

## I Want to *Want* to Eat Healthy with Ali Shapiro – Insatiable Season 12, Episode 4

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:09] AS:** Went vegetarian, then paleo. You stopped restricting. You're trying to love yourself more, but nothing seems to be working fully, and you might feel hopeless about ever feeling good in your body. And every time you fail, you trust yourself less.

As the larger world feels increasingly in peril, caring about how you feel in your body may feel frivolous and even more hopeless. We are at a time when our individual and collective stories about what to do for our bodies, health, and the world are crumbling. Because these stories we have, they aren't working for how our bodies or our world actually works. And I believe centering our bodies, all bodies, not just thin, white or "good" bodies. And what all of our bodies need to thrive will help orient us in a better direction.

There's no one-size-fits-all diet, exercise or way to bio hack. Good health is much less about willpower or discipline and more a complex interweb of our societal structures, food choices, emotional history, environmental exposures and privilege. There is a great loss of certainty in safety when we initially have to face what is real versus the half-truths we've been fed. But the loss of these stories creates an opening. If this opening is pursued with curiosity and discernment, we can discover our awe-inspiring ability to create and embody a new body story for our physical and political bodies and the earth.

I'm Ali Shapiro, and I host the Insatiable podcast. So we engage in the type of conversations that will lead us to radically new body stories for ourselves, each other, and the earth. To do that, we discuss a more truthful approach to freedom from cravings, emotional eating, bingeing



and being all or nothing. We explore the hidden aspects of fighting our food, our weight, and our bodies and dive deep into nutrition and behavioral change science and true whole health.

But fair warning, this is *NOT* your parents' health care or the conspiratorial crazy of the wellness world. This is a big rebel gathering to those who want to hold nuance, context and complexity in order to lead the way to a healthier future for all, because our lust for life is truly insatiable.

[INTERVIEW]

- I know I need to be gluten-free for my Hashimoto's. I used to be able to do it no problem. Why does it feel so depriving now? asked my client Kara.
- I hired a trainer to help me get in shape. And then I actually made it to the gym, was so tired I cancelled and came home. I want *to want* to be healthy but I also don't want to? asked my client Joanna.
- Or in my own life recently, I was tracking my macros for sleep and post-pregnancy weight loss. I had lost about 10 pounds total, my sleep was improving and then I stopped tracking. My sleep still needed improvement and I still have more weight I want to lose so what was happening?

On the surface, these scenarios appear to be different issues.

One is about food supporting someone's health.

Another is about food and exercise when we aren't on a roll.

And mine was about not tracking anymore when I still had health and weight goals I wanted to achieve...and I was on a roll.



To the untrained eye, these are different root issues. But if you understand how emotional satisfaction plays into our food choices, then you can see how all three of these scenarios lead back to the same root cause and process to work through them, which is what we do in Truce with Food. So I know this well!

Today I'll walk you through what is happening at the root cause level and the solution. And then if you want to start to understand how this evidence-based theory applies to your own life, join me for a free, 2-part workshop series called "I want *to want* to eat healthy" on December 1 and 8 at 12 pm EST at [alishapiro.com/masterclass](https://alishapiro.com/masterclass). Think of it as a TWF Masterclass.

Both workshops are a taste of the TWF process. I'm pulling back the curtain on the process. We are in a unique time where COVID has escalated a lot of our frustrating eating habits and made many of us want to make important changes. The TWF work fits nicely into this intersection. And this is part of TWF January 2022 launch. Teaching more than selling, don't worry.

Ok, onto today's episode. Let's start with how I'm defining emotional satisfaction. Not going to give an academic term, just what I've seen in mine and my client's lives. It's when we have deep meaning in our lives.

Think of this as the "I'm choosing this", I'm grateful this is on my schedule and self-chosen challenges like raising a child or running a business or maybe both.

We are all going to have the "have tos" and "musts" and there needs to be enough of the "I'm choosing" to make us feel satisfied with our lives. For example, there's certain things I have to do with running a company or raising Eça that I'd love to pawn off on someone else. But, I can't and that's OK because both provide so much meaning to me that it's worth it. To use a financial term, there's tremendous ROI in both instances. And of course, there's the annoying things of life that just have to get done like so many dishes! MY GOD.



Now there are ways I can make both these endeavors harder and less fulfilling. And that's where a lot of our emotional satisfaction gets drained. For many of my clients, they have a mix of stuff they are grateful for and things they want to improve upon. And often, the stuff we've chosen becomes too stressful. And then life does what life does, which is pile on more like a global pandemic. We often "fall off track" with our eating at this time thinking that's a given casualty of stress.

So that's our working definition here of emotional satisfaction: enough "I choose this" in the mix of all the "have tos" and "musts".

I use the climate metaphor with clients. If we enjoy the climate we are living in, we have enough "I choose this". If it feels like there's a climate collapse happening, including our battle of food like a constant storm in our lives, then we probably don't have enough emotional satisfaction.

Compare that to the weather which is episodic stress like getting COVID, it being your son's first ever illness and fever, losing childcare in the process and having three water leaks in your house, which is what happened to me in February of this year! That was a storm that blew in.

However, the climate of my life is so different compared to when I was battling food that I had the resilience to handle that stress without turning to food. Remember as I've talked about on the podcast before, resilience is about stress and recovery. Many of us don't get enough recovery. There are systemic barriers like racism, capitalism and patriarchy that make this impossible for many of us. When you see how many women had to leave the workforce because of COVID, that wasn't an individual choice, it was a systematic failure.

