

EPISODE 73

AS: *Women in particular had been conditioned to believe that our power comes from controlling other people's responses. Now, I don't think most of us as women would think, "Oh, we're trying to control other people's responses," but it's, "Oh! I feel guilty if I say no," right? Or it's — Go ahead.*

SC: *And a lot of insecurity.*

AS: *Yeah!*

SC: *We think too much about what the other person is thinking of us and our responses.*

AS: *Exactly. That's exactly because we've been conditioned that our power is in people pleasing and being good, or being whatever identity we love about ourselves, right?*

A lot of clients, when they come to me, it's like the nighttime eating, like, "I eat this, and I know I shouldn't, but then I have a glass of wine, and that leads to two, and then the Netflix binge." Even though that's so miserable, it's familiar, and that's lack of agency though. It's like really thinking we have no other choices. But we have to first see what's blocking our choices first is what I want everyone to get out of this."

[INTRO]

[0:01:10.3] AS: You know battling food in your body doesn't work. You want to love and accept yourself, and because you're insatiable, you want results too. You bring the same intensity to your life, wanting to maximize your time, potential, and experiences you have here on our beautiful and wondrous planet Earth. Fair warning, it will be a rollercoaster. But for those insatiable, this is your primetime to thrive. Here is just saying yes to the hunger of wanting it all.

I'm your host, Ali Shapiro, who is dedicated to pioneering a saner and more empowering approach to health and weight loss.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:01:50.3] AS: Welcome to episode 73 of the Insatiable Podcast. Why is no one talking about agency and out of control eating? Agency is a word rarely associated with weight loss and healthy eating, yet it's a root cause of emotional eating and bingeing. In this episode, I share what agency is and why it's critical to weight loss and health. How the degree of agency we have determines if we overeat or full out binge. I'm going to be coaching Insatiable listener, Stephanie Cahill, and where she's lacking agency today and beginning steps to transform into someone more agency and power to eliminate this, "I deserve this eating."

Stephanie is a Boston area native and now lives in Southern New Hampshire. She's an oncology nurse, manager with Beautycounter, and she's a special needs mother to her two-year-old son, Benjamin. She loves to cook and is a self-proclaimed podcast junkie. We'll get into the nitty-gritty of agency today, and I hope you guys enjoy this episode as much as we enjoy recording it.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:45.3] AS: Welcome Insatiable listener. Today, we have a very special guest, an Insatiable listener, Stephanie Cahill. Welcome, Stephanie.

[0:02:46.1] SC: Hey Ali, thank you so much for having me. I'm super humbled to be here.

[0:02:58.3] AS: Oh! It's going to be great. I invited Stephanie on — As you guys all know by now, Juliet has departed from the podcast. No hard feelings. All good stuff. I'm experimenting with some reformat, and one of the things that I love doing is when people engage with me on social media, at Instagram @alimshapiro, and share what resonated where they have more questions so that we can do episodes that are even more useful to you.

Stephanie, do you want to share how we connected and why you're here today?

[0:03:28.0] SC: Absolutely. I was driving in my car listening to episode 67, and it really struck a chord with me into the point where I treaed up a little bit when I had a receipt on the passenger

side and I just started scrolling down some points that really resonated with me. Then, I messaged you on Instagram, I'm @cleanerstephanie, and we started messaging, and then I joined your *Why a Cookie Isn't Just a Cookie* workshop last week, which was incredibly helpful.

What I really liked about episode 67 was when you were talking about personal agency and this idea of having independent choice, and I really hadn't heard that before, that idea. So here we are.

[0:04:13.5] AS: Episode 67, was that *Trigger Foods*, or *Why Do I Fall Off the Wagon*? I can't remember. Isn't that — I kind of feel like I go in a trans when we do this, and then I —

[0:04:24.8] SC: I'll pull it up. Sorry. Let's see.

[0:04:27.2] AS: Don't apologize.

[0:04:28.0] SC: Yeah, 67, *Why Do I Fall Off the Wagon With Food*?

[0:04:31.9] AS: Okay. Yeah. You set up the definition really well. What we want to talk about today and why Stephanie is here is I want to go a little bit more in depth of why agency matters and how our stories caused what we may think of as emotional eating — We'll talk about it — Relationship binging. It's a very new concept to be introduced into the health conversation, I think.

I wanted Stephanie to be here to ask the follow up questions. Also, she has given us permission to share her story and help her work through and what agency would look like in her story. I also contacted some clients, if I could use them of their examples in recent sessions, and they let me do that too. We'll have some different ideas.

The word Agency, it has different definition. From a personality — I'll just say psychology, agency is the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free own choices. The key part of this is I think a lot of us think we're taking free choices, maybe not when we're eating poorly, but in our lives, I think. You said, Stephanie, you're an oncology nurse, you're a wife, you're a mom — We'll get to how the motherhood piece relates to this.

You feel probably like — And you're in America, "Freedom!" Right? You wouldn't think of yourself as not having agency.

[0:05:59.1] SC: Right.

[0:06:00.0] AS: Right. The trick here is that to act independently. What happens is we have these structures in life that what we would call cultural conditioning, such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, customers, and they determine our limit how much agency we believe we have. Women, on a food level, body level, we are conditioned to believe that we are only — We can only take up space if we're a size four, or two, but then you're too thin, right?

There is this idea that we have agency, but we're largely controlled in ways that we don't want to be controlled, or we don't know we're being controlled. An example that I will use in my own life was when I started on my own path was I was diagnosed with depression, irritable bowel syndrome, acne, all these stuff, and I didn't realized I had agency over these symptoms. I just went to the doctor and thought whatever choices — My choices were, what medication I was going to take.

[0:07:05.8] SC: I have a really similar story too to that.

[0:07:08.0] AS: Oh! Yeah. Yeah. That was part of — Go ahead.

[0:07:11.4] SC: Yeah. No. Sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off. About nine months ago, I was just kind of between a rock and a hard place two years after the birth of my son who was born with some special needs and developmental delays. I was working night shift. I was exhausted. My body was depleted, and I went to my doctor and she prescribed me an antidepressant and kind of sent me on my way, and I just felt like they're thanks, but no thanks, and there's something more here that — Same thing, I struggled with acne and just digestive issues, very low energy, and just not feeling like myself.

