

#217 - Let's Talk About Your Body, Part One

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 217 - let's talk about your body, part one. There's a lot I want to cover here, so much so that I had to break it up into two episodes. It was just too long. So next week, we'll obviously do part two of let's talk about your body. In total, I have ten principles to consider about the body - yours, other people's, how you engage with your body when you're alone, and how you pay attention to your body when you're with other people, hormones, privilege, and the complexity of body positivity. So like super light not big thing. Today we're going to talk about the first five principles. Let's do it.

Number one, the body is amazing. I'd like to start here because we start with something undeniably true. The human body is a marvel. I always knew that to be true, and then I read *The Body* by Bill Bryson and was dumbfounded. Dumbfounded. If you've never read Bill Bryson, he's weirdly funny while being immensely informative. I'd imagine him as the perfect college professor. Mostly nerdy, very enthusiastic, brilliant, very much not too cool for school, and gets you excited about whatever he's talking about. But the point is to start with what is true. The body is good. The body is amazing, in fact. Yours! Your specific body, no matter how it looks or operates or feels or moves is amazing. That is always where we begin. If you don't think that's true, especially about your own body, the other stuff won't hit. Your body is good.

Number two, there is no normal body. Let me say that again. There is no normal body. In fact, I'd like to posit that there isn't even a spectrum of normal bodies. Normal is a cultural construct. It's what we're told to think. But there is no normal body. Culturally, we've been told there is or that there is a normal to strive for. There's a baseline we're all supposed to hit, but the problem is that the baseline is a thin, perfectly functioning, likely tanned, taut, medium-to-tall body that doesn't have overlapping toes or a large nose or thinning hair or dry nail beds. Makes me think of Mean Girls. We have been told for decades that there is a normal, and our most recent iteration of what normal means is what I just listed. Thankfully, we have been moving past that idea of one body being the perfect body. But I think you'd likely agree with me that there's no such thing as a perfect body. Would you agree that there's no such thing as a normal body? Because that's different altogether. Normal might mean average to you, but what really is average? You might think normal as an average is a certain clothing size, but do we know the actual average clothing size? And even if we did (which we do but I'm not going to say it), we're still normalizing something that's not normal. All bodies are good bodies. Putting them on a spectrum does no one any favors.

Which leads us to number three: there is no hierarchy of bodies. Thin bodies are not better than fat bodies. Strong bodies are not better than weak bodies. Tall bodies are not better than short bodies are not better than tall bodies. Healthy bodies are not better than sick bodies. There is no hierarchy. But systemically, there is. That's where we have to change our thinking and our language and our movement in our daily lives. That's why I really don't like before and after fitness pictures. It's setting up the hierarchy. It's saying that whatever is on the right is the good one. If you were putting the photos in order, the "after" photo would be better because it's literally positioned that way, right? In fact, I think if I were to give you a stack of photos of different kinds of bodies and asked you to put them in order of hierarchy, you'd likely be able to do it. You'd feel gross doing it, but you could do it. Because we've been implicitly and explicitly taught to rank bodies as a culture. And it's wrong. Not

just morally wrong because it's claiming that one version of good is better than another and placing morality on something that isn't bad, but it also is factually incorrect. It's like smoke, this idea that some bodies are better than other bodies. It's a mentality created out of thin air, and we've been fed it for a long time, so long that we think it's actually real.

And this is where we get into it a little bit with number four. A body doesn't have to be healthy. A body doesn't have to be healthy. Your body doesn't have to be healthy. Now, do we all prefer healthy bodies? Bodies that function well and metabolize fuel and give us energy and rest easy and don't hurt when we walk or run or bend over? Of course. Do we all prefer bodies that don't get sick or hurt or have chronic pain or disabilities? Probably. But... but but but. A healthy body isn't all we think it is. I read a book recently called *The Body Is Not an Apology* by a beautiful activist and educator named Sonya Renee Taylor. She writes in that book, "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 not a 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. Each of us will have varying degrees of health and wellness throughout our lives, and our arbitrary demands and expectations as they relate to the healthy size of people's bodies fuel inequality and injustice." When we aim so hard for health, we're not being kind to ourselves when our bodies aren't responding the way we want them to. We're not being kind to others with disabilities. We're not embracing all the sizes of bodies as good. There's a movement of health at every size, and that's true. There is health at every size. But health isn't the gold medal here. A fat body with high cholesterol doesn't count less as worthy than a fat body with normal levels of cholesterol. We don't get to implicitly excuse or more willingly accept fat bodies that are healthy while disregarding fat bodies that are just fat. All bodies are good. Health doesn't get to be the ticket into that door. Under no circumstances should a fat person who is in some way unhealthy, whatever that might mean to that person or to you, under no circumstances should that person be shamed for their body. No way. We don't get to arbitrarily decide what makes a body good or not.

Which leads us to number five: Privileged bodies exist. Notice if you have a privileged body. You have a privileged body if you're thin and you don't have to think about fitting in a restaurant booth or an airplane seat. Our systems award your thin body which gives you privilege. You didn't earn it. Thin bodies are seen as having better chances at romance, they can fit in little sports cars, they are perceived as more capable which is garbage, but it's the system we live in.

White bodies are privileged bodies. The system of the United States is built to give preference to white bodies. Male bodies are privileged bodies. There aren't "who wore it better" comparisons of celebrity guys very often. Guys with bodies that were in the middle of that cultural hierarchy that we want to break apart are excused far more quickly and quietly than women. Abled bodies are privileged bodies. If you are able bodied, you can go to any restaurant you want. You don't have to wonder if there are ramps or wide doors or tables that accommodate you. Cisgender bodies are privileged bodies. It's likely that some of you listening have strong or complex thoughts about cisgender bodies or bodies whose gender matches their birth sex, but no matter what those thoughts are, I hope you'd still agree that as a culture, cisgender bodies are privileged. They aren't looked down upon. They're not questioned. They don't have to wonder what bathroom they're allowed to go

in. It doesn't matter what your perspective is on transgender bodies and bathrooms; we can likely all agree that cisgender bodies are privileged bodies.