And for many of us listening to this podcast, a lot of times we don't get enough recovery because we don't know how to make life feel less overwhelming. And I've found my clients are



short on the recovery part of resilience, which leads to feeling out of control around food and treading water with life.

If we return to the examples above, which are based on real clients and myself, all three of us have what in mainstream behavior change is called, “Know Your Why.”

It’s used in coaching. It’s used in motivational interviewing which is a specific tool that some coaches use. It’s used in most of the health coaching trainings I’ve seen. It’s all the rage. Knowing our why is important.

So the why’s for our examples are: better manage Hashimoto’s so it doesn’t progress and less discomfort, feeling in shape and at home in one’s body and for me, it was sleep + losing more of my pregnancy weight, which again is still part health (lots of weight around my middle) + feeling at home in my body.

There’s more to knowing your why and uncovering intrinsic motivation but there’s enough information out in the world on that.

What is lesser known for right now, but I know will be the rage in like 10 years, because my clients and I are pretty much 10 years ahead of our time with health and wellness stuff is understanding our WHY NOT. Google is using it, their head of Leadership and Development said the focus on the Why Not will be the disruption of coaching.

As Dr. Daniel Kahneman, Nobel Prize winning behavioral expert says, “If you want to change behavior, diminish the restraining forces; do not increase the driving forces.” So many of us are increasing the driving forces - doing more. Yet if we want real change, we need to diminish the restraining forces which is our Why Not.



This is the Truce with Food work. Knowing our WHY NOT. Often thought of “this eating makes no sense”, “I care but don’t care” and “I want *to want* to be healthy”. If we think of a car metaphor, our why is the gas and our why not is the brake.

And being in this space actually takes a lot of energy. OMG. We are actually working really hard in this space. I see clients building up cooking, exercise in this space. I see food and health being so much harder than it needs to be. And that’s tricky because here in America, it does take effort. So I don’t want to deny that. AND, many of us are making it much harder than we have to.

So what’s the root cause of our Why Not? Mainstream culture thinks it’s a willpower or discipline problem.

In reality, Surprise. It’s much more complex than that. And at least with my clients I’ve found they have to much discipline and are taking on too much they don’t need to be that is the matrix reality!

Our Why Not has three main components: our “bad” habits, our emotional immune system, and our stories which is what this podcast episode is about.

### **Our Bad Habits.**

#### **Key takeaway: Our Bad Habits Are Often Protective, not Self-Sabotaging.**

How this translates on a daily basis is that Inner Critic or Inner Food rebel you think you have, it’s actually there to try and protect you.



For example, if I were to ask you what's getting in the way of any health goal you have, you might say something like "I have no time to workout" or "I have no energy", "I order Uber Eats too much" or "I eat too much sugar".

Let's look at Kara, my Hashimoto's client, who felt like she didn't have energy or time to workout or really cook. When I asked her why, it was because she has two kids, not enough childcare support, both her and her partner work full-time jobs and COVID aggravated an already precarious situation. Makes total sense! So we can acknowledge this isn't just a Kara problem. This is a societal failure that the US is a country that doesn't support parents, at all. Really important to start to reduce shame and beating ourselves up.

So, we have to see what wiggle room she has with the reality of living in a country like this at this time in her life because her Hashimoto's is also draining her time and energy. In this day and age, often emotional satisfaction is simplifying and just taking things off your metaphorical plate.

One of the habits she identified was that she scrolls on her phone for upwards of an hour at night to unwind, except of course, it doesn't make her unwind. It actually delays her getting to sleep in classic Revenge Bedtime Procrastination, which I believe is an official psychology concept at this time. Not enough freedom or "I choose" during the day, try to fit it all in at night. But one of her bad habits, which you'll see very soon is actually protective, is her scrolling on her phone at night.

So on the surface, our Why Not looks like a bunch of bad habits. But that's just the tip of the iceberg.

I also want to mention that often when we think of bad habits, we list states of being. "I don't have time to workout" isn't a habit. You'll want to understand, why don't you have time to work-out? If you think "I'm too tired", then why don't you have energy?



We often confuse our ways of being with habits but our habits usually lead to the state of being.

So once we identify our bad habits, it's time to understand they are the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

Let's travel below the iceberg to our Emotional Immune System.

### **EMOTIONAL IMMUNE SYSTEM: The Waist Deep Waves**

**Key Takeaway: Our Emotional Immune system is brilliant and has deeply rewarded and protected us. It generates our behaviors based on what we believe to be “good” and “bad”, “right” and “wrong”.**

Our emotional immune system is basically an unconscious anxiety-management system that works to keep us safe in terms of belonging. I think of this as being in the waist deep part of the ocean. The waves are a little choppy here, sometimes more than others, but you're getting by, based on your ideas of “Good” and “Bad” or “Right” or “Wrong”.

From a food and exercise standpoint, we think we know how to generally eat and work-out. When things get choppy, we find another plan that more or less conforms to our general ideas of what the issue is. And with stress, we more or less manage within the same “good” and “bad”, “right” or “wrong” categories which again, feel like “I have to, I should, I must”.

When you think, “how will they react?”, “what will they think?”, or “I don't want to be seen at this weight”, that is your emotional immune system at work.



Each of our emotional immune system's are different and they are generated from the stories we have about what has happened to us in our lives. These stories have brought us great rewards and kept us safe. Think of your stories as what motors the tides.

Your emotional immune system is beautifully brilliant. All the things you love and are proud about in your life? You can thank your emotional immune system. All the ways you've stayed safe these years? You can thank your emotional immune system.

Your emotional immune system functions very much the same way our physical immune system does. It enables us to thrive and defends us when working properly.