I cleaned up my diet, that was like stuff number one. Now, I'm feeling so much better. Thanks to agency, but I don't think I really realized that's what it was until that podcast that we're expanding upon now.

[0:08:02.4] AS: Yeah. Yeah. I think that's so important to know, it's a thing, because then you start questioning, "Where am I not making independent choice?" or "Where do I have choices that I don't know exist yet?" Any time I think we feel stuck, or something, like what happened with you, is like, "No. There's more to the story." I think a lot of times, we get these intuitive ideas, but then we think they're crazy, or we're just like — For me, with acne, I tried antibiotics high school, which now I cringe at knowing acne is a digestive challenge.

[0:08:34.2] SC: Me too.

[0:08:34.9] AS: I did Accutane in college, then it was like, "Oh my God! There's a class action lawsuit against Accutane now." This is this idea of we think we're making choices by choosing different medications. Really, there's a whole other dimension, and that's healthcare.

In diets, I would say, that we think the only choice is calories in, calories out, "I have to find a plan that cuts out calories." Whereas, actually, it's not even that there's other choices, there's other ways of approaching that.

Those are some examples of agency, it's related to the topics of the Insatiable podcast, health, and eating, and losing weight. What we want to talk about today is when we are making — When we feel lack of agency and how that contributes to overeating and binging. I want to say this isn't — I don't like to put men and women in categories altogether. However, as a rule, women in particular have been conditioned to believe that our power comes from controlling other people's responses.

Now, I don't think most of us as women would think, "Oh, we're trying to control other people's responses," but it's, "Oh! I feel guilty if I say no," right? Or it's — Go ahead.

[0:09:46.4] SC: A lot of insecurity.

[0:09:48.5] AS: Yeah!

[0:09:48.9] SC: We think too much about what the other person is thinking of us and our responses.

[0:09:53.9] AS: Exactly. That's exactly because we've been conditioned that our power is in people pleasing and being good, or being whatever identity we love about ourselves, right? "Oh! She's the healthy one," or "She's the socially conscious one," or whatever that is. Those aren't necessarily bad things to be, it's just when those definitions of being a good eater, or being a good mom, or being a capable mom, or a capable workers.

When those definitions restrict us, we're not having agency. What I find with overeating and binging and when we're stuck in a story, which our stories paralyze our agency, and we're going to talk more about that today. That's where your questions were. We don't feel like we have a choice, "I am eating this, and I don't want to be doing it, but I'm going to the fridge, and I'm standing up, I'm not sitting down. I'm not lighting a candle. I'm just —" All the foods.

[0:10:48.2] SC: Uncontrollable.

[0:10:53.3] AS: Let's talk about your story, and let's talk about what resonated with you and where your questions are.

[0:10:59.5] SC: Yeah. I really liked how you talked about these vulnerable stories and how they can cause cracks that crumble your belief and your ability to work through something. I kind of scratched this out during a workshop last week. Historically, I think I've held on to some stories of my life including — My parents had an extremely messy divorce. I moved several times in childhood. Also, addiction and mental health issues run on both sides of my family. Those are kind of some of my historical stories that, I think from a young age, I definitely turned to food as comfort, or reward, or —

Presently, just the stressors of being a special needs mother and sometimes being in that state of overwhelm, which you also talk about a lot on the podcast, and that really resonates with me. Historically, those stories, and then my present story. I liked how you also mentioned that

binging, or overeating, is the accumulation of the tension of our story, and that really struck a chord with me.

[0:12:08.9] AS: Yeah. From the *Cookie Isn't Just a Cookie* workshop, what rough draft outline did you — What is underneath the tension that's underneath? Your stories are — Which aren't just stories, they're reality. Your parents went through a messy divorce, mental health and addition issues. You moved a lot. Now, you have this other — Being a special needs mom, you're once again — Basically, everything is new and chaotic again. What's the underneath feeling that triggers that sense of chaos? If things are chaos, then what's that baseline of that story? Underneath all those stories, I guess is what I'm asking.

[0:12:50.9] SC: I guess it's just the feeling of instability.

[0:12:54.7] AS: Okay. If I feel instability, then —

[0:12:58.4] SC: Yeah, then it just is not peaceful, and you kind of lose your cool sometimes. It's just hard to move forward.

[0:13:08.5] AS: Okay. The story then — This is great, and we'll use this. Again, I always the clients, "This is a rough draft. In *Truce with Food*, we spent the whole first month clarifying it. If I feel instability, things aren't peaceful, and if things aren't peaceful, then — What was the effect of if things aren't peaceful? I can't move forward?

[0:13:29.1] SC: Yeah, or it just feels out of control sometimes, and that feeling of overwhelm builds up.

[0:13:35.7] AS: Okay.

[0:13:36.5] SC: And some of its physical stressors, like physically being absolutely exhausted. By the end of my day, my low power can sometimes just be shot by the sheer fact that I'm tired, but then there's also that emotional fatigue as well.

[0:13:53.2] AS: Yeah, and I'm glad you bring that up, because our underlying story creates a chronic tension that exhaust us, and it often — It doesn't mean that we don't have a lot on our plate. Often, we're doing a lot of — Carlos and I call it the approval monkey behaviors if we don't even know what we're doing. I'm kind of like, "Please like me. I want gold stars."

Our story triggers, often, these defenses. I just want to make sure we get with that baseline is again. If things are unstable, then I feel overwhelmed. Is that — Or I'm overwhelmed. Because if I feel overwhelmed, I feel like agency, but if I'm overwhelmed —

[0:14:28.0] SC: I'm overwhelmed.

[0:14:29.7] AS: Okay. Okay. If you're overwhelmed, what's that mean?

[0:14:35.3] SC: I'll just grab what's convenient, what's easy, what I'm craving. Whether that'd be salty, or sweet, sometimes both. Just not making the healthiest of choice at the time. Then, feeling badly after.

[0:14:51.9] AS: Yeah. Let's sink below foods. Let's think back to — If I feel instability, I'm overwhelmed. If I'm overwhelmed, does it feel like you have no power, so that's why you're eating the salty and sweet?

