, you know.

So that didn't totally change. But as it evolved, and we then moved to Denmark, where there, there was no Org representation anywhere near me. And I found that I missed it. And when I would come back to the States and visit family in Boston, I would find local classes and take them there. And it was there that I was introduced to the greater Org concept, that there were these trainings that you could do.

And, and I actually was inspired by Maria Skinner, who you have had on [00:35:00] as a guest. I was so so lucky to stumble into her studio. And she saw the joy that I had and that I wasn't getting it where I was living and suggested that I could teach. You know, if I want to keep doing it, that I, that I could teach it. So then I went on the path to get trained and to teach.

And I think it was through that transition that I realized this is my movement form and this is how I want to move. And, and I started to have this, I recognized that my approach to exercise before, just wasn't sustainable. You know, any new endeavor I would get into, whether it was spinning or I don't know, there was no CrossFit back then, but whatever it was post Tybow pre CrossFit. I can't remember, but whatever it was. If it was painful and if it was, you know, too exhausting, I couldn't sustain it. Naturally, because what body wants to keep doing that? My body wouldn't let me keep going to this class. I could do it for three weeks. And then, you know, and then that was it.

[00:36:00] But the Org was the only class that I wanted to keep going to. I'm also speaking as somewhat a neurodiverse person with ADHD. I need novelty, okay? And this was still giving me the novelty that I needed. And it didn't hurt my body. My body liked it. And my body was the one who made me go back. Same, like, my body was the one who never let me diet too much, because my body is wise.

And I learned through the Org, and I want to give credit to this, you know, through the practice and through the trainings, that there is wisdom in the body. I think that was maybe one of the first places where that concept was introduced to me. And there's so much in our culture that wants to tell us otherwise. Because there's so much money to be made off of the thought that we can't trust our bodies. And that this device or app or service or person is better, knows better how we should move and, and eat and, you know, all of these things.

So there was something really empowering [00:37:00] and that just sat really true in my body to think that, oh, this movement is the right thing to do with my body. Not because it's burning calories. Not because it's, you know, giving me a perky ass. But like because, uh, because I want to keep doing it and it's enabling me to do all the, you know, movements that my body was designed to do.

And so I had this sort of, um, watershed moment in that development where I went from being a gym bunny to, no, this is how I move. And I move the way my body wants to move. And some days I'm going to do it to an extreme. And some days I'll do it more gently.

Because that's how I want to do it. And, and that felt really, really, really strong and empowering.

However, the story for me still around food and eating, did not line up with that. I was still not willing to believe that my, what my body was telling me about what to eat and when to eat could be trusted. I think I had just been so deep in, in diet culture, which we all were, uh, are.[00:38:00] That I, it didn't even occur to me that everything I believed about intuitive movement might also apply to eating and the relationship to food.

When I would do my Org trainings, I would see this as an opportunity. It was kind of a self care week, right? They're week long. You kind of usually are going somewhere else to do this, so you're on your own, or maybe you're staying with friends. And I would take advantage of that time to do something extreme with my eating at the same time. So I would, I would do like a cleanse or a detox.

And this was amplified by the fact that the trainings that I went to in particular had a big focus on being captured on film and being in a room full of mirrors. So there was a lot about the visuals and getting marketing images. So, you know, anybody [00:39:00] who's struggled with body image knows that it's a fraught relationship with a mirror or with photos. Right. Or seeing yourself in a photo. And you know, so these Org trainings were that to the nth degree.

And I think that would inspire me to feel like I needed to have some control over something. And so I would, I would do some kinds of, um, of course you would never call it a diet. Oh no. I would, you know, some sort of protocol of clean something.

I hate just inherent classism, racism, everything ism in calling something clean. You know, it's always, what is the opposite? What's the opposite? Dirty?

Candice Schutter: Mm-Hmm.

Tara Wike: Right?

Uh, I didn't see this then though, right? So I would, you know, so I would go and tie my training weeks to some sort of disciplined thing that was imbued with all sorts of healthism and, you know, orthorexia.

So I got to the point where I was getting ready to do black belt. And [00:40:00] knowing this was going to be a big deal and there was going to be a lot of cameras. And so I got all excited. And I did a bunch of research. Cause I'm also a nerd and I like to, I could probably have a nutrition degree at this point, honestly, with the amount of, you know, in depth. I, I paid to have a subscription service that allows you to see medical studies. You know, I wasn't just going to read some bestseller diet book. I was going to crack the code. Because I went MIT. I can figure this out, you know, here I go.

But magically somehow, whatever I would arrive on would be somehow aligned with whatever the fad of the moment was. So I, it was some kinds of like keto intermittent, I don't know what that I decided I was going to do before the black belt. And I settled in to do it.

And I, again, I've only done a handful of these in my life, but in the past when I would try something like this, I would get this sort of beginner's high of like, Ooh, like project. You know, like, I'm going to prep, you know, I'm going to buy special Tupperware that's [00:41:00] just for this.