AND...just like our immune system can go haywire from new pathogens like COVID or the general wear and tear from stress, our emotional immune system can start to cause us problems. COVID has caused tremendous emotional stress and challenges that have led to burn out for a lot of us, myself included.

Part of all of this is forces outside our control. And some of it is in our control in the form of our emotional immune system and it's rigid ideas of what we have to continue to do or not do.

And the reason our bad habits are actually protective is because if we were to do the opposite of our "bad" habits and do the "good" or healthy thing, there would be fears and worries that would arise.

For my client Kara, if she didn't scroll, she said what she would feel was doubt. Did I say the right thing at work? Why did I snap at my kid again? How do I have so much yet feel unfulfilled? So the scrolling was protecting her from self-doubt. And when it comes to the stories that make us turn to food, these fears and worries are often laced with shame. So here with Kara, it felt like she was actually the doubt. It wasn't that there was a specific situation at work or with her kid, it was she felt like she was the issue.



For my client Joanna, she realized she often didn't exercise because she worked a lot. Ran her own business. So if she were to exercise instead of work, the feelings of falling behind came up. So not exercising protected her against the sense she was falling behind. And for Joanna, falling behind felt like it would lead to financial consequences.

So our bad habits are protective because they are actually keeping really uncomfortable fears or risks away.

Now, back to our physical immune systems. If they are working well enough, it's most likely they will be able to work through new pathogens or stresses by evolving in complexity. It will now understand how to handle more, right? And often it doesn't just handle more but you get other benefits as well. For example, we know there are cancer prevention benefits for those who have natural immunity from measles, mumps and chicken pox. I remember seeing a functional medicine statistic like 5 or 10 years ago that women who've had measles and mumps have 50% lower ovarian cancer rates. Wild yet makes sense. **This is a medical example but all the great religions, myths and philosophies have this metaphor in them: the challenge is the medicine.**

So what is the challenge and medicine contained in our food battle?

### Changing our Stories

**Key Takeaway: We eat when we feel unsafe in our stories. Food is a metaphorical attempt at attachment.**

Now, if we travel further into the deep end of the ocean, we get to the heart of the iceberg, which is our stories. Our emotional immune system doesn't manage physical pathogens. Rather, our emotional immune system is made up of stories that generate our ideas of "good"



and “bad” and “right” or “wrong”, about ourselves, other people and experiences. And these ideas are what generate our behaviors when we are in the waist deep choppy waters.

And again, this emotional immune system is brilliant. It works relatively well. In the same way you’d only address your immune system if you had a chronic issue like an autoimmune disease, inflammatory-driven depression or something like an acute stress like COVID where you want to build your immunity, we will most often only feel the constraints of our stories when we have big dreams and goals like food battles, that we have trouble accomplishing. These challenges are considered “Optimal Conflict” by developmental psychologists.

Optimal Conflict is defined as:

- The persistent experience of some frustration, dilemma, life puzzle, quandary or personal problem that is...
- Perfectly designed to cause us to feel the limits of our current way of knowing...
- In some sphere of our living that we care about, with...
- Sufficient support so that we are neither overwhelmed by the conflict nor able to escape or diffuse it.

When I was teaching this to my TWF Certification group, I described it like Plantar Fasciitis. You can’t get away from that heel pain. Doesn’t seem so major but OMG, it limits you in so many ways. Sometimes it will feel better than others but it’s painful enough that you’re going to do whatever you can to relieve it.

Now the key here is the sufficient support so that we are neither overwhelmed nor able to escape or diffuse it. What breaks my heart is often the support people go to get for their food



battle further shames them and actually builds up their stories and lack of safety in the world. They end up feeling more broken when one more thing doesn't work. Or the approach isn't truly addressing the root reason we often turn to food has nothing to do with food but these stories.

This is also why some of my clients have tried CBT yet found it only can take them so far. CBT is pretty popular for eating issues because it is evidence-based. CBT is focusing on changing how you feel about food and food choice yet often we aren't eating because of the food. We are eating because we feel unsafe in our stories and eating is about safety or attachment from where we feel unsafe in our lives.

This is because food is also about attachment, which is its own podcast. But to summarize, when we are babies, toddlers and in those years before we narrate our lives, one form of safety is food. And ideally it's enough food and coupled with comfort. And its still about safety today. We need to eat!

Eating to feel safe and comforted doesn't necessarily make logical sense as adults yet it provides a wired in felt sense of safety because we all have a strong drive for physical and emotional safety. It's primal.

If you think about times of your life you fell off track with your eating, there was probably considerable stress in your life. When we are stressed, part of it is the issue itself and the other part is we detach from our needs. This deprives us of emotional satisfaction in the process.

For my client Kara, she realized her self-doubt fear was tied to everything falling apart. And that's because as a child, her parents divorced and she took some of that on and so became the person who was always trying to fix everything, her kids, the people she managed and her husband. And it wasn't just her parent's divorce, it was other real things happening. All this fixing to have control of other people was an attempt at the safety of everything staying



together and on track. Yet it added considerably more chronic and unpredictable “have tos” and “shoulds” to her list.

We each only have so many “have tos” and “shoulds” that can fit in a day. So something had to give. For Kara, not eating gluten free was the safest thing to give, especially when it caused disappointment with her kids, who she took their disappointment as about her rather than kids needing to learn limits.

Our work together was to evolve her ideas of how to be “good” in the various relationships in her life, which were informed by if she was fixing and rescuing or not. Our work together was to learn to discern what was hers to not take on and what wasn’t hers to take on.