[0:15:06.1] SC: Yeah.

[0:15:07.7] AS: Okay, because, I bet, growing up, you didn't have power, right? You were at the mercy of your parents.

[0:15:13.5] SC: Right. Yeah, a lot of things were out of my control. As the oldest sibling of three, I feel like I was always searching our wanting stability.

[0:15:25.0] AS: Okay. Did you try to take that on for your siblings?

[0:15:29.0] SC: At times, yes.

[0:15:30.7] AS: Okay. Because I wonder, I've had some clients who've had not the same situation, but have had to really be the parent sometimes, which is something that you're setting kids up for failure, and so they're really worried about that overwhelm trigger is a fear of failure. Do you think that would be more?

[0:15:49.6] SC: Yeah, absolutely; situations, financial issues. I also do think though that it's built up my resiliency, and also my caretaking. From a young age, I knew that I wanted to become a nurse. There's also been a lot of blessings in disguise.

[0:16:12.5] AS: Yeah! That's one of the things we talk about in *Truce with Food* is that these wounds have birthed so much wisdom and empathy, and there's a lot of old in them. We can build even more gold if we can heal them, because then we feel powerful because we've been through them and we're not at the mercy of them.

I love that you bring that up, because this isn't — I get so frustrated with people, like, "You have self-limiting beliefs," which is totally — First of all, oversimplifying, that you can just not believe that. Then, everything — "Okay. I just don't believe than when things are instable, that I'm not going to be overwhelmed." It's like, "No. I'm having a somatic response. This is freaking me out. Now, I don't even trust myself even more."

Let's go with that, because what I see is happening with the food then and why this is flaring up now is that — And you being a mom, and create a ton of instability, and then a special needs mom, which every — From what I understand, every special needs child has special needs. It's an adaptive change process. There's no formula that you can follow.

[0:17:23.7] SC: Exactly.

[0:17:25.2] AS: Yeah, go ahead.

[0:17:25.9] SC: Like you said in the workshop, it's new territory. That's very vulnerable, motherhood, to begin with. Then, the special needs part just adds an additional layer of insecurity and uncertainty of knowing what my son's future will look like. Also, that just his childhood will be remarkably different than what I thought.

[0:17:50.1] AS: Yeah. There's two pieces here; there's grieving that loss, right? I don't want to gloss over that and say that you can — That's not a story. That's real.

[0:18:03.7] SC: Yeah. Thank you for acknowledging that. There's a very helpful story that someone sent to me early on, and I'll have to send it to you after the fact that maybe this can help somebody who's listening. The idea is that you're planning a trip to Italy and you have all these places you want to go and you have your guidebooks and you're all set for your trip to Italy. When you're up in the plane, you land in Holland, and it's different. It's beautiful. Holland is gorgeous, but it's not Italy. Grieving the fact that you aren't going to Italy is part of that. I guess, thank you for acknowledging and recognizing it.

[0:18:45.5] AS: Yeah. Life isn't tied up in a nice easy bow. However, the part that you do have that we want to restore and replenish agency is the story that if I feel instability, basically, I'm going to fail. That's the part where based on how we coped in the past, that's why we don't feel like we have choice, right?

On the surface, the failure is I'm eating salty, or sweet, or whatever I can find my hands on, which is failure, because I know this stuff doesn't make me feel good. How we eat is how we live. It's also — When you're getting overwhelmed with new data about — What is your son's name?

[0:19:27.9] SC: Benjamin.

[0:19:28.6] AS: Benjamin. You get a test back, or therapy doesn't go as you think. It's like, "Huh!" The story tells you, "I failed again."

[0:19:36.4] SC: Yup.

[0:19:37.1] AS: Which then is when it's like the epic comes out, "I'm just going to eat." None of this is conscious.

[0:19:43.8] SC: That's a hundred percent how I feel, yeah.

[0:19:46.7] AS: Yeah. Even though this — I want for listeners to realize this story. We have stories of what happened to us in the past, but it produced this basic emotional sense of things that is running our lives. Stephanie's story is, "If I feel instability, I'm overwhelmed. If I'm overwhelmed, I'm going to fail."

What happens is that story, what it is — Why I called flaring up and really tight, that's when binging — We might go from overeating to binging, because it creates a chronic tension, not just around food and how you're trying to eat clean for you digestion, and skin, and all that stuff, but because it's also now flaring up with Benjamin's unfolding. It probably — With a lot of my clients. I'm not going to you on the spot with this, but they see more subtle forms of that and their relationships. Instability looks like, "Was she mad at me?" It may not send them home to eat, but it might wear them out enough that they're like, "Huh! I said the wrong thing." is their idea of failure, because there was a sense of conflict.

I share that so that people see your agency is arrested and all of those things, because you're not — You don't have any choice there. You're just reacting, because you're trying to protect — You're trying to protect yourself from your story, but, really, the story is flared up. Is that clear?

[0:21:11.4] SC: It is.

[0:21:11.5] AS: This is why I need you to ask me if you have any questions.

[0:21:13.2] SC: Yeah. It's exhausting, and I totally click with that, feeling self-conscious sometimes, or second guessing myself in situations.

[0:21:23.7] AS: Yeah, and that's usually driven by our stories. In our stories, because we are in a stress response defensive position, we never resolve them, because we don't know what we want. We know what we don't want, "I don't want to failure. I want Benjamin to be as —" What are the thoughts that go through your head around him?

[0:21:47.0] SC: Just that will I get to hear him say, “I love you mom,” or what will school look like. I just want him to be a happy, well-adjusted young man. I know he will be and he’s the most joyful boy you’ve ever met. Like I said, just the answer in TPs.

[0:22:08.8] AS: Yeah. What we do with agency — To restore agency — I don’t want to over simplify how challenging it is to transform a story. This is why *Truce with Food* is three months and by the time this is aired, it’s already under enrollment and all that stuff for next year, or privately,” because I just don’t want people — Often, people’s stories comes down to failure and then they think I should be able to fix this in three steps, then they can’t. Then, they’re like, “See. I failed again.”

