

## Audio Transcript for Episode 604: "Body Dysmorphia in the Age of Filters + Celebrity Culture"

*Please note: This transcript has been lightly edited to remove filler words or sounds.*

**ALEX JONES:** I'm realizing that I have to try to be nice to myself, try to be nice to this body. And that's all I can do.

[music playing]

**CHAD MOSES:** You're listening to the "To Write Love on Her Arms" podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. I'm your host Chad Moses, and in each episode, we'll be talking about the things that can often feel hard to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. We'll be sharing stories and exploring big themes like hope, healing, and recovery. If any of the topics we discuss, or the stories we share, feel too heavy for you, know that it's OK to pause, to restart, or to stop altogether. As we discover new stories, we hope to remind you that your story is important.

[music playing]

**CHAD:** Even before social media and influencers, celebrity culture permeated our senses through magazines, billboards, advertisements, TV shows, and movies. We're told what is and isn't attractive or desired when it comes to the way we look on the outside. And now, with technology at our fingertips, with filters on nearly every image our eyes take in, and with products and routines that will supposedly transform us into the individual we're admiring, it's no wonder why so many of us deal with dysmorphic thinking when it comes to our bodies.

In addition to body dysmorphia, there's also body positivity and more recently, body neutrality. To explore all three of these things and more, I'm joined by Alex Jones (the TWLOHA Designer, not the *other* guy) and Auslyn James.

Alex Jones is an Ohio native and, as mentioned, he's been a designer at TWLOHA for seven years and counting. He grew up doodling on any scrap of paper that came his way and still enjoys creative pursuits like photography, illustration, and lettering. When Alex isn't slinging designs at work or at home, he can often be found at the nearest theater watching the latest Oscar winners or nominees and playing games like "Up and Down the River" with friends.

And then we also have Auslyn, TWLOHA's Director of People Operations. Auslyn has spent a number of years honing her craft and is a Senior Certified Professional in Human Resources as well as Certified in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. When she isn't doing all things HR, she can be found traveling, walking along the beach, hanging with friends, or video-chatting with her family. Auslyn is originally from the small island of Antigua but has spent the majority of her life living in NY before moving to Central Florida seven years ago.

This conversation is one that deserves to be explored and had, and we are beyond grateful that you're tuning into it. So without further ado, I am your host Chad Moses. Let's get started.

[music playing]

**CHAD**

Today, we got a couple new guests to the podcast. We have Alex Jones. Good buddy. Glad you're here man.

And we also have Auslyn James. And you're coming up on a year with the organization, aren't you?

**AUSLYN**

Yes. In June.

**CHAD**

That's awesome.

**AUSLYN**

I know. I'm excited.

**CHAD 3:14**

Yeah. So excited to have this conversation with y'all. For those that are familiar with the podcast, we often dedicate a number of episodes each year to topics like eating disorders and disordered eating. And it's really fascinating for us to see this conversation evolve in our realm, under our roof. Because originally, eating disorders, disordered eating, body dysmorphia, stuff like that, is not part or was not part, of our mission statement.

**AUSLYN**

Right.

**CHAD**

So it's been really cool to see how we've been able to continue to serve our supporters in including these topics.

**AUSLYN**

Evolution.

**CHAD**

So yeah, yeah, it really is. It really points to also just how topics of mental health have evolved over the years.

**ALEX 3:57**

Yeah. Originally, I feel like most eating disorder conversations were very narrow as far as like— what methods you did, or how it manifested in your life. And now we're realizing that body dysmorphia has a much broader spectrum, and can exhibit itself and show up in different ways depending on different factors in your life.

**AUSLYN 4:23**

Yeah, I know, especially in our culture— I mean, growing up in the islands, it just wasn't a thing that you talked about. I think overall, mental health is just not really a thing that you talk about, it's something that you experience. And even just with body image, any challenges with body image, it just never had been something that has been a topic of conversation at all. So, you know, it's interesting now, especially now living in the US, seeing how things have evolved, and just being able to be part of the conversation and having those conversations now with family. Yeah.