From this understanding, Kara’s not being gluten-free made perfect sense. Because when Kara felt like she couldn’t help enough or fix her kids, team members or husband’s issues, she doubted herself and ate because she was worried about things falling apart on account of her not doing enough (again, the shame piece makes it about something broken in us).

And again, the various stories in your emotional immune system have served you brilliantly. They’ve kept you safe and helped you accomplish what you’re proud of accomplishing in this world. Kara’s stories made her an incredible leader and she was doing a great job with her kids. It just felt like it was also burning her out. And, was there a way to “work smarter” as they say and enjoy all of this more? Turns out YES there was. And that was the deeper freedom I think most of us are craving in food freedom. That we can feel safe emotionally and have more choices there.

Because the gluten-free fell into place once she cultivated a new sense of safety within herself that she could trust herself and relate to those around her in a way that was much more emotionally satisfying.



I chose this evidence-based framework because it doesn't gaslight like a lot of coaching theories and approaches do. Sometimes our stories are true. They freaking came from somewhere! And, they aren't always true. When we have something like a food battle or other optimal conflict, the opportunity is to see more nuance and complexity in our stories, rather than things being so "Good" and "Bad", or all-or-nothing is how it's often felt.

For example in the coaching world, they will tell you scarcity is a mindset and to think abundantly. Can you see my eyes rolling? Guess what - scarcity is REAL. Capitalism is built on that! And, it's not always real. And often what we want most, deep connection and impact, is generative, meaning the more we create, the more there is.

While we are on the subject of critiquing some coaching models, HA, And what's important to realize about our stories is they're different from emotions. Emotions are usually defined as the physical sensations we feel that arise in our body. So for example, anger involves a certain bodily response. And in a lot of emotional eating coaches will say "an emotion only lasts 90 seconds." And the idea is that if you can wait those 90 seconds, the discomfort will pass. And in the case of emotional eating, you won't suddenly want to eat anymore.

However, when an emotion contains a story, like "If I have self-doubt (which again is often mixed with shame), things will fall apart", it becomes a feeling or story about that emotion. And feelings take a lot longer than 90 seconds to fade in discomfort. In fact, stories, when activated, tend to create a chronic felt sense of stress in our lives. You can see with Kara how that story will affect her everyday of her life that there is a real or perceived threat of things falling apart.

My client Joanna, she had a story around being behind meant she was being lazy, which would lead to her being worth nothing financially. And in the process, discovered how this was a metaphor for her self worth and being worthless, as work was the most rewarded thing in her family of origin. So she wasn't just working hard for money, she was working hard to preserve



her belonging in the “hustle” circles she was part of today, very common in entrepreneurship. Often the values we learn at home we then find industries that match those values.

In our work together, we had to redefine hard work on her own terms and expand the “good” and “bad” definitions of lazy and hard work that she had learned from her family and current peers. She discovered the value of that recovery piece of resilience and also how eating well and exercise could add to her work quality versus take away.

Another example is the story many of us have about our weight. Clients will often say, “everything is OK, but my body makes it feel like there’s a cloud over everything”. That is your emotional immune system that holds a story around what your weight means in your life, including what we think would be different if we were just at a “better” weight.

For example, I met Carlos at what I thought was a “bad” weight, which was 30 pounds heavier than I thought was possible. I still don’t know how I came up with that number. I didn’t have any understanding at the time what was happening but basically, our being together forced me to see that my ideas of when I could date and find a partner weren’t always true.

What I didn’t have language for at the time was I was waiting on my weight to reduce my risk of being judged, rejected, disappointed...all horrible feelings! Because were there men who would’ve judged me as unattractive? Most definitely.

If you have a weight story, maybe it’s kept you from judgement, rejection or failure too. Because we do live in a fatphobic culture with thin privilege.

And it turns out thinner people get judged, rejected and disappointed too. Relationships are very complex yet we often think our looks will make it much easier. We will be judged, rejected and fail for reasons other than our weight. HA! And perhaps, our weight doesn’t always have as



much weight as we think. The obstacle and path is to be able to see more nuance and discernment, rather than tying everything back to our weight.

So our work in Truce with Food to increase emotional satisfaction by challenging our stories so we feel more safe in them, which often includes having more of what we really want versus what we think we have to put up with, so we don't turn to food for safety.

And to do this, we need to decide how we want to define our values, usually with an expanded definition we've learned from our family or peers (industry) and lead from there.

For Kara, she realized she didn't like trying to fix or save everyone anymore (she didn't realize she was doing this before, she just thought she was helping). Rather, she wanted to be there for them, listen and better support her team, children and husbands own growth. So much less work! Things falling apart happened so much less and when they did, she now had the resilience and mindset skills to manage that too. Her food, including gluten-free, fell into place without white knuckling anything. Sometimes she still felt deprived when her entire family was eating gluten and the deeper relationships she had with them now from no longer trying to fix them no longer made her feel like food was the only way to belong or connect in those occasional meals.

For Joanna, she realized she valued having more time to do things in her business and the creativity she brought to her work was more important than always getting it done faster. We evolved her definition of working hard to be about impact instead of just busy. This also shifted the type of clients she wanted and she was able to get clear on what she needed financially and better plan for that, which included having more savings because she also started saying no to certain clients and raising her rates so wanted to plan for a new understanding of the rhythm in her business. And she found other entrepreneurial circles who were anti-hustle culture. Super fun!



Of course all of this just didn't happen. We worked together over months and not all our new choices always work out like I'm describing here. Sometimes these choices can involve making really hard decisions.

I shared my own example about my bad habit being not tracking macros. What I realized after I reflected, because I can do a lot of this work very easily since I've been building the skills for so long is that I had been overfunctioning in my life the previous three months and was burnt out, so there wasn't any energy left over to track, because while it's a small part of my day, it still takes emotional labor and effort.