I think starting to see all the other places, because this might be — In *Truce with Food*, we call — Once you start your story in one place, you see it everywhere and it’s like people think they have all these bad habits, and it’s like, “No. It all comes back from the same tension, the same coping mechanisms.”

What we want to do — We’ll use the example of Benjamin, because I think this is where — Is this where you find your eating — I should ask you, where do you find a struggle right now? Is it when things don’t go as planned?

[0:23:07.1] SC: Yeah, just those bad weeks, like you said, where therapy doesn’t go well, or I get a 15-page reports comparing his developmental age much younger, or we go to the playground and I feel markedly out of place, because I can’t relate to a lot of other moms in the conversations. I feel different, really different.

[0:23:32.8] AS: Yeah. Then, which if you feel different, it feels overwhelming, which then you probably overanalyze everything, because that you’re looking for failure.

[0:23:44.6] SC: Yup, totally.

[0:23:46.0] AS: Not failure, but it’s different. Different is the failure in that story. Is that clear?

[0:23:50.0] SC: Yeah, just like out of place.

[0:23:53.5] AS: Yes. You're not consciously thinking I'm failing, but of our place is setting up that same idea of failure.

[0:24:02.4] SC: And I feel self-conscious.

[0:24:04.5] AS: Yes. Anytime you feel self-conscious, your story is clearing up. Do you have any questions about agency themselves with our stories before we talk about sort of moving through them?

[0:24:15.7] SC: Not at this point. Not at this moment.

[0:24:17.4] AS: Okay.

[0:24:17.9] SC: Yeah.

[0:24:18.7] AS: One of the things. I'm going to share with you guys a couple examples of how you can start to identify this chronic tension in your own life. It's really hard if you don't have outside help, because you're just in it and you normalize things. The more you probably see your story, Stephanie, the more you're like, "Oh my God! It's what I'm doing here." I'm reacting in a way to — Again, failure — I'm using that word, but it could look — It's going to look different in different places. Instability looks different with Benjamin that it doesn't work, than it works with your Beautycounter rep, which looks different with your husband, which looks different with your family. The core pattern is instability there.

For those of you listening, anytime you're using the words, "I'm stressed," there's where we feel like of agency. It's not what's happening does, it's feeling like we don't have the capacity to work through that. Stephanie gets a 15-page report, it doesn't mean there is loss and grief there. However, it also means when we start to respond to that stress, we have to start to figure out new metrics of what matters to us, what is really meaningful here.

I'll give you a very concrete example. Anytime you're saying you're stressed about things, usually means that you feel a lack of agency. Most people, they'll say they're stress eating, and

in my mind, I'm like, "Their lack of agency eating." Because life is going to come at us. It's do we feel capable and have the capacity to respond?

Here is an example of one client's story that we have that she gave me permission to share. The core of her story was if I feel doubt, it's unsafe. If I feel self-doubt, it's unsafe. She's a business owner and she had a couple of different locations, and she was opening up — I think it was like a fourth or fifth location of the store. We were chatting about it and she's like, "I just feel like it's so rushed. I'm stressed about this."

We realized that she had set a deadline based on financial projections, which is completely logical, and how things were supposed to be. It turns out things didn't go as they were supposed to be because of project management. As your story illustrates exactly, Stephanie, life never —

[0:26:42.0] SC: Things happen.

[0:26:43.0] AS: Yeah, and that's why diets don't work because they only work if everything was according to plan. What she realized was she was starting to sense with all these new information that she wanted to push opening back one week. Again, this is where her doubt and un-safety, or lack of safety story was really being triggered.

However, the rushing of the store opening was contributing all the doubt, which is why —

[0:27:07.2] SC: Absolutely.

[0:27:07.9] AS: Yeah. What we realized, what we talked about — I didn't tell her what to do one way or the other, but I said, "It sounds like, in your story, one of the ways you keep your story going is —" All of us, when we're in a story, we tend to feel — I call closing the story loop. We feel like there's a rushed — We have to make a choice, because it feels so vulnerable to be in that story. That's sometimes why we eat, because then we distract, it's like, "Oh! I know how this ends with me eating ice cream." That feels a lot better than, "How do I not fail here?" For her safety, was the financial return. Different story. We all have different stories.

What we started to realize was — I said to her, “What is your metric?” Especially given this story that we’re working on and you wanting to use your voice more, she thought about it. One of the tools for her was giving herself more space, which is probably a good tool for all of us. She emailed me this morning and was like, “Oh my God! I decided to push the opening back, because I want to enjoy it. I want to do things on my terms, on my way, and not rush this.” She’s like, “The whole team felt so happy. I feel so happy.”

Yeah, maybe they’re going to lose — Maybe she won’t make the money in that week, but I bet longer term, because things are going to be set up. She’s going to have extra help if she pushes it back a week. It doesn’t mean that there was necessarily a tradeoff and that she’s going to lose. You just realized she could trust herself, even though it felt like she should doubt herself. So it, in essence, tested that story. Right now, her life has gotten infinitely better. She feels — The team feels better.

That story of, “If I doubt myself, it’s unsafe.” She kept up the stress. She kept driving to get this done on time, versus she just transfor — She tested it to put a couple of notches in it not ruling her as much the next time.

She was saying — When we first started working together, she was emotionally eating 20% of the time and eating wild 20% of the time. Once she understood our story and the tools that we’re working on, she said it’s now 70-30, where 70% she’s eating fantastic. It’s only 30% —

[0:29:20.5] SC: Awesome.

[0:29:21.8] AS: Yeah. She’s decreased. We’re not doing any points, or plans, or rules, we’re just —

[0:29:26.8] SC: Yeah, solve that.

[0:29:27.5] AS: She’s like, “I just love our work together. This is —” because she’s tried weight watchers, all these stuff that we’ve all done.

[0:29:35.7] SC: Me too.

[0:29:37.8] AS: Yeah, the cleanses and all these stuff. She's like, "All I have to do is be more authentic and empowered and the food takes care of itself. That's agency. That's one client example there just for people who — I think the more examples we can get sometimes, the more stories we can see.