**CHAD**

In that same vein, we know that the conversation has been a late-comer to our story, and even late comer to the scene of how people understand mental health. But I guess, we'll start with Alex. What was your first introduction into the breadth of topics dealing with eating disorders, disordered eating, and body dysmorphia?

**ALEX**

So I remember going to the theaters for the very first Spider-Man movie with Tobey Maguire back in 2002. And, you know, I've loved superhero movies ever since. But there was a moment in that movie where he gets bit by the spider. And he, at that point, he's very much a scrawny nerd. And then he goes to bed. And then when he wakes up, he is fully transformed into Spider-Man. He's no longer scrawny, he has these huge abs, he's very jacked. And, kind of from that point forward, most superhero movies have a moment like that. Whether it's a physical transformation like that, or just, 'Look at the shirtless guy and how jacked he is.' So, growing up with that, I didn't realize at the time how much I was internalizing that, but now that I have kinder eyes, and have a little bit of perspective with age, you kind of realize, 'Oh, I was trying to live up to those standards as a kid,' or, still even now comes up when I go to the gym or something. But, those big moments in pop culture history with a shirtless superhero, I've had to realize that's— they're working six months or a year for that body. Their diet is very strict. They're posing and the lighting is—

**CHAD**

Even makeup.

**ALEX**

Yeah, they have makeup for that. And so, even though I'm seeing it, it's not actually a real depiction of what that actor looks like.

**CHAD**

Yeah so you said, 2002 was the first time you realized—what the transition story looks like? How about just kind of your growth into understanding that *how* that affects you is indeed, a mental health conversation?

**ALEX**

Mhm, yeah. So, the way that we view our bodies, and compare them, is not a healthy thing to do. So having to unlearn that— that behavior, and that kind of standard that I was placing on myself was something that I had to do in order to get better with my own mental health. Really.

**AUSLYN**

From my experience— a lot of my experience has been more around body dysmorphia. And if I were to go back to the origin— growing up around my family— I've always been a very thin individual. I used to be called names in high school, just because I've always been this very, very, thin person. And even through maturity, I was wishing, because all of the friends that were popular in school, were a little bit thicker in body structure. So I was always like, 'Oh, my God, these girls are always the ones getting the attention. And these girls are always the ones— everyone looked up to them.' And I just kind of faded in the background. And I was just like, 'Okay, well, maybe I need to do something to gain some weight. But then, at the time, skinny was in, but I wanted to look like something else. Over time— and I think once I started going to college in Antigua— I recognized that, 'You know what? You look okay. You look okay.' And then as I started dating, I realized, "Okay well— " I remember this one guy I dated he was like, 'Yeah, well, you know, you dress like a guy,' because I always wore sneakers. He was like 'You dress like a guy,

and you're really thin.' That was, I think, probably what was a really pivotal time for me. Because this was my first boyfriend, I was already in high school and was being called really thin. It's not a thing that's very attractive in my culture. People look at it like, you're poor, you don't have food, you know what I mean? And so because you're not looking at a particular body, you know, weight structure, you're not well off, you know what I mean? And so, I just never really wanted to be thin. But then once I came to the US, I started gaining weight, eating some different things, having exposure to McDonald's and those kinds of things, the fast food. And every time I went back to Antigua, on summer breaks, and things like that, my family would make comments. And we have this thing. It's like, family dinner every month. And I always tried to schedule my trips around family dinners, so I can get to see everyone, but it was always a source of anxiety for me, because going back, it always felt like a comment was being made on your weight. Whenever I looked in the mirror, who I was, was not what I saw. But I think as you age, as you mature, as you become more and more educated in the realm of mental health, and just kind of psychology and stuff. You learn how unhealthy those thoughts are. And you get to see yourself in a different light. I had to unlearn— like Alex said, a lot of the things that I felt about myself.