So the issue was why I was overfunctioning for the last three months? What was the story that led to that? And again, a lot of it was insufficient childcare, Eça was sick and not sleeping from his entry into daycare. There wasn't a lot I had control over. And, some of it I did, especially around my work load, but I got some stories about work ya'll!

One of my deep fears that drives me is around being powerless and the story I have is that if I'm powerless, I'll have to settle. And if I have to settle, I'll be like everyone else. What's become very apparent to me these past couple of years is I have a strong need to be exceptional. It's freaking why I thought I would crack the diet code. In a dark twist of fate, it being hard to diet and keep weight off actually fed into part of my repeated diet attempts. I'm like "I'll figure this out". Again, all unconscious until the past couple of years. This identity is big with some of my clients - felt as the Super Woman identity often.

And I've been able to accomplish some really exceptional things from this story, both around my health and my business/work in the world! It was great when I felt exceptional for defying my infertility diagnosis and doing an unmedicated birth and awful when I felt exceptionally powerless when my breast milk never coming in, how my body felt like it continued to breakdown post-pregnancy and really struggling with the transition into parenthood and felt like I was a bad exception there too.



So I've been making some real changes in my life in how I work so that it can be satisfying while also being a parent. My life has evolved in complexity and so my values and thinking will have to as well. I'm really grateful I know how to do this for myself, even if it means making some hard choices that I never saw myself doing, particularly around slowing down and working less.

And yet this is what it means to be alive - to take risks. That's because to be alive is to take on risk. The goal is to get to do more of the "I choose this risk" versus thinking we just have to react like we always have, which often makes us feel more unsafe, especially around food!

I do believe there's a way to get better at risk so we develop the psychological safety within ourselves. Psychological safety is the ability to take manageable risks (h/t to my friend Sas Petherick for that definition). When we have enough of this safety, we no longer turn to food for attachment. We attach to what we want from life and learn how to navigate the twists and turns of our big goals. And this is the heart of the TWF story revision process.

So to summarize, we have bad habits that are protective. Because to do the opposite of these habits would generate worries and fears from our emotional immune system, which is comprised of stories about our lives that make us feel unsafe.

Now I know this has already been a lot. After we do this opening exercise in TWF where we diagnose our stories, people feel like they're in a snow globe. It's a radically different way of looking at our goals and selves.

So if you feel like you've gotten enough, take a beat. And again, if you want to check out how this all applies practically to your life, join me on Wednesday December 1 and 8 for a free 2-part masterclass workshop series called "I want *to want* to be healthy" at [alishapiro.com/masterclass](https://alishapiro.com/masterclass). It's like a TWF masterclass.



If you're curious about how we have to change our stories, I'm going to continue on. Because the real work to end our food battle is actually getting out of the all-or-nothing or "good" and "bad" binary of our stories.

I'm not going to go into a ton of detail here because the podcast is already a lot to think about but I know my clients love the research like me.

As a broad overview, many of us are in what's called a socialized mind around our food and certain stories in our emotional immune system.

A hallmark of this mindset is we often think in good and bad binaries. It makes us extremely judgemental of ourselves, other people and the experiences we have. We have a track in our mind about what it means to be good and bad, right and wrong with our food, exercise and just about everything else.

And this is because in this socialized mind place, we make sense of the world based on the authorities in our lives. And it's part of adolescent development to receive a moral compass from the authorities we identify with in our lives. We all do it. Most of us, if not all, come off the conveyor belt of adolescence into this stage of development, usually in our 20s. And it's not a bad thing. It's just that we trust and believe in the people we identify with. That's our parents. Our peers. Our work culture. And our church.

And in the health and wellness fields, many people claim to not be religious but spiritual. Yet what often isn't understood is we often transfer the values of white Christianity onto our food and body. Again, another podcast but it's really important in this domain to understand that many of our "good and "bad" ideas around food and bodies are one set of ideas, not the truth.



How patriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism come together to define the values around discipline, sacrifice, hard work, productivity, being in control and success inform what we think of as “good” and “bad” foods and bodies.

There’s a specific version of these values that aren’t often questioned. Yet we need to if we are going to have deep, emotional satisfaction, with radical food freedom a side-effect of this. And in fact, the working definition many of us have of these values are unbalanced and unsustainable and why burn out is such a hot topic right now. I think COVID made that painfully clear.

But, back to our development. Our sense of self in this socialized mindset is dependent on the relationships we have. Therefore, we are most concerned with “what will they think?”. Again, this is a really great way to relate to the world at times. We do want to be considerate of others and yet it often holds us back unnecessarily. And even self-identified rebels can be in this stage! Our sense of rebellion is still in relation to what we learned and is often still binary...even thinking we are only rebellious and not anything mainstream for example!

Also in this stage, because of our binary thinking, we often oversimplify things. Therefore, we think there is THE ANSWER in the form of a diet and the problem is just finding the right plan versus increasing our need to be with more complexity about how safety, and our stories influence our eating.

When we become self-authoring, we can start to actually see our stories, rather than “that’s just how I am” or “that’s how life is”. I hear people say all the time, “I can’t eat just one cookie” or “I am not a group person” or “I don’t do hard things” as if their a fixed personality trait instead of a way of being that comes from our past and can be changed once we understand why we are that way.



Kara and Joanna didn't realize that how they were reacting to their relationships and work were a learned way of relating and they could unlearn and choose something else and hopefully improved upon what they had learned.