[0:29:54.7] SC: I love that, and you just reminded me. In the workshop, you mentioned, when you're overtired and overwhelmed, what can I do in this moment to empower myself? Is one of the questions you asked us to think about, and that's been helpful in those moments of sheer exhaustion, or whatnot, just to ask myself, "What can I do in this moment to empower myself?" A lot of times I'll do and act of self-care, have a cup of tea. Just sit down. Pet my dog. Just take some deep breaths. That's been helpful. Like you said, you have to be mindful of that so that you get out of your story and out of your head a little bit, which isn't always easy.

[0:30:41.1] AS: No. The less you can see your story, the less you want to do any of that stuff.

[0:30:46.6] SC: Totally, because when you're there and you're stuck, it's really hard to break the chain sometimes.

[0:30:54.3] AS: It is. Actually, heading down this road of agency was — I kind of stumbled upon it, but I was looking for it, because I would notice with my clients — This was early on. I've been doing this 10 years now. I would try the traditional tools of journal this out, or drink a cup of tea, like you, and all that stuff. When they were "bad" or in the throes of a binge, they weren't going to do those tools, neither did i.

[0:31:21.1] SC: Yeah, same.

[0:31:22.0] AS: I found that in the beginning, giving them this just little bit of distance to see what's — Oh! I'm feeling this way, because I'm afraid of this. Even just knowing that it wasn't about the food and giving them that little bit of distance, gave them in the beginning those chances to do the tae, to do the petting of the pet — Petting of the pet. That was super meta.

It gave them space to — In our story, it's so emotional. That's why in the first month of *Truce with Food*, people are often catching it after the fact, and we have to go back and say, "What was happening there? What was a new way that instability showed up for you? What's a new way that you thought you were afraid of doing the wrong thing?" Because these mental models that prevent agency have become so normalized.

A lot of my clients who run businesses, or run teams, they are trying to get their ideas out, yet they don't realize that they're sabotaging themselves by asking — Opening everything up for questions in the beginning and my voice gets drowned out. Overtime, they're like, "I'm contributing to that by setting up this way." It kind of gone off on a tangent, but we have to start recognizing how we recognize our story and then see how we perpetuate it.

I always say, one of my favorite quotes, I feel like I quote this all the time, but that was made famous by Erin Brockovich and Gloria Steinem is the truth will set you free, but first, it will piss you off.

[0:32:52.3] SC: Yes.

[0:32:54.4] AS: It's kind of like, "Look, I didn't choose for all these shit to happen to me." This also isn't helping with how I'm responding. It's not necessarily about how we're responding with the food, it's, "Am I leading with the questions?" "Am I not giving myself a space to feel what I need to feel?" Am I looking at it as failure, because I don't have the answer right now?" versus, "I need to get more information." Starting to ask those kind of questions and figuring out part of agency and independent choice is figuring out what need to do so that we can transform our story, so that we can look at "the data in the moment" very different than "failure". That's what I meant, not "data in the minute."

Do you have any questions? Part of what I wanted to — I can get really theoretical and I wanted to see if do you have questions about how that relates to your story and can we work through that more?

[0:33:50.7] SC: No. That's all great. I don't know why I'm looking at my notepad, as if I can't listen to this episode later on. Another thing that I liked that you had mentioned too is that when

you seek community, there can be growth, a great opportunity for growth. I've found that as well in the special needs parenting world. First, you have to choose to accept that. That's been helpful to me. I've been inspired to start a blog space to share some of my perspectives, because I feel sometimes I bottle up a lot of these stuff. Connecting with that community, there can be an opportunity for growth.

I love that you shared that, because that's one way —

[0:34:40.8] SC: I can't believe I just shared that. You're the third person I've told.

[0:34:46.9] AS: Tell us your blog. You got to promote it now.

[0:34:49.9] SC: Cleaner Stephanie.

[0:34:51.3] AS: .Com?

[0:34:52.3] SC: Yeah. I have a friend who's designing the website, and then a graphic artist working on the logo piece. It's very much in the beginning stages, but that community piece and that opportunity for growth, like you mentioned, is from that episode where I scratched out all these stuff on a receipt. That's how impactful it was and how life-changing. Really, thank you.

[0:35:15.1] AS: Yeah, thank you. I'm glad it resonated though. It resonates because you're ready for it. I think one of the things that you just said is, "I can't believe I just said that." This is what my clients — They're surprising themselves, because when you really have agency, especially — I have so much to say that about, but we talked about this over email. I think it was you and I. A lot of times, we have — Again, we have men telling us to take back our power, and own our power, and develop your core self, and go out there.

I'm not blaming men at all. I love men. Backed — I was bullied by girls, so I've always been better friends with seduced — I was a tomboy growing up. I'm married to a dude. I love dudes. However, their bodies and their preferences are received very differently from the world. At the end of *A Cookie isn't Just a Cookie* workshop, someone was, "Laura. Hi, Laura." Was telling us that Deepak wrote this article based on his book about emotional eating. Deepak Chopra had

this — I agreed with his points on how to have agency, and have power. Which, often, power is basically the ability to implement these choices.

I agreed with them. However, I want everyone listening, often times, it's a lot more nuanced. Deepak Chopra comes from India, which is a very cast hierarchal system. He was at position, and male, so he was at the top of that power pyramid. Obviously, immigrated to the U.S., where now he's at position, which is the top of the power structure as well in the medical system.

Great for Deepak, and I love that he's saying these things, and it's going to be different for those of us who've been at the mercy of these power structures. Specifically women. Women's bodies. Women's bodies and women's preferences are not perceived the same way. That throws this different idea of, "What are my preferences? What are my choice?" because what I found is that women, because we've been so conditioned to be good, or think about other people, it's not a bad thing, and it also confuses us.

As you were saying, "Oh my God! I went to the special needs community, and now I'm starting a blog." It's like you're discovering your preferences as you go. That was a like a long philosophical/tactical drill down.

[0:37:38.0] SC: No. I love that, and you're so right about the societal norms that are placed upon us externally from so many different angles. It's really vulnerable to put yourself out there. Like you said, there's gold in those wounds.