So as we think about our bodies individually and as we think of our bodies moving through the world, I think it's really important to acknowledge that there are privileged bodies. I live in a very privileged body. It's a little strange for me to call myself thin right now because there's never been a world where I would ever do that, even when I suffered with disordered eating, but by cultural standards and for this example, I am. I totally am. I have a thin, white, abled, cisgender body. I am highly privileged. What that does for me and hopefully for you is help you see yourself in a broader community. How can we be aware of each other's bodies in this way? How can we advocate for less-privileged bodies? How can we be kind to ourselves and to others when we complain about a stomach roll at the pool when there are bodies who can't go to the pool at all because they are underserved because they aren't privileged? This is really important work we're doing here, to pay attention to the privilege of your body or to honor your worth when society and restaurants and job interviews and airplane seats don't.

I was struck by this quote from Sonya Renee Taylor. "A particularly strategic maneuver is to decide that if we don't understand something it must be wrong." I do that. Do you do that? If I don't understand it, if something doesn't fit within my worldview or what I've always just accepted to be true, then it must be wrong. Sometimes it is. Sometimes the thing is wrong. Sometimes we were wrong. Sometimes it's a spectrum or really complex and not at all black and white. If any part of you is pushing up against anything I've said today, that's good. I really really think that's good. That means you're paying attention and listening. It means something is happening, ironically, in your body that's causing you to feel uncomfortable or still or anxious or energetic. That's okay. That's good. Our bodies are really beautiful communicators. But what I would invite you to do is to not dismiss any of that discomfort as proof that what you're bumping up against is wrong. Again, it could be. It could be that as far as you're concerned, there is one way you want to see a particular thing when it comes to bodies, and you're allowed to believe that. But perhaps there's space in between the discomfort and the decision to not automatically determine something is wrong simply because you don't yet understand it.

Bodies are complex and beautiful, and culture has made our perception of them complicated. Definitely confusing. Even contradictory. But if we can all start from the same place that the body is amazing, that there is no normal body, that there isn't a hierarchy of bodies, that bodies don't have to be healthy in order to count, and that there are privileged bodies. The sooner we all acknowledge those things, the sooner we can process everything from how we feel in a swimsuit to how we feel about transgender bathrooms with more kindness and empathy. I realize that's a wide scope of topics, but I'm not nothing if not complex.

Next week, we'll get more into thoughts on your individual body, but today, this week, I wanted to start here. I wanted to give you these five ideas to start thinking about and noticing. See where you're stuck. Notice where you're uncomfortable. Pay attention to how you feel in your body when you go to the store or the pool. Pay attention to how you look at other bodies, if you put them in a mental hierarchy, if you judge bodies and didn't realize it, notice where certain bodies would not have the same benefits as yours. Just start to notice. Again, I realize this is a lot and kind of broad and a little unnerving and I personally believe very beautiful and human, but it's understandable for it to be

a little uncomfortable. We have been fed quite a story for our entire lives about each other's bodies. We probably have had numbers on the scale that are our upper limit, that if we ever crossed that number, we would never leave the house. That's why we say that fat people are brave for wearing form-fitting clothes or swimsuits or just existing. Kate Kennedy says that all the time - why can't women just be allowed to exist? Your body shouldn't be labeled brave for just existing. We shouldn't look down on and feel sorry for disabled bodies, like they are less than or have to be talked to like children. All bodies are good bodies. It's a lot to unwind, but this week I just want you to pay attention to how all of that settles for you.

And next week, we'll get into the second half of the list. I hope this episode has given you something to think about. It sure has me.

Okay, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! Every week I highlight someone who I see on Instagram or who has emailed me who is celebrating the Lazy Genius way in a way that makes me smile and want to cheer them on. This one is a little different than past weeks, but I just have to highlight one of the most Lazy Genius moves I saw regarding something I love very much. So one of our podcast sponsors, at least in this year of 2021 because you could be listening to this in the future when no one has nails anymore I don't know apocalypses are weird, but one of our sponsors, on this particular episode if you're listening when it comes out, is my beloved Olive and June. It's the best nail polish, the best at-home mani system, this isn't another ad I just genuinely love them. Anyway, this week's Lazy Genius of the Week is Katie from the INstagram account you should all be following called @whatkatefinds. I love Katie so much. She's a fashion person, a lifestyle person, she has some specific niche loves as we all do. She will often go deep into The Bachelor franchise, John Mayer, home shopping networks, sustainable clothes and shoes, snacks... she's the best. Anyway, she is also a fan of Olive and June. She even has her own color - WKF which is a beautiful olive green that my sister Hannah wears a lot. Katie made a nail polish color wheel, you guys, and I am a puddle on the floor. She made a color wheel to help people pick mani-pedi combos or choose colors to do an ombre with. She literally painted the most beautiful layered nail polish color wheel for your enjoyment. She was the genius so the rest of us could be lazy. It's the coolest thing. I'll put a link in the show notes to her Instagram account and maybe to the specific post if one can do that, but seriously @whatkatefinds is such a Lazy Genius in many ways, she's read the book, she's matched her nail polish to it before if I remember correctly, and she's just an all around excellent human who just raised all of our nail polish games. Congratulations, Katie! You're the Lazy Genius of the week!

That's it for today! Thanks for listening, thanks for sharing the podcast, for reading The Lazy Genius Way, and for being generally excellent human beings. I'm always so grateful for all of you. Until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!