Right.

Tracy Stamper: Get all the books.

Tara Wike: Yeah, get all the books, do all the research. And this time though, I remember distinctly. Like, I don't know if you all have an inner body voice, but every so often, it's not often, the bitch shouts at me. Like, and, and. And I woke up on the day one that I was supposed to start this not a diet diet and, and I, and I heard her say:

"This shit again?!"

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tara Wike: Like it, and there was, and there was no joy. There was no joy. There was no, Ooh project. You know, it was, I just had this like veil drop over me of sadness. And I just thought, well, but this is what I have to do, because my body's wrong and it's a problem. And this is what I have to do. So I guess I'm just going to suck it up and do it, because this is, this is what I have to do.

And I, you know, I'm a very joyful person normally and I think this was the closest I ever felt to [00:42:00] being depressed. You know, I just had a cloud over me.

And, um, my husband and I had a 10 year anniversary. And we decided to go to, there's a Michelin star restaurant in our small Danish town, you know, how rare is that? So we're like, we're going to go. And I told myself, night off. You eat what you want. You know, this, you're forking out a lot of money. Let's just, you know, press pause and we'll pick this up tomorrow. And we went, and it was divine. Like, just an unbelievable meal. And I was with this man that I love more than life itself and just was feeling so good about everything.

And then I woke up the next morning devastated.

Cause all I could think was, if only I was allowed to feel that way at every meal. But alas, I cannot. Because clearly, you know, I must suffer.

Then I was driving, and I was listening to a podcast, Dear Sugars. Uh, if you've heard one.

Candice Schutter: Cheryl Strayed.

Tara Wike: Yeah, with [00:43:00] Cheryl Strayed.

And they had an episode. Um, I can find it and link to it. It changed a lot of people's lives. It was a few letter writers wrote in and they were living in larger bodies and had experiences of frustration and desperation around their relationship with food.

And they had these guests on, Dana Sturtevant and Hilary Kinavey, from, they had a different company name at the time, but they now are called Body Trust, The Center For Body Trust. And they came on and they had a response to these letter writers that I had never heard before. And I don't know if the message had just not been out in any spaces I was in or if I was so biased that I couldn't have heard it, you know until time was right for me to hear it.

But they were just basically saying, you know, these diets didn't work for you because diets don't work. They don't. And [00:44:00] they don't for anybody for any extended period of time. Um, you know, a tiny fraction might maintain some change to their body, but at what cost, often quite a high one, you know? Often it means disordered eating for the rest of your life. And in fact, this is not your body being wrong or broken. In most cases, it's your body protecting you. And, you know, trying to keep you alive.

And, and this just, all of a sudden my intuitive movement awareness and awareness around how I was relating to eating and food came crashing together. And I just, I had to pull over. I think I was projectile crying. Like, I don't know that's a thing. I was like [gestures tears spilling] you know.

And it was just this, like, I was sad that I hadn't seen it before. Because I like to think of myself as smarter than falling for patriarchal bullshit. You know, and I was sad. And I was [00:45:00] mad. And I was, um, I wanted to apologize to my body for ever doing anything like that to, to my body.

And I, it, it just completely tore everything open. It tore it wide open. And this was like three weeks before my black belt.

Candice Schutter: Hmm.

Tara Wike: So I still had to go show up in that space. And I was raw. I was absolutely raw.

I immediately contacted the two women who were on that podcast, and, and got counseling from them. I was like, any cost. I don't care. I need you. And it was so powerful. And I really encourage anybody who's having these sorts of feelings to get some, you know, professional support and therapy around it. Because it's a big thing. And there's great books, but it's also great to talk to professionals.

And, um, you know, one of the things we did, we, it was a group session online. And one of the things, the first things we did was go around and tell our body story, what they called, our body story. And the question was when did you [00:46:00] first learn that your body was wrong? That your body was a problem?

And um. You know, and, and, and I, I think we can all answer that, right. Can anybody say, actually, no, my, my body's 100 percent not a problem.

Candice Schutter: Not a problem.

Tara Wike: Right? And so that struck me. But what also struck me was that I'm straight sized, okay. That's a term for, I can go into the majority of stores and buy clothes that fit my body. As opposed to plus sized. And I am able bodied. I am a white woman. I present as femme, and I'm cool with that. And, uh, you know, all of, all of the privileges.

Which of course I was tangentially aware of, but I was sitting in this virtual room with these people, some of whom were living in much larger bodies than me. And the stories they had, it just destroyed me. You know, from the extreme feelings that I had around how problematic my body was, because I [00:47:00] didn't look like a standard fitness instructor. You know, all of these little offenses I had.

These were people who couldn't get health care.

Candice Schutter: Yep.

Tara Wike: You know. Couldn't fly on a plane. Couldn't, I mean, and it was just like, oh, shit. It was a huge slap in the face. And I think that was what turned on my activism button. Because I thought, I feel this hurt. And it can't even be a fraction of what these people are feeling.