[0:37:57.6] AS: Yeah. I really want to give you a credit for going towards, because as someone who — Again, I never thought I was a perfectionist, because I thought perfectionist meant like you wanted Martha Stewart matching placemats. I was like, "No. I'm never going to pretend to be domestic."

I said to Carlos a couple of years ago, I'm like, "You know —" We've been together now 10 years, I'm like, "I don't —" Especially now that I don't have food issues. I don't care about cooking. Whoever gets hungry first has to cook, so we're always like pushing dinner back to 8:00. I'm like, "You know, I'm don't think I'm really domestic." He's like, "I could have told you that the first six weeks we were dating." I was like, "That's out of the bag."

It's right, if people want to be domestic. It's not a talent that I have. I was perfectionist, and then I was going for what was safe. I would often find myself in food, in exercise at least, going with places where it looked good, or I thought it was good, versus finding the places that were vulnerable for me. I think that's really important, because I know a lot of my clients struggle. Most food issues come back to a sense of safety. Failure feels unsafe. Overwhelm feels unsafe. People may not use that language, but food issues are first, second and third chakra issues, stability, safety.

We often avoid the very communities, or we don't reach out when we need help. For everyone listening, if you start to discover your story and where you need that support, look what is so beautiful that you're doing. You found intimacy there, real connection.

[0:39:37.8] SC: Yeah. I found out early on, believe it or not, by joining a Facebook groups for parents of children with low muscle tone, was really helpful to connect with that community, and I just — So much strength from the other parents. Like you said, I just want to seek more opportunity for that growth and that gold in our wounds.

[0:40:02.4] AS: I love what you're doing without realizing it, is you're challenging your story. You have experienced incredible stability. Rather than saying — Feeling like a failure is like shutting down. When you get results, it's like, "Ugh! I failed."

Part of probably — Maybe in the past, or maybe — This doesn't apply to you, but sometimes with people, how they keep their story going is they shut down, like, "I'm out! I'm avoiding this." Which looks like closing off and sharing. Then, you continue to feel like a failure because you don't get the information you need.

[0:40:36.7] SC: I've totally been there too.

[0:40:38.3] AS: Yeah.

[0:40:39.2] SC: I guess one thing that helps me is that I am sort of an eternal optimist, and eventually I'll see the silver lining, not always, but I guess I'm seeking that.

[0:40:55.1] AS: Yeah. What I think too — Like in our culture, which is like a very quick fix. We expect results like that. When I think of love, I think of mother earth love. There are seasons. You bury those seeds and they need a lot of fertilizer, right?

[0:41:15.8] SC: Yup.

[0:41:17.2] AS: Spend a lot of time underground. I think winter is six months here in the east coast.

[0:41:21.9] SC: Yup, and then you get storms, and all sorts of variables, but then the season changes and it's bright and sunny and there's beautiful moments in every day. Nature is another thing that helps to really ground me as well.

[0:41:37.9] AS: Yeah. The more that we heal that story, what I love about this is now you're starting a blog. You're actually doing the opposite of shutting down and then saying, "See? I was right." This is overwhelming. Falling back on the story of like, "I'm going through so much instability." It doesn't mean that you shouldn't be overwhelmed, it just means, "And what am I going to do with this?"

I found with clients, even as they start to release a little bit of that tension, it just gives them some of that energy back from the day that was so drained. The more they test and the more that they transform that story — Because what you're now saying is when I feel instability, I've got this. I've still got to discover how I've got this.

[0:42:24.4] SC: It's restorative, like you said.

[0:42:27.3] AS: Yeah, and so you're challenging that story. The more you do that, rather than, "I'm failing," and looking at everything like a 15-page report. The mind will say, "This is how Benjamin is different," which feels, in your story, like failure. It's like — Now, you're starting to learn how to make new meaning from those reports, from who he is, and appreciating — Yeah.

You said, when you talked about him on video, he's the most joyful kid.

[0:43:00.4] SC: Oh, yeah.

[0:43:01.0] AS: What's cool is, as we have more agency — I always say when we stopped eating pre-packaged foods, we stop running a pre-packaged life. I think —

[0:43:12.4] SC: [0:43:12.4]

[0:43:14.7] AS: Because we compare ourselves against “normal”. That's the pre-package definition of, “This is what makes for a happy childhood. This is what makes for good parents.” Yet, if we focus on the process rather than just gunning for the outcome, we find that we get that replenishment, that restoration day-in and day-out, or enough of it that we don't get exhausted on the days where you're going to be drained. Let's not pretend that this is something it isn't.

[0:43:43.6] SC: Yeah, it won't all be roses and butterflies. Another helpful thing was that, back to the comparing, what is normal — We're bombarded by social media and you're scrolling and scrolling and seeing things that look so perfect from the outside. I love this, that comparison is thief of joy. That's helped me so much. Where Ben's milestones were so delayed, and he didn't walk until almost 2-1/2. That just helped me a lot, is just to celebrate his milestones when they came and to not compare with others, but it's hard, and it's human nature.

[0:44:25.8] AS: Yeah. One of the things that — When we go in *Truce with Food*, I give people tools and techniques to see when they're in a story, because this is challenging. Also, how to get out of it. One of the huge things that I tell them that they know they're in a story is when they're comparing. There's this imaginary hierarchy, like we have power structures in our culture, but that's a big sign, because what it does — This is kind of what food does, is it makes you feel you safe, but unsafe. It's like, “Oh! Let me compare, because that's a benchmark.” I know where I am in relation to normal, which is kind of the lowest — Where I would say eating — Certainly, even if it's miserable, certainty is the lowest sense of safety. It's like, “I know how this ends,” or “Here I am. I'm good this week, because I'm down two pounds.” In this case, “My child is this.” It gives us a grounding, but then it takes the rug out from underneath us at the same time. It's the illusion of safety is what I'm trying to say.

Same with doing things like — A lot of clients, when they come to me, it's like the nighttime eating, like, "I eat this, and I know I shouldn't, but then I had a glass of wine, and that leads to two, and then the Netflix binge." Even though that's so miserable, it's familiar, and that's lack of agency though. It's like really thinking we have no other choices. We have to foresee what's blocking our choices first is what I want everyone to get out of this.