### **CHAD**

Yeah, you're hitting on a number of really interesting topics here, about the ways that we kind of learn what beauty, what attractive, standards look like. And, Alex and I, we can certainly relate on the American pop culture side of things. And certainly, these are generational conversations. What our grandparents saw as beauty standards are very different from what we see. And certainly probably different from what your daughter is seeing at even her age. And with that you have a cultural gap between the places that we're learning and the places I'm going home to relate with family. We're getting so many layers of being bombarded by—

### **AUSYLN**

But this—I feel like this goes back to even learning in school. Remember? Hansel and Gretel. Remember that story? The witch, they passed her a bone and she was like, 'Oh, you didn't know you're too skinny. I think I need to fatten you up a little bit more.' So when you go back and you look at that, and like, 'Okay, is this the way to go? You know, is this what I should have looked like? Or is this the best way to be?' I remember watching—there was a movie with—it's—I think Norbit. Not Norbit. It's Eddie Murphy. Nutty Professor. Where he was really nice and strapping when he was a more heavysset guy, he just wanted to look like somethin' else. He took the pill or whatever potion he took, he became this—the ladies liked him, he had more confidence.

### **CHAD**

Well, and this is all being sold as a comedy, right? So this isn't even an honest—this isn't even a serious investigation, of what body image is.

### **AUSLYN**

Right, but these are the things that we have seen from the time that we were kids, you know?

### **ALEX**

And when you make jokes about something, the reason that a joke is funny is because there's a little bit of truth to it. Even though that movie is saying it and it's like, 'Ah ha, this is funny, they're still subliminally conveying that same message that they're trying to make fun of, but they're not. They're saying it.

### **CHAD**

A roar of laughter ends a conversation, right? That is kind of how we've created our society, that when people start laughing, that's the end of the conversation. On to something else. So kind of looking back

through our journeys of becoming more aware of who we are, how we relate to our bodies, and all the ways that we integrate the information around us. You mentioned stories, we've mentioned movies, were there any particular kind of celebrity voices that drove you to maybe shape or frame yourself to fit a mold that was literally someone else's body?

### **ALEX**

Well, for me, there's been so many superhero movies. And, you look at an actor like Hugh Jackman, who's been playing the same superhero for several years. And he's played Wolverine in several different movies, for a literal decade, every year, every couple of years. And each time he's on screen, he's bigger and more ripped than he was in the last movie. He like, keeps upping the standard. I kind of had to realize, I just have a different body type. Hugh Jackman is six foot two, six foot three, whatever. Wolverine was a short teen. So having to realize like, 'Oh, like, we just have different body types.' No matter how hard I work out, no matter what kind of diet or exercise plan, I'm still not going to look like that. Just because I have a five foot 10 frame, whatever happens, it's not going to be translatable. So I've had to realize what you had mentioned a couple times about trying to be something different. And I'm realizing that I have to just try to be myself. This is the body that I live in, I have to try to be nice to myself, try to be nice to this body. And that's all I can do is just be kind to myself and take care of myself. Show up for myself.

### **CHAD**

Auslyn, how 'bout you? Were there any specific names or faces or magazines that were really kind of driving how you –

### **AUSLYN**

I think for the majority of what I can remember, it was a lot of me-versus-me. But I do recognize– growing up, my family used to call me Grace Jones or they used to call me Tyra. Young Tyra. We used to watch Tyra. You know what I mean? I was tall, and I was slim. And so people used to associate me with a model of some type. And so they would call me Tyra or Grace Jones. But I just can't ever remember wanting to look like Tyra or look like Grace Jones. I just remember, for me, a lot of it was internal. And it was just me versus the person I used to look like. It became extreme. It became the diet pills. Right? It became those things. And then I think the part that was just kind of like, 'Hey girl, be yourself,' was when it became so extreme that I ended up in the hospital, due to severe dehydration. The doctor was like, 'Listen, you continue these things, these things affect your heart. You continue these things, you're gonna be done.' That was already apparent at that time. And so I was just like, 'Oh my god, you really need to – I don't know what it is. If it's a switch in your brain or something you just need to stop.' And I did. And I started doing things the more healthy way. I just went into the bathroom actually, and saw a little sticker. I think it's part of the mental health pack that talks about showing up for yourself. Someone worth showing up for. And I chuckled because I felt like, you know, it may not have been those words exactly. But I had those same notes and reminders for myself that I needed to show up for myself more. And yeah, that was the part that really turned the tides for me, where I was like, 'Hey, be yourself, whoever this person is in this body, and love that person.'