And I'm still allowed to be in a space where I'm a fitness instructor. And people will still look to me somewhat as, you know, some voice on this topic. So I have a responsibility to change what I can about this culture so that these people don't suffer to the extent they suffer.

So everything was firing off from me. So I'm mad at, you know, at what I've been through. I'm mad at what the world is making these people go through. And that I've been blind to it. I was completely blind to it.

[00:48:00] I think this, if I can also speak on behalf of, you know, straight sized, cis, white ladies, like it was a George Floyd moment a bit. You know, for me, where I knew on paper, I've got privilege. But then all of a sudden it was just staring at me, and I couldn't turn away from it anymore.

So I felt very, um, righteous, I think is a word. I don't know. That usually has a negative connotation, but I felt very righteous about it. And I felt very raw. And then I, I went to this, this black belt.

Like hot tip, try to be in your best mental space before going into an intensive. Um,

Tracy Stamper: Yeah.

Tara Wike: And one of the, uh, one of the things that happened. And I have to credit the folks in the room were as receptive to my state as they could have been. And, but there was

one thing, one practice that we did on the very first day. Which was we had all filled out these, um, waiver forms saying if we [00:49:00] fall dead in this training.

Candice Schutter: If anything happens, anything at all.

Tara Wike: We'd all filled out these forms. And then, the trainer was inviting individuals to come up and teach a, you know, song. Because at this point we're all teachers or we're all, people who have shared.

And instead of just calling us out by name, she was taking some factoid from our form. And so it would be like, would the person who lives on, you know, Mulberry Lane, come teach the next song. So it was like pretty cute. It was pretty cute. And then, um. And then we get to the one where it says, Will the person who is 56 kilograms please come to the front of the room? Because we had to fill out our weight on this form.

And in this, if you don't have a charged story around the number of your weight, then, sure, then that's as innocent as.

Candice Schutter: Who is that though? Who is that person?

Tara Wike: I don't know that person.

Candice Schutter: Especially in that room.

Tara Wike: It sent me, you know, talk about [00:50:00] being triggered, that sent me into a spiral. Because I thought, Oh my God, is this person going to say my weight?

And, you know, and then, and then in the space that I was in, I was like, I should stand up for that. I should have doubled the weight. I should have put 'fuck you' in the weight category, you know.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Tara Wike: But meanwhile, I'm realizing that this story I had around, if the world knows what that number is, you know, it's the worst thing that could happen.

But fortunately I felt empowered enough to actually go up to the trainer afterwards and say: Yeah, that was not cool. That's a charged number for a lot of people. And they were open to that and, you know, changed their ways.

But, you know, there, I was going to be encountering things like that every day. And I finally got to a point and I think, I know others have gotten to this point. It's a very emotional experience these trainings and there was one day where it was too many mirrors, and I had to walk away. And, and I came back in tears, and I just kind of had to tell everyone the story more or less what I just told you. You know, here's where I came from and here's where I am right now. And, and it was very, it [00:51:00] was very well received by a lot of the people in

the room. But there was also a lot of acknowledgement that, yeah, this isn't the most, uh, body embracing space.

Uh, you know, there was a lot of cognitive dissonance going on in the practice itself. There was love your body, be in the moment, you know, whatever your body can do is fine and good. And adjust things so that things work for you.

But there was, you know, implicit and explicit sometimes acknowledgement of what a body should look like.

And what clothing sizes should be available.

Candice Schutter: How it should be able to move.

Tara Wike: Yeah, how it should be able to move, too. It, yeah, absolutely. is a

Candice Schutter: That was a big message, very ableist. If you do this X, Y, and Z enough, then your body "by design." I remember those words were used a lot, "by design" should be able to do X, Y, and Z. Should be able to fit in certain clothes. Lots of shoulding.

Tara Wike: Yes.

Candice Schutter: A big pile of bull [00:52:00] should.

Tara Wike: Yes. And again, in some cases more explicitly than implicitly.

But in my experience, I was never directly shamed. But I would say all of the marketing material available in the early days, certainly at the time when I was involved, showcased certain bodies. So, you know, there, there's a message there. This, this is the right kind of body to be doing this.

Yeah, and again, when they were making and selling clothes, I, I guess they still do, you know, some sizes are available and some were not. It didn't affect me. But this is one of those spaces where I try to be more activist now. I try not to shop anywhere that doesn't have a broad range of sizes. Even though I can fit most things, like, still.

Tracy Stamper: Cool.

Tara Wike: That's one small thing that I can do. Um.

And I know other people have had experiences with the Org that were much more explicit and terrible, that you've, you know, we've heard on your brave podcast. And I feel awful about that. And I'm so sorry for anybody who went through any experiences like that, where you were forced [00:53:00] to parade around in a swimsuit or, you know, told to go on a diet before you're filming. And, that breaks my heart. It absolutely breaks my heart.