[0:45:55.5] SC: I feel like there's so much room for growth and you've just chipped up the iceberg, "Thank you for starting the process and hopefully more good things will come from this," but I just love the idea and it's been really empowering.

[0:46:11.3] AS: Good! One thing I want you to think about so you can prepare, is now that you've started this blog, you say you couldn't believe you said it. It's an unstable thing, right?

[0:46:21.1] SC: Totally.

[0:46:23.7] AS: How are you going to make sure that — The more stories have told on us, the less — I call it your inner protector, how you behave, how you see the world, the patterns that you do when you're in the story. How can you set yourself up? Say, when you start a blog, if you don't hear any feedback, your story is going to say, "That lack of feedback is failure," because that's what you're waiting for. How are you going to make sure what metrics mattered to you?

[0:46:51.8] SC: That's a really good question, and I have thought about this, is putting stuff out there into the abyss. The internet abyss is really terrifying, but I think I just need to play the long game here and think about just being true, an honest, and authentic to myself, and it will pay forward, and just not to get wrapped in feedback, or comments, or things like that. We'll see. I would love any pearls of wisdom from your experience.

[0:47:28.1] AS: Oh my God! In fact, I need to ask Insatiable listeners. I actually really want to grow my platform. I've spent eight years in academia and I'm ready to come out, and I am learning. I'm on a learning curve. Yes, I've done some things well, but I still have so much to learn myself. I think that's — There's not one diet that works for everyone. Everyone's communities are different. You can never really predict.

I remember attending this thing about these things that we go — We think these things go viral, but they are highly calculated to go viral. I'm like, "Oh my God! They paid \$20 million for something to go viral." I'm like, "I'm out! I do not have a \$20 million budget."

Actually, that reminds me Insatiable listeners, I am looking to really grow and get Insatiable out in my work, so if you have any ideas — I'm asking for help. I usually don't ask for help. I usually say things after they've happened and I figured them out. This is my own vulnerability story of, "I'm not at marketing in social media."

However, what I think is important though, and I just want to kind of point this out, the same way that those reports that Benjamin gets, or when you're at the playground and you feel different, which feels like — Again, you may come after this podcast episode and realize it's not failure that you feel like, but it's powerlessness, or something.

[0:48:39.9] SC: Totally.

[0:48:40.6] AS: That's just a stand-in, because the more you search to see it, the more you get fined tuned with the words, but you have enough of a working model, is that the same way that you reached out to other parents and communities on Facebook that understood and could help you navigate this data. When we're starting something, like a blog, you may get feedback back from people that feels like criticism, because it's like, "I'm powerless."

We want to make sure though that you're open to getting the feedback back that will help. I'm not giving that to you as wisdom. I'm saying more, "This is how our story keeps —" It chokes us, basically. It's like, "Oh my God! Silence, I take as —" I'm not saying you're going to have silence, but I'm just saying like if you feel like, "Oh my God! I didn't get the reaction I wanted," versus — Also, "Oh! I got the reaction I didn't want." It's recognizing, "My story is going to tell me that I'm powerless and that I just have to shut down." People have three responses in their stories; fight, flight, or freeze, and I get more into it in Truces with Food,. What that looks like? Making sure that you're not doing that response, because that will keep the story going.

Is that clear?

[0:49:51.2] SC: Yes. I definitely digest it.

[0:49:55.0] AS: Yeah. For those of you listening, I want you to think of when I — As I search to identify my story, do I fight? Am I like — Like, anger. Most of my clients do a combination of flight and freeze, the freeze is the overanalyzing, “Oh my God! Should have I said something different? Should have I made this decision?” That kind of freezing, and then the fight is kind of like, “I’m out. Forget it. I’m just going to shut down. I’m not even going to address this.” Right?

[0:50:24.6] SC: Yup.

[0:50:25.1] AS: Start to think about how that shows up. You’re not going to think I’m fight, fighting, or freezing, but think about the behaviors that you do that in essence are keeping you stuck and you’re responding to something as a stressor when it’s not really a stressor, right?

You’re learning curve with your son is very much a stressor, and though, I think what you’re finding is the more you’re on the learning curve, those same things that used to stress you out don’t any. They don’t feel so powerless — You don’t feel so powerless in them anymore.

[0:50:56.4] SC: Yes.

[0:50:57.0] AS: Would you say that’s — As you’ve gotten more context, as you’ve reached out to community.

[0:51:03.9] SC: Yeah, talk to me and get out of my own head and just be more mindful of him and all of his strengths. It’s still a struggle every day, but work in progress.

[0:51:17.2] AS: Yeah, and that’s a really big — Again, in *Truce with Food*, we always say, “There’s \$700 cake, a 70, and a 7. That’s \$700 a cake?” I would work on your story through the blog, because once you build agency and you restore that core center and make it more resilient and capable, those other things — Just the same way that I’m sure you’d look back on your life 10 years ago and you’re like, “I can’t believe what stressed me out.”

[0:51:41.6] SC: Oh, yeah. Classic. Yeah, I remember when Ben was in the NICU and we were stuck in terrible traffic in Boston, and I just looked to my husband and I was like, “It’s such a trivial matter. Our son is on life support.” Not be like — Traffic can really be stressful, but you do have a different appreciation and perspective and resilience, and experience this on so many different levels. I don’t need to be so extreme there with my example, but it helps.

[0:52:14.7] AS: It’s true.

[0:52:15.2] SC: It helps. Yeah.

[0:52:16.7] AS: Yeah. What I’m saying is this story with Benjamin, it’s a \$700 cake. When you’re testing your story, I would start it with the blog, something that feels — It still high stakes and it feels vulnerable, yet it’s not — It doesn’t have the gravitas of the care that you’re trying to build and create for him.

I don’t want to trivialize the blog. It’s so a part of that, yet it’s — There’s going to be a learning curve there. I would work on your story through that. Of course, the food will fall into place.

[0:52:52.6] SC: Yeah, I appreciate that.

[0:52:54.7] AS: Yeah. Also, continue to give yourself now that you — I love that you talked about doing the — Petting the cat, or the dog.

[0:53:02.2] SC: My dog, yeah.