The self-authoring mindset requires being able to see the expectations we are operating from, those "good" and "bad", "Right" or "wrong" beliefs and judge the expectations. In other words, we question what feels normal to us. This creates an I or self that Dr. Robert Kegan who created this theory says "picks up the psychological pen" to self-author or discern what we agree with and don't from the authorities we've identified with.

In this process, we can start to make other choices and honor the complexity of there not always being a clear "right" and "wrong" or "good" and "bad". That there are so many choices in between. What we call in TWF: Option C.

So to bottom line it, the work to become self-authoring with our food involves identifying the stories in our emotional immune system, connecting with our stories to our eating, and then redefining or self-authoring our values and what values we want to embody in the stories that make up our lives. We then build our capacity to be with increasing complexity which translates as being able to be more nuanced and discerning. TWF Clients are like: this is so complex. How did I ever think this was just about diet and exercise before?

And in this day in age, we are being forced to grapple with increasing complexity whether we want to or not. And the more complexity we face that we don't feel equipped to handle, the more we will eat to feel safe!

When we become self-authoring around our food, which is challenging our ideas of "good" and "bad" food and food choices and in our stories, we can start to step back from what we learned in diet culture and learn what foods work for our bodies based on how they make us feel,



versus rigid “good” and “bad” categories. Often some of what we learned from diet culture is useful.

The Zone diet introduced me to blood sugar. It was a great start and required lots of tweaks for my body, especially as I advance further into menopause. But was a really useful starting place. It also had a lot of blindspots.

We can also learn how to eat sugar to be moderate and that it’s not always bad. When one day we hear, coffee is great for you. And the next article we see says it’s bad, we can know if that’s true for us and in what context. For example with coffee, a major way to reduce cravings is to drink your coffee with food, not before breakfast, because of its effect on your blood sugar. This is one example of a million why learning our bodies and context is critical.

In the self-authoring space, we often start to see food beyond its influence on our weight. Weight concerns don’t magically go away. Yet we are willing to start to relate to food and our body in new ways.

In my own life, one of the ways my own self-authoring development continued (most of my clients are already on this climb in their life, we are rebels after all, yet not so much in the food, exercise, health department) was when I realized the reflux antacids I was recommended by my doctor for my IBS symptoms were actually making my IBS worse; my problem was caused by too little stomach acid, not too much. Questioning doctor’s was revolutionary to me at the time as my cancer experience and my Dad’s influence especially, led me to trust doctor’s completely. I had thought they were smarter than the rest of us and had some magical knowing to be the authority over our bodies (and sometimes they can be!).

It’s also when I pieced together my depression was caused by gut issues and inflammation, not the serotonin deficiency or genetic risk factor I was told by my doctor and therapists. I



continued to self-author my health when I was able to heal my gut, not continuing to cycle through more anti-depressants. Becoming self-authoring was therapeutic in itself!

The self-authoring mind can learn to step back and say, what other choices do I have aside from the good-bad binary or this is THE ANSWER I used to believe in? For me with my health, it was medication or nothing. I had no idea of all the wonderful choices in between.

As we become more self-authoring, we develop a conscious belief code of our own. I think of this as embodying our values and making discerning choices from there. And of course values can change. Becoming a parent has shifted some of my values. COVID has shifted a lot of people's values. Becoming self-authoring is about adulting hard core to consciously choose for our lives.

This prevents and simplifies our stress as we choose more fulfilling ways of being and the stress we do have feels meaningful. Especially because the world is very binary and will only increase so as the polarization increases. Talking to a client about the entire realm of parenting. MY GOD. Sleep training is great. Sleep training is bad. Cosleeping is great. Cosleeping is bad. And it only gets worse when the choices feel even more important. There's so much relief when you get that nothing is good or bad, not every choice matters as a result and you know what's important or meaningful to you.

To use a food metaphor: you show up to the buffet, you know exactly what you want, take a satisfying portion of that and it's that simple, easy and fulfilling. Of course with life choices there's more work but you get the idea.

Being self-authoring usually leads to a richer way of understanding your food, body and the world around you. A TWF Certified say "I just wish everyone could think about their body and health like this." Yes, I agree. IT has been so rewarding and given me so much health and life fulfillment.



It's like why I loved traveling to other countries. It was like, "OMG, they do this!" and it was such a different way of looking at things. Becoming more self-authoring enables us to get creative with our own lives and open up new possibilities, which is a wonderful cycle of more emotional satisfaction with enough grit to show us our true capacities.

So if we want to have a Truce with Food, we will need more emotional satisfaction, with radical food freedom as a side-effect of that process. And to have more emotional satisfaction, we need to understand our Why Not, that our bad habits are usually protective so our emotional immune system doesn't freak out. And to enable our emotional immune system to handle the expansion required of more emotional fulfillment, we must evolve our values in our stories that drive us to feel unsafe and eat as an attempt at safe attachment.

And this requires developing into a self-authoring mindset around our food and stories.

And the side-effect of that process is we have more resilience, self-awareness, body awareness and confidence to take on bigger challenges and we experience increasing emotional satisfaction. To come back to our climate metaphor: the climate of our lives shifts. It feels more comfortable more often so when the storms do come in, and I have a feeling like just like in the outer world, they will be more frequent for our inner worlds, we have the reserves and skills to better manage, lead and create from what life is giving us.