And I think, fortunately there's cultural moves going on now where it's a little less cool to say stuff like that. But the biases are still there. I mean, they're shifting. There's different language now, you know, diet's a four letter word. But there are still thoughts about what bodies are valued versus not.

So one of the reasons we're talking today is because I wrote an article kind of chronicling my experience with the Org, and how I thought it could and should better align with body positive principles. And how we could be more active in that space.

So, you know, there's the Health At Every Size movement that has a pledge you can sign if you're a practitioner or in, you know, in our case, a fitness instructor. I've signed it. Um, that's basically ensuring that I'm a safe space. And I'm not going to push, you know, weight centric [00:54:00] talk or any of that stuff.

And I could really see, at this time I still had a lot of belief in the Org. And I was like, oh, if they can see the light on this, we can line up with this body positivity movement. You know, already this is a practice that appeals to people who are a little outside of the standard fitness norm, right? These are often older people. They're often people with different body types and different abilities who maybe aren't comfortable going into a gym but are comfortable going into an Org class. We're halfway there, guys. We talk about love your body. We, you know, we're in the moment, it's mindful. If we can just do this little extra bit, we can go out and tell the world that we are Health At Every Size aligned. That we are body positive and that this is a safe space.

And I even managed to pitch this to Marissa in a, in a training in my first degree black belt training. And I was surprised that it was well received. And I was invited to write an article kind of pitching this idea that would be included in an [00:55:00] upcoming newsletter.

So I did that. This was early 2020. The pandemic happened. Everything went up in the air. It was chaos. My article never saw the light of day. I had written it in December of '19. A few times I wrote and asked, you know, can we, it is coming out? No? Maybe? No, no response.

Um, and I'd had enough experiences at that point dealing with the Org and with Marissa to kind of keep my expectations low. And, I thought, okay, I tried. And then I kind of started just distancing myself and saying I'm going to do what I can do which is to be as inclusive and as much of a proponent of the HAES ideal, Health At Every Size ideals, to my students as I can. That's what I have the power to do. So I'm going to be the change I want to see. And whatever happens with that article happens.

Um, I also had some contacts and colleagues who were closer to the heart of the Org who I knew were going to be pushing the same agenda and were in the, um, I forget [00:56:00] what they called it, I think, since disbanded, um.

Candice Schutter: The DEI council. Yeah.

Tara Wike: Yeah. So I kind of trusted some people to deal with it at, you know, Org HQ. And then I was going to just sort of do my own thing from there.

Then when I've, you know, reached out and been a part of your online community, at one point I shared the article. Because I thought, okay, well, maybe somebody can read it. And, um.

Tracy Stamper: Here's Here's my chance.

Tara Wike: And yeah, right, here you go. I wrote this thing, so I might as well put it out there. And that sparked some good conversation in some of the calls, um, that we've had. And, and so that's how my name popped up. Random lady in the middle of Denmark now popped up on your radar as someone to talk to about body positivity and, you know, dance and fitness and all of that stuff. So.

So here I am now. And I've been through some radical recovery on the eating front. I'm, I practice intuitive eating, which is much like intuitive movement, which just means trusting my interoception. Trusting my body to tell me what I want, when I want it. [00:57:00] You know, understanding that I'm not a robot or a machine. Which is the, you know, metaphor we, the medical industry loves to apply to our bodies.

And I just, one of the things that gets under my skin is these trackers and apps and things that tell you exactly when you should be standing and sitting and eating and sleeping. And you know, that you clearly must have the same calorie input every single day.

And I'm like, okay, no, I'm wildly variable. I'm like, not only do I have my hormonal cycle to contend with. It's what, you know, what did I do yesterday? Did I sleep well? Did I, you know, am I getting ready for a trip? Am I?

No, I don't have a set number of calories I should be eating every day and you wouldn't know what it would be anyway. So fuck off.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Every body is different. There's no formula here. Yeah.

Tara Wike: Yeah. And everybody's body is different every day.

And just the, the hubris, like the, just the gall to think that we can deduce it to a formula when our body has evolved for millennia, [00:58:00] you know, to be incredibly brilliant at surviving and thriving and reaching homeostasis. Like, we still don't understand the half of it. Nutrition itself is like such a new bioscience. We barely get it.

And I'll tell you, medical doctors, most of them aren't trained in it at all. They know as much as you and I do. But people look to them as experts. Or people look to us as a fitness instructor, you know, people look to people in the fitness industry as like, what should I eat? And whatever. And we don't know any better than you do. We, ask your body, ask your body.

Tracy Stamper: It's interesting that you say that. I, Through the online community that has popped up podcast started, I've a number of people talk about Org teachers and trainers giving advice on nutrition.

Tara Wike: Oh yeah.

Pretty extreme stuff too, that I, that at least in the circles I've run in.