### **CHAD**

I think that that's one thing that a lot of people—it's a really nefarious thing about body dysmorphia, disordered eating is that we lead ourselves to believe that this is just about appearance. We don't consider a lot about what this is doing to our brain chemistry. What this is doing to our cardiac health, what this is doing to other primary functioning organs in our body, but we're just driven to look like Hugh, to look like Tyra, to look like these people who are literally famous for the way they look. And what do we think is the major drive, the impulse to change the way we look? You mentioned a me versus me thing.

But I could, hypothetically, get to look like Hugh Jackman at some point. That's not going to give me his prestige, it's not going to give me his history, it's not going to give me his bank account. What is it about?

### **AUSLYN**

I think it's just Influence, you know what I mean? And idolizing. So for example, I love John Legend, but I don't want to look like him. I don't want to look like his wife. You know what I mean? But I think you have those people that you really look up to, you wish you could be them. Whatever that piece of them looks like to you. Whether it's like working out really, really hard, because you feel like, 'Hey, I'm going to achieve this, just this standard.' I think that could be a driving force. But I know now, in this new era, this new generation, social media has definitely played a huge role, in what people's body images and their own perception of what it should look like.

### **ALEX**

You'd said, even if you look like Hugh Jackman, you still wouldn't be able to have the other qualities of his life that you see. But I also think, the inverse of that, if I looked like Hugh Jackman, it also wouldn't make me a better designer, it wouldn't make me a better co-worker, if I was six foot four, and weighed X amount of weight, that still wouldn't make me a better brother, or better uncle or any of these other things. I've had to realize that the people in my life don't love me for how I look, thankfully. What they like is the conversations that we have, the work that I'm able to do, or how I show up for them, as well.

### **CHAD**

I kind of want to stick on superheroes for a second.

### **ALEX**

I'm always down for that.

### **CHAD**

Yeah. Yeah, me too. So, not too long ago "End Game" came out. And one of the biggest talking points was finally we have a superhero depiction, that is not jacked, that is not ripped. And this is 'fat Thor'. But even then, that was giving us a narrative that there was something that changed about this character's body that was supposed to give us as audience a clue into his mental health state. And, perhaps it's unfair for Hemsworth and unfair for the character of Thor to replace an entire conversation based on this one aspect of the character. But that is a conversation that we had in the office at the literal watercooler about, in what ways did this do service to Body Dysmorphia conversations, in what ways was it actually limiting in what the conversation was?

### **ALEX**

Yeah, I mean, it's a very nuanced conversation with having a very fit actor like that wearing a fat suit. There's a lot of valid criticism of that versus, just hiring a fat actor in the first place. But for me, personally, I did enjoy seeing 'Fat Thor.' For me, the way that he deals with his own mental health, he's very avoidant, he's very self-medicating. So indulging in whatever food or drink he has on hand. So that's kind of how it shows up in my life as well. So I kind of saw a little bit of a reflection of myself in that character and it was nice to see a guy with a big belly, still every bit as powerful in that moment as he was in other moments.

### **CHAD**

And still, ultimately worthy. He was able to reclaim Mjolnir. He was able to find closure with his mom. Talk about the transformation moment, the only thing that transformed was he got a cape, and his beard got braided. And I'll be honest, I would love to have the link to get a good Thor braid here.

**ALEX**

Maybe after summer tour.

**CHAD**

I'd like to kind of touch back on the generational piece of the conversation. Auslyn, you were talking about seeing your daughter, and how she's understanding her body, and different aspects of herself. And probably now starting to notice, celebrities and social media, perhaps. And as the years passed, we definitely see new and old styles fade in and out. And unfortunately, beyond clothing, this often includes body type, body frames, how we present the clothes we can't take off — the skin that we're in. So inevitably, a certain type of body becomes 'in.'