OMG. I tried to cut this down to be simpler but it's a real challenge to communicate complex topics and solutions. If you want to start to understand your own emotional immune system and stories and some tips for choosing differently in your story, come to the free workshop "I want *to want* to eat healthy": A Truce with Food Masterclass on Wednesday, December 1 and 8 at 12 pm EST. Recording if can't make it live. [alishapiro.com/masterclass](https://alishapiro.com/masterclass)

And when it comes to food and our bodies, I've found clients and my younger self are often living outside of ourselves in this space, not even in our bodies. And our ideas of what is "good" from food to exercise that counts to how to be are largely influenced by the diets they've tried



or “what worked” in the past. And our ideas of being self-aware are really based on being self-critical around what other people might think of us.

And, diets and relying only on an expert’s ideas alone require us to stay in a socialized mind as a “faithful follower”. But we need this in this mindset stage because we want direction (even if it’s wrong). This is why we become increasingly reliant on diets and experts instead of our bodies cues despite them not working.

And even if we’ve given up dieting, which I did back in my 20s, these “voices” are often internalized as our own. So we still have thoughts and feelings about what is “good” and “bad” from these authorities.

As a result, we will often be unaware of our own body cues or what we want to value as adults in this developmental stage, making us more dependent on the authorities outside of ourselves.

And in this stage, we will also view food, exercise and just a better plan as central to the solution to our food battle rather than the complexity of inputs like everyone has unique nutritional needs, our stories and stress.

Recognizing other choices in this space is difficult because our thinking is limited to “all or nothing” and nothing in between. And again, this is because this binary thinking has kept us safe. Don’t want to knock this way of orienting. Has tremendous value

Powerless to me means I have to settle. And if I settle, it means I’m like everyone else. I have an identity I’m actually working on a lot this past year around needing to be exceptional. It’s a major reason why I thought diets would eventually work for me - I’d be the exception to the rule! Many of my clients have identities around being hard working, capable, etc. that make them believe the dieting failure rate won’t apply to them.



It really flared up with my pregnancy journey. Felt exceptional in a bad way being infertile, getting pregnant after an infertility diagnosis, had this condition poly which 1% of people have (didn't care one way or the other), doing unmedicated birth and then when my breast milk didn't come in and I was struggling so much, on the shame end of that story, which is probably where it came from originally when I was bullied and then felt targeted by life getting cancer as a teenager. EXCEPTIONAL IN BAD OR GOOD WAYS.

So this is why clients say this stuff is deep. And it is! And all this stuff is often stuff we thought we got over AND it's still controlling how we show up today. I never thought bullying was affecting me. Totally thought I was over it.

Emphasize: this isn't therapy where we are going to analyze the past. Rather, in TWF, we look at how this affects us today and how we can work through those patterns to be more free of the deprivation or constraints of our stories and then, food freedom falls into place, no white knuckling required.

So our goal with testing our stories is to learn the blindspots of our stories. What do we discover there if we have a solid structure and coach to guide us? We discover a lot more options and nuance. And this is how we learn to build our capacity to be with more complexity. Think about this on a food level alone.

But this good-bad, all or nothing mindset happens in all arenas. And it's part of the reason we can feel too much stress and unsafe in our stories. OMG. The parenting arena.

Running a business: here's what to do, here's what not to do. Here's how to get to six figures (code for success, making it), seven figures, etc.



And the problem when we are in this good-bad binary mindset is we believe there is THE answer. We oversimplify the problem and thus, solution.

This mindset has an academic name and grounding. If you've followed my work for awhile, you've heard me use the term socialized and self-authoring mindsets. I want to explain a bit about what those are and the role they have in our stories.

### **Socialized and Self-Authoring Mindsets**

That's because to become self-authoring with our food and body, we have to be able to handle more complexity. In the case of Truce with Food, that our stories or why not are why we eat, not a lack of willpower or discipline and there isn't a set list of "good" and "bad" foods, rather it's figuring out what works for your body and when "bad" foods can be tolerated by your body, yes even sugar.

And that's what we do in TWF with our stories. We take our stories from a socialized mindset to a self-authoring mindset. Because when we are in a socialized mind, we tend to be very all-or-nothing because we have rigid ideas of "good" and "bad". Very binary.

With my client Kara, she discovered being gluten free was so hard now because she had a story around how to handle being gluten-free with her kids. And when we zoomed out at her emotional immune system and life these days, it was easier to not feel the restriction of gluten when she had her own schedule in life because so many more things were what she was choosing versus now with her kids, her time isn't often her own. So we started working on how the self-doubt failure story comes up with gluten and her kids and also, how that story was coming up with her weight and how that was making her feel stuck and out of choice in ways where she could squeeze some of that in.



With my client Joanne, she discovered a couple of reasons she didn't want to work-out. One was not knowing to adjust her nutrition for her cycle and so her energy was extra low. So learning and discovering why she was so tired on that day in particular was huge in her understanding that it's not always good to work-out. In fact, when we have our period, lighter exercise like walks and yoga are great, not working with a trainer. And then we had to work on her work story. And part of becoming self-authoring for her was "how much work is enough?" "How much money do I need? Want? Is exercise really taking away? Am I really being lazy and self-indulgent by not working all the time?"

With me, as soon as I realized what it was, I was able to start tracking again. It's also an example I wanted to include because I had also fallen off with m tracking in August and September. And I had been in high over-functioning mode from May-July. So many times we think we are emotionally eating based on what just happened. But often it's a more holistic or complex way of understanding our eating patterns. And I was over functioning over the summer because of the same story. Again, it helped me get through this summer which was just brutal in many ways.

That's part of developing a seat of judgement for ourselves. It's really forcing us to adult hard core. What do I want for my life? How much do I really need? We don't want Joanna to abandon her work ethic and drive. She needs that if she will be self-employed. And, she needs to self-author how she wants to define being lazy, self-indulgent and work. For many of my clients, we shift the focus from busy to impact and that creates a lot more emotional satisfaction and they start to see how exercise supports their energy and stamina for entrepreneurship in this case.