[0:53:02.9] AS: I didn’t want to say petting the pet again, or that cup of tea and all that stuff, and with just knowing that you have a story. Then, that stuff is very useful. It often takes being able to see what’s really happening to get a little bit of that distance.

The cool thing I will tell you is the more agency you develop, overtime, you start choosing very different paths and people don’t need the tools of different things, because their daze just aren’t wearing them out in the same way, because it’s more on their terms. It’s more on their choices.

[0:53:34.7] SC: Yes. I have noticed that with cleaner eating, that once I got into the habit, I felt so much better, and I exercise more personal agency and ate foods that really nourished me versus just the convenience pre-packaged stuff. It did get easier with time. That was not an overnight fix. It wasn't a 30-day thing. It's been nine months of kind of cleaning up my act. Don't get me wrong, I totally had pizza and wine on Friday night, because Ben had an ear infection last week, and that felt really good in that moment.

[0:54:10.4] AS: That's kind of like why I don't believe in good and bad foods, because where you are right now, that was probably a decent choice. I think the stress of having to be perfect all the time puts this other — The body is more resilient than we give it credit for. Sometimes you just want to have pizza and wine.

[0:54:28.8] SC: You said too, sometimes I was probably the most self-protective decision could have made at that time.

[0:54:36.0] AS: Yeah. Also, we were chatting on Instagram about Robb Wolf's new book, which I put into the library to get. About you reading what works for you and taking what works, and then leaving the rest. I was like, "That's agency. That's an example of agency." I think, for all of us, on a very food level, you want to get to that point where you have enough context for what works for you, because then when you have those evenings of pizza and wine, you're balanced enough to know that, "I needed that tonight."

[0:55:06.4] SC: Totally.

[0:55:07.7] AS: Because what people don't realize is if we say something is healthy — If something is healthy and good, then something is unhealthy or bad, and then we just feel bad about that. I think one of the greatest joys is being able to do that kind of stuff here and there if it's what you really want. To take that away — Again, that's not personal agency, that I'm being guilted into it.

[0:55:31.7] SC: Thank you for pointing that out, because I wouldn't have had the perspective to see that as a personal agency, but now that we've explored this, I am going to look for these

pockets of personal agency that maybe I'm exercising without realizing it. Reading that book and taking away what I think is going to be helpful. Yeah, thank you for that, for pointing that out.

[0:55:54.5] AS: Yeah. I think for some parting words for people, start to identify your story. See where you're using the word I'm stressed, or I'm overwhelmed, and really get clarity on what feeling is triggering this supposed outcome. I gave you an example of my other client, Stephanie, has given you. Thank you so much. An intimate look at what's her story and based on her past, but we don't even have to go back to her past. We could start to make new meaning out of that story, which will make her feel even more powerful, because it's like, "All that happened to me, and look what I was able —" She's going to create this amazing blog and community by challenging her story and transforming it, right?

Then, you get to keep the gold and then there's other — I'm sure, silver, bronze. I don't know precious metals. Maybe flowers. It doesn't have to all be precious metals. A lot is going to sprout up.

I think another tool is start to think of where I am trying to be chosen, versus where am I making choices, "Where am I hoping to fit in? Where am I hoping to look good," versus, "What do I want to choose? What's my end goal?" That will help you start to develop more agency too.

[0:57:06.8] SC: I love that. Another thing to mull over.

[0:57:09.1] AS: Yeah. I wrote this book in grad school. We went to Sweden to study the natural step, which is a sustainability model. I asked one of my professor if I can turn my paper into an e-book, and he allowed me. I got a great — They actually adopted it into the curriculum at Penn at my grad —

[0:57:27.8] SC: Awesome.

[0:57:29.1] AS: Yeah, and this woman reviewed it on Amazon. It was called *The Roots of Going Green: Your Fork Your Power*, and it was about the environmental impact of our food choices. She left this review — I'm so proud of it. It's basically like, "You won't need to read anything else on this topic. Ali packs a punch in this. It's everything you got up in —"

I realized, when people write about the podcast, they're like, "There was a lot in that." I was like, "Oh my God! It reminds me of that book. It was only 30 pages, but it was probably way to overwhelming for people."

She has a sustainability background, so she loved it, but if you're the average person coming to — I think it was useful, and it's on Amazon if anyone wants to buy it.

[0:58:10.6] SC: Awesome.

[0:58:12.0] AS: I forget that people are like — I have pages of notes from each episode. I'm a big picture thinker, so it's not that I'm like — I just ring a lot of concepts together and —

[0:58:22.5] SC: No. I love it. Thank you so much for all the content you share and put out there. I'm so happy I stumbled across your podcast. It's really been life-changing. This year has been a big year of growth for me. Thank you for being part of it, and I love the Insatiable Community, it's been fun. I always learn something new and different.

[0:58:43.8] AS: Good! Good! We're honored to have — I'm honored to have you. I keep saying we — Juliet. In spirit, she's wishing us well.

[0:58:50.7] SC: Love her too.

[0:58:53.1] AS: Thank you so much, Stephanie. Where can people find you?

[0:58:55.9] SC: Thank you, Ali. I'm most active on Instagram @cleanerstephanie.

[0:59:03.5] AS: And your blog, cleanerstephanie.com

[0:59:05.7] SC: Yes, pretty sure. Yeah.

[0:59:07.7] AS: Okay, and we'll link to it on the website.

[0:59:10.6] SC: Cool.

[0:59:10.8] AS: Yeah. In addition to following Stephanie you guys — I was kind of joking, but not nearly, and that I am really looking to grow the podcast and my work, and so I could really use your help and either passing along the podcast and showing people how to download them. I'm realizing a lot of people don't know how to download podcast. If you have any ideas for me on how to get this kind of work out in the world, I really want to change the conversation that we have around food and exercise and what it really takes to be healthy and whole, because wholeness is health.

So, hanks everybody.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:59:44.3] AS: Have questions or reactions about the episode? Reach out to me on Instagram and Twitter @alimshapiro, or Facebook at facebook/alimarieshapiro. If you love this show, please leave an iTunes review and tell one friend this week about how to get the Insatiable Podcast on their phone.

See you on social media.

[END]