[00:59:00]

TRANSITION

Tara Wike: So, all of the energy that I would have given to whatever my latest fitness or diet regime was back in the day, I then turned to exploring and trying to understand diet culture and health at every size and intuitive eating. And, and it really is kind of a, you know, mind opening, mind blowing experience once you see the other side of it. And realize oh my goodness. All of these assumptions that I've been making my whole life are based on falsehoods effectively.

You know, diet culture being the water we swim in, you know. It's, it's really, uh, what we're, in the western world at least, all kind of raised up to believe that certain foods are good and certain foods are bad. Certain ways of eating are good or bad. Body sizes say something about your health and your value. And that you even have control over your body size. Like, there's, there's a myth right there. [01:00:00] Right?

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tara Wike: And of course, there's two sides to that coin. So if you're in a size that is demonized or that is not the beauty ideal, then it's your fault, and you should do something about it. Conversely, if you happen to have the body size that the culture does idealize, then, you've done something right. And you've earned it.

And I think we find a lot of fitness influencers and people who end up in that space, you know, I'm here to tell you, it's genetics. The majority of it, right? It's genetics. It's systemic issues. It's, you know, your, uh, mean income in the place where you grew up. It's how many marginalizations you experience in your life. It is epigenetics. It's what your ancestors bore and what genes got turned on when you were in the womb. It is so many things that go into what size your body is that have very little to do with your lifestyle choices, for better or for worse.

So a lot of people walking around in idealized bodies think they earned it. And [01:01:00] this is why there's a resistance a lot to diet culture from many people. From people who are benefiting from it, because, like many systems of oppression, where, you know, people in privilege don't want to give up that privilege. That feels like oppression to them. And for the people who are victimized by it, but have spent their whole life fighting it. And putting all this energy into it to learn that they were fighting a pointless battle, that can feel like, why have I wasted all of this energy? I don't want to give up.

And to learn that you will likely never, you know, reach some ideal. You have to grieve that. You know, that's a devastating thing to learn for some people. So there's a lot of levels to it.

But I still haven't defined it, have I? You know, diet culture being, yeah, this paradigm that we're all in that places so much importance on body and adipose tissue and the food that we consume and the way that we move our bodies.

Um, I've shared with Candice and Tracy a link to a really good, in depth, kind of description of it. And [01:02:00] I'll ask you to put that in some show notes.

Candice Schutter: Absolutely.

Tara Wike: Because it can go much deeper.

And I know that folks listening to this will have varying levels of exposure to this. At this point, I hope a lot of people have heard the term diet culture, more so than maybe five or six years ago when I was first hearing about it.

But, it's again, it's at the point now where some of this stuff is being co opted and twisted and taken advantage of in the capitalist realm. So even things like intuitive eating, which was the biggest part of my recovery process, you have to be careful where you learn and read about, about that stuff. And Health At Every Size, which I think, I haven't checked because it makes me so angry, but somebody hacked the Wikipedia page for Health At Every Size. This very fat phobic doctor went in and wrote something that says Health At Every Size is a, you know, like field paradigm paraded around by people who want to celebrate obesity. Or said like some awful thing. Um, I haven't visited in a while, but I worry. When I, so when I tell people about it, I say, don't go to the Wikipedia page.

There's some [01:03:00] fundamental texts. Health At Every Size was written by Lindo Bacon and supported by foundations that are seminal in this work. And there's, but there's the books, there's *Health At Every Size* is a book. Read the latest edition if you're curious. And *Intuitive Eating* is also a book, the fourth edition is out now, and that's Elyse Resch and Evelyn Tribole.

And it's funny, because people, people who have been immersed in diet culture, when they ask what my recovery entailed, they always say, but what do you *do* now? If you're not watching what you eat? Or, you know, making a plan, or counting the calories, or making sure you have enough protein, or what? You know, what do you do? What could you possibly do?

And I say I do intuitive eating. Which, part of me is angry that this even has to have a name. Because to me it's just normal, attuned, human eating. Like the same way that I breathe and pee, you know. Like I listen to my body and I do what it tells me.

But in, I think there's a little [01:04:00] more to it. There's a bit of nuance to say, it's not instinctive eating. It's not to say that, you know, I'm walking through a grocery store and I

just grab whatever I, you know, see and eat it. And you know, your frontal lobe is part of your intuition as well. So you can make a plan.

Like I ran a road race yesterday. I woke up. I wasn't sleeping super hungry. But I knew I was going to need to, you know, have some energy for my race. So I ate a bowl of grape nuts, even though I wasn't really feeling it at the time. And I'm glad I did, because I wasn't hungry two hours later when I was running my road race.

You know, so, and that's intuition, too. It's kind of knowing how it's going to make you feel. Knowing what's, what's coming in your day.

But it's effectively, if you really want to boil it down, it's eating what you want when you want. Which sounds so scary, because we're told that our intuition is wrong. And people will always say, default is, oh, if I did that, I would just dive into a, you know, box of brownies and never come back up. And you might. If you've been restricting yourself from brownies, you might in the beginning.