One of the biggest challenges in our stories is we don't know what we don't know. It's not everything we already know. It's what we can't see because we are convinced we know! This plays out a lot with clients who at first, really believe their food stuff is about food and exercise.



But after going through the TWF process, seeing their emotional immune system, they can see there is so much more involved and food is actually a smaller piece than they realized.

Relating to food and our bodies, when we have our “own compass” and “frame” around how our bodies work, we can generate independent ideas about how to eat, exercise and best support our bodies. With the Truce with Food tools, we can make the connection and hold the complexity of when our food is about our stories and feeling unsafe versus willpower and discipline.

Self-authoring sober people attracted to this work. To opt out of alcohol culture is very self-authoring. Or people who go through yoga teacher training and it’s life-changing in part because they are exposed to an entirely new way to relate to their bodies and exercise in particular.

If I were listening to this in the throes of my battle with food, I’d think, if there’s a clear, evidence-based process and it makes logical sense, why wouldn’t everyone want to just change their stories if it meant ending the battle with food and you get all this good stuff along with the process? I also get that I have a high need for control and agency in my life so maybe not everyone else is thinking that! Ha, #selfawareness.

I think there are for a couple of reasons: the first one is people see their food battle as a problem, not . And I certainly did for 20 years so I get it. And it makes sense because we’ve been socialized to think it’s a willpower and discipline problem because we think being good is about being disciplined and being bad = not enough discipline. So many of us spend years trying to find a better plan or more discipline.

There’s fewer voices in a more complex space saying, what is this is a symptom, not the problem? Our mainstream culture is very binary and thinks very linearly or direct cause and effect. But our bodies and life are nuanced, complex and systems-oriented. For example, you



don't necessarily overeat at night because of what happened when you put your kids down to bed. You probably eat because it's when you can feel all the stories that are causing you stress and you eat to feel that safety. I've found plenty of client's out of control eating has nothing to do with what happened right before they started eating. It's either one big story that is causing them stress or a few stories that wear us down and by evening in this example, we are like, "I care but don't care". That's a safety gap.

Because if we think of the tip of the iceberg metaphor, your food, exercise and health habits are the tip and underneath is your emotional immune system, which contains your stories. No one really looks that deeply in at least American culture.

The second reason is because we aren't a culture of depth, we don't have a strong skill set in our emotions and feelings. Plus, the emotional immune system can be really challenging to look at at first. It involves bringing these feelings in our story to the surface. This process changes how you feel as much as how you think so there is a dissolution period like a caterpillar where your like, who am I? How am I orienting without this story controlling me? I've had clients who feel quite bewildered because they no longer turn to or battle food, for the first time since being kids. And it's like who a I without this food battle? Where does all this energy go? There can also be a loss when food doesn't take up as much space in your lives. I've had clients who thought they were foodies and realize they aren't really, they just were around food to feel safe. Of course there's much to gain but with gain there is usually loss. I still have stories that come up for me not around food but life.

Granted it becomes much easier and I can work through some stuff pretty fast and other stuff, it takes a while but I'm so comfortable being in process that it's like, OK, it is what it is. However I continue to look at my stuff because I know my stories are going to be there whether I look at them or not. So do I want to choose my hard - it's either the chronic frustration of feeling stuck somewhere or doing the self-awareness work to get to the other side and the benefits of seeing the world in more possibilities.



For example, about oh, six years ago, I felt really isolated in my business. Using the TWF story tools, I realized I was judging other women's work, specifically the ones I deemed as pretty and popular in my field. And by popular it was social media following at the time.

I judged it as shallow, surface level "girlfriend advice". Now granted some of it was! And, it kept me from really putting myself out there to develop a network of colleagues I genuinely wanted to collaborate with. And this all came back to being bullied in fifth grade by pretty popular girls. I thought I was over this. I seriously never think about this. And, that experience created a story in my emotional immune system to protect me from the shame, rejection and isolation I experienced all those years ago. But it was the chronic problem of feeling so isolated in my business that made me actually look at this stuff. I had to upgrade my story because while my story was true in the past, I needed to evolve to see things with more nuance and complexity. Especially because what often happens if we don't address our stories, they become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, I was metaphorically still sitting at the lunch table by myself, only this time, I had put myself in that isolated space.

And in the end, I've built a fabulous group of colleagues whose work I love supporting and are great people too. Some are pretty and popular! And some aren't so popular. But I've discovered popularity isn't something I care about when I discern who my collaborators are. I want their work to teach me and be valuable to my community.

So this is all about genuine self-awareness and our role in keeping ourselves stuck (put a \* there because in a minute, also going to explain as Laura McKowen says, it's not your fault but it is your responsibility). I'm talking about isn't your astrology chart (although I find that really fun and useful), it's not your Enneagram (I also love the Enneagram but not what I'm talking about here). It's not the fun personality stuff. It's like "Oh, I judge people like this. I react in this way."

[END OF INTERVIEW]



[OUTRO]

Thank you, health rebels and visionary storytellers for tuning in today. If you know someone who would benefit from this episode, please share it with them. And remember, we have transcripts of our episodes at [alishapiro.com/podcast](http://alishapiro.com/podcast) for your non-audio friends and family. And if you can, I'd love it if you can leave a review on Apple Podcasts. It helps more people find the show. And both actions, reviewing and sharing with others helps us change the cultural narrative around food weight and our bodies. Thanks for engaging in a different kind of conversation. And remember, always, your body truths are unique, discoverable, profound and *liberating*.

[END]