But ultimately, I don't know. We've [01:05:00] probably all had an experience, like you go on vacation, you eat a bunch of, whatever, fried fish. Cause you're at the seashore. And there's one day where you're like, man, I just want a salad.

Like.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tara Wike: That's intuitive, right. Cause your body's like, yeah, enough of that. So it was good, thanks. But now we need something else, right.

But when you're in the state that I was in, which is recovering from restriction, mental and physical, the solution for me, or the path took was to allow all foods. It's just, you know, don't demonize anything. Understand that all foods have a purpose. They're all giving you something. Sugar is energy. And, you know, all these things, carbs are energy, and your brain loves them. If that's what you're needing, there's a reason for it. Either because you've restricted or because your body wants it.

And, so I would do things like, if I was in a shop and I thought, I want a candy bar. I'm gonna buy a candy bar. And then, the most amazing thing that I never thought in a million years would ever happen. One day I was cleaning out my, my [01:06:00] work bag, my tote bag I bring for work, and I had like five candy bars in there.

And I'd forgotten about them.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Tara Wike: It, yeah. If you had told me years before, hey, Tara, you're gonna have a bag full of candy bars and you're gonna forget there's candy bars in there. I'd say like, fuck you. I know exactly where every ounce of chocolate is within a, you know, one mile radius. Like,

Candice Schutter: Right.

Tara Wike: And, and that was when I was like, holy shit, this is legit.

And there are, you know what I did, I ate toast every single day for a year. Because I hadn't for years. Even when I wasn't on diets, it was like, well, that's bread and butter. I mean, how evil can one be? Right?

And so I, and I would wake up with, you know, the maximum willpower I was going to have that day. And so breakfast was usually the most, um, snooty. You know, I would have my overnight chia, whatever.

And, and so the recovery for me was like, I'm going to eat a piece of toast. Like that was [01:07:00] rebellious for me. And I did it for, I think a year until I was finally like, I don't feel like toast today.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tracy Stamper: I love that.

Tara Wike: Right. And maybe I'll eat it.

And, but to disassociate these value judgments that we place on our choices and on our food.

I spoke to how I had had this meal with my husband that was this beautiful experience where I kind of allowed myself to eat intuitively and then was so depressed the next day thinking I can never do that again. And when I found intuitive eating, when I found this practice, I made a vow to myself.

And I'm not a woo woo person who, you know, does ritualistic things. But this was probably the most ritualistic thing I ever did. I have a walk-in closet. And I have, you know, a mirror in there. And, and I remember getting on my knees and looking at my own eyes in the mirror and saying, "I will never put you on a diet again."

Candice Schutter: Mm.

Tracy Stamper: Whew.

Candice Schutter: Powerful.

Tara Wike: Yeah.

And it was like inside voice telling that. So it was like the boss was in the room. Like [01:08:00] guess what, kids, this is done.

And I haven't, and I haven't. And I eat like I ate at that Michelin star restaurant every day. And, sometimes my body gets a little bigger, sometimes it gets a little smaller. It's, I have a very, personally have a very resilient body who's determined to be pretty much the size she is no matter what. And that's fine. And I've come to terms with it. Uh, it doesn't look like a magazine lady. Although nowadays that definition is expanding. I'm happy to see more examples of bodies.

Uh, but, I, yeah, not everybody knows what recovery looks like or knows what intuitive eating is, so I wanted to just give a little explanation of what's on the other side. And what can be available out there.

Candice Schutter: So I want to share with everybody just how timely this conversation is. [01:09:00] Um, Tara, I had a couple moments when we were recording with you last week where I dissociated like two or three times. Because what you were sharing was landing in such a personal way.

Tara Wike: Oh, honey.

Candice Schutter: Um.

I just want to thank you. I want to thank you for showing up right now.

And it's funny because we connected months ago and talked about having this conversation. And it just, the timing. It would have been immensely helpful then as well, but I think I needed to be exactly where I am right now.

And, um, I just want to share that,

Well, first of all, the definition of intuitive eating makes perfect sense to me, because there have been many times in my life where that's just how I've operated. And the culture around me was sort of telling me that it was wrong. And I had this [01:10:00] cognitive dissonance, and I feel like what I'm doing is fine. Like what's wrong with just eating what I want to eat when I want to eat it?

Um, but then I was steeped in wellness culture, that was like, well, no, actually, you need to think about this and this and this and this and this and this and this. And so I was going back and forth between those two things. But ultimately I would land in this intuitive eating place. And it worked for me because I have thin privilege.

And I also was teaching like at least seven classes a week. So just math. My body stayed in a certain place regardless of what I ate, right? And then I would go through these swings where

I'd be like, I have to do a cleanse. It was always about cleansing. I'd be doing these cleanses all the time.

So then I stopped teaching in 2019. And my body started to change and adapt. And I was getting older and all these things started to happen. And I was doing my best to make peace with that. But then I entered into this yoga community where suddenly it was like all about purity. [01:11:00] Keep your vessel pure.

And so then I went back into all of this restriction. So for like two years, I was eating in this really restrictive way. And I really felt like it was connected to like morality almost. Like, you know, it was just like, I, this is a good. I'm a better human. I'm a purer vessel, if I eat this way and I cut out this, that, and the other.

And so I went into that and was able to sustain my body weight. And I was very proud of myself. Pat myself on the back. Like I was able to stay in this little pocket. But I didn't have dessert. I didn't have a glass of wine. I didn't, I mean, so many things that I denied myself.

And then because I had deprived myself of these things when I would indulge on them. Not only, maybe I would binge, but mostly I would have a reaction. I would get a headache. I would, like, it was just this shitty thing where I had abstained from these things for so long that they started to, sort of, torture [01:12:00] me when I would have them.

Because my body was just like, what is happening? Right? And.

Tara Wike: Or your mind.

Candice Schutter: Or my mind. You're probably right.

Well, this is the aha I had when we were talking last time. Is when you were talking about restriction. Because then I let that go when I left that community, and I went into the 'cult'ure series. I let that go. I started to eat more intuitively. And I have been for many months. And my body has gotten larger. I've gained weight.

And right before we went... this is what I want to share. That's really vulnerable.

Right before we were set to record this, like the week before. I had decided that I was going to go on another cleanse. I got this new scale and I made this plan and like I'm gonna da da da da. I won't even go into it, because you all know the drill.

And then, Tara, you're speaking and when you said that you listened to that Dear Sugars episode and then you said to yourself, "this shit again?!" It was like, like I was [01:13:00] getting, in the best possible way, smacked in the face. Because it landed so deep. I was like, Oh my God.

When we got done recording, I went and talked to my partner. And I told him about it. And I just started crying. And I was just like, Oh my God, like what am I doing? Why am I doing this to myself?

And I just want you all to see in real time, like how this is like an ongoing journey. I feel like for any, any human potentially, but certainly for most women that I know. It's like I get to this point where I think I'm, this is, this is not a problem for me anymore. Like I'm fine with this. And then I catch myself getting caught in the spell of the diet culture. But putting it in different terms in terms of healthism, which we're going to talk about. You know, this sense of like my morality and my worth is connected to my weight. And I need to get my shit together.

And this is why I want to spend so much time on this topic.

This need to [01:14:00] control is really what the 'cult'ure series is all about. Like that we have to control and lose a sense of agency to some ideal that was created by a culture that wants to control us and distract us from the real shit that's going on. While we're obsessing about our weight, we're not fighting the patriarchy. We're not doing the things we need to do to call all this shit out

And I just, want to just be humble and say like, these are spells I just keep getting caught in. And this is just another web around all of this stuff. And just thank you, Tara. Because you woke me up. And I returned to the scale to Amazon. And I'm, I'm not doing any. I just made a batch of cookies yesterday.

And I'm just like, no. I'm going back to trusting myself and my body. And, um, thank you. Just thank you.

Tara Wike: Oh, well, I'm, I'm so grateful that you could, you could benefit from my inner voice as much as I did. So, hey, I should, and that's why I'm here. I want to shout it out and share what I can.

[01:15:00] Um, yeah, so much compassion. And I'm pretty outspoken, obviously. And in my circle of friends as well. And I have friends who, like you, you know, were on the precipice of things or even choosing to undergo a cleanse or a whatever. Um, and I want to make it clear that I have nothing but compassion for people who choose to go that direction, because the pressures in our society are huge.

Um, it's a choice I've made to not. And, and it's a choice I've made to come share the opposing opinion. Just to say that's not the only way. And to offer this, you know, counter argument that wasn't very available to me when I needed it.

So, but I, I always say I, I hate the game, not the player. So, you know.

Candice Schutter: Exactly.

Tara Wike: I, I don't, I don't begrudge anyone making personal j. And I very much believe that people have autonomy over their bodies and to do whatever they want with it. I just know what works for me. And I know that [01:16:00] there are some false beliefs behind a lot of what's pushed on people that I want to have exposed.

And I think one of them, too. I think at the age that we're at, Candice, you and I are similar. I'm 47. Um, you know, bodies change continually. But for women, they have some peaks, right? And that's when you also see the highest incidence of disordered eating amongst women. When you, when you hit adolescence and when you hit perimenopause.

And I was, so delighted to find some research that, um, because I have this little belly now. I, I've always like, uh, I don't want to talk about my body shape too much. That's not cool. But I have a little more belly than I used to and, to the point where I noticed when I was doing kind of yoga poses, you know, when you go into like child's pose. Like, Ooh, you know. It reminds me when I was pregnant. Right. I was like, okay, all right, we're gonna, we're gonna alter this pose a little bit.

And I thought, I wonder what's up with this? Because I know this is something that happens to women around my age. And I wonder if [01:17:00] there's a reason. And so I did some research, and let me tell you. If you Google like menopause belly, what 99 percent of the hits are is buy this and do this and, um.

Candice Schutter: Yep, how to get rid of it.

Tara Wike: How to get rid of it.

But, fortunately I knew the resource channels to go through. And I'll share this too, when I get the link. Um, adipose tissue, certain types of adipose tissue produce estrogen, like the type that you would have in your belly. And, it's thought that it helps regulate when your ovaries are getting a little on the fritz about providing your body with estrogen. That this other source of estrogen can sort of ease the symptoms and balance things out.

And so, it's easy to look at and demonize kind of anything that relates to having a larger body. But if you get curious about it, and you take the morality away. And you say, well, why is this, what could be, the, you know, the reason? And so I was like, okay, I'm going to, I'm going to learn to appreciate this [01:18:00] and say, thanks. I maybe some symptoms would be worse if I didn't have you. And I'm going to, you know, accommodate for you.

And that's the kind of thing that, it's probably a TMI, but that's my nature. That's the kind of thing I'll share with my class when I teach.

Tracy Stamper: Beautiful.

Tara Wike: I think this is, this is one thing I wanted to get around to is to talk about what, you know, how can we model, um, you know.

Well, first of all, is not pretending that we're experts on nutrition when we stand in front of our class, right? a lot of yoga teachers and unfortunately, Org teachers sometimes do.

But also just to show what it looks like to accept your body and, um, accept a changing body. I like that we have this concept of the now body. You know, not what it once was, not what it could be, but what it is right now.

And similarly, when language shows up in class, it's so common in our culture for women to degrade their bodies in front of each other.

And, And we rarely evaluate. We rarely even, you know, critique it or [01:19:00] consider that, that it's something we shouldn't do. It's, it's like talking about the weather, right? To say like, oh, look at my, you know, flab or, or whatever that is. And I put the kibosh on that in my class. Because, first of all, it's often coming out of people who do not have the largest body in the class, and.

Candice Schutter: Mhmm.

Tara Wike: And, are not thinking, what is being said by what you're saying?

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tara Wike: You know, you're basically saying I don't want to look like you.

You know?

And, uh, I have close friends in larger bodies, and we talk about this all the time. And they tell me how hurt they are by statements like that. And nobody who's saying those things comes with the intent of making that, right? But, and this I find is a very generational thing, actually, this impact versus intent. Um,

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tara Wike: You know, in my career, I work heading up a department in the toy design area of Lego. One of our focuses is on diversity and inclusivity. And [01:20:00] a lot of times the resistance to make bold moves or strides in this area has to do with, but I didn't mean any harm by what I was doing before.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter what you meant.

Candice Schutter: Exactly.

Tracy Stamper: Exactly.

Tara Wike: And I always presume good intention. I don't presume people are out there trying to be fat phobic or racist or anything. You know, and that the woman in my class who was talking about her arms. Like she, she wasn't trying to, she was probably just trying to be funny, you know? Or a little vulnerable or whatever. But, um, but the point is, is that that it's hurtful. And now, you know, so you can do different.

And so I, you know, I tried to lay down some rules in my class. We don't talk about bodies, good or bad in that way. We can talk about how they're feeling and what they can do.

But the shape of them. Not relevant. And, and primarily not under our control. And they're going to change and so let's embrace that.

Candice Schutter: [01:21:00] Part 2 with Tara will drop next week. You won't want to miss it.

Here's a quick preview.

Tara Wike: And then if this is like the first time you're hearing stuff like this, I'm sure there's cognitive dissonance and being like but too much pie! But not enough movement! But what about? But what about?

And I think we need to turn that down a few notches. And just say, no one act of eating a piece of pie is gonna make you or break you. And having this anxiety around it, it *is* gonna have mental and physical effects. Right?

Whereas accepting that food is more than just fuel for your movement and for your body. Uh, it's joy. It's sharing. It's celebration. It's social. It's cultural, you know.

It's sometimes compassionate, you know. Sometimes it's the only self care we can give ourselves in a moment is, you know what, I'm just gonna have this cookie right now. Because [01:22:00] I had a tough day. And, and it's, It's yummy and I, and I want it.

Candice Schutter: Thanks for tuning in, and we hope you'll join us again next week. If the subject matter in this week's episode resonated with you, please be sure to share it with anyone you think might also benefit. Especially right now in the aftermath of the holidays, which is a season of great vulnerability when it comes to recruitment into the cult of diet.

And if you enjoy the content featured on this pod, please consider giving it a five star rating, or hitting the subscribe or follow button on your favorite listening app. Let us know that you're out there listening.

Speak kindly to yourself and others as you move into 2024 and we'll see you next week.
[01:23:00]