**CHAD**

And in these conversations, we've become attuned to this term of heroin chic, this idea of an overly thin, almost emaciated look, that is becoming what is desirable, whether that's through oversized clothing, or through body modification through diet. So I guess, just kind of naming that. That's not the style that I grew up with in high school and college. For those that are less familiar with terms like heroin chic, or just ways bodies become a fashion statement.

**AUSLYN**

I don't know if you guys remember, a couple of years ago, the twins, Ashley and Mary Kate Olsen. Remember how, years ago, they were like super, super, super thin? And based on what I saw, what I was exposed to, I felt like that was the thing. This is what you saw. This is what's modeling the clothing. This is a body type that you're seeing. And is this what we should be looking like? Is this what makes the clothes fit better? Like you said, there's some things that come in and out. And that was from what I was exposed to years ago. And then in my culture I know now— like BBL's are a thing, right? And so I'm scrolling down my timeline on Instagram, and I see, for example, plastic surgery clinics that will pop up on my sponsored ads or something like that. And it will ask questions like, 'Hey, who is your celebrity look alike?' Or not look alike, but like inspiration. Because pretty much what it does is the advertisement is pretty much around, let's say women who, who go in, they want to get their body modified. And they want to look like a particular celebrity. So they come with a picture. And so this person's celebrity inspiration was, let's say Kim Kardashian. So the plastic surgeon tries his or her best to get that person that figure. And so the things I see now it's really the thick thighs, the big booties, the small waist—

**ALEX**

The itty-bitty waist. Round thing in your face.

**AUSLYN**

Exactly. And so that's the thing. Then I thought we touched on this point earlier, when we said, 'Okay well, I could try to look like Hugh Jackman, but I may not have his resources, right. But then, what I see is that on social media, there are individuals who will go and get their body modified through plastic surgery, and then they become Instagram models. and aspire to have the same level of resources, as let's say, the Kardashian family, right. And some of them, some of them, you know, they do become successful through that medium. Because now their bodies look different. They have that attraction, they get more likes, they get more, you know, push in social media. But then it starts now to turn individuals where celebrities, like I watch a lot of the Real Housewives franchises, and I'm seeing now there's like a, it's not really an epidemic. But it's a- it's a growing, yes, it's a growing trend. Where the individuals and the people that I'm watching on TV are utilizing like ozempic and like medication that people who do have like reasons for needing that medication, there are shortages, because people are and celebrities are, you know, pushing

that, you know, hey, we're I'm taking this thing, and it's making me thin. It's like all over Tik Tok right now. And people trying to get that- their hands on that drug because it makes them more thin. So it's like you started

**ALEX**

And it's a side effect, In fact, it's not even the primary purpose. Yeah, exactly.

**AUSLYN**

Exactly. So we started then, then we started looking at you know, started with the BBL thing. And then now

**ALEX**

and now a lot of - there are a lot of celebrities who are getting fillers and implants dissolved. And like taking it away. You know, Blac Chyna who's Yeah, is getting a lot of stuff dissolved from her body. And so it is just a trend, you know, it's a trend, but as a matter- you know, the pendulum is always gonna be swinging one way or the other.

**CHAD**

Yeah. So wild irony of this right. So you -you want to look good so that you can market a product. Yeah, right. But I can sub in and out a t-shirt very, very easily. subbing in and out parts of my body, yeah. is way more timely, way more difficult and risky, dangerous Yeah, like,

**AUSLYN**

But can you imagine like the effect that that has for example, on a person who loves Blac Chyna, looks up to Blac Chyna. And years ago, when she started doing all this body modification, the person's like, Oh, my God, like I need to get me a bbl. I need to do this. I need to get these dimples. Now, it's like, okay. What do I do? Do I take them out? You know, do I continue to- And there are people who will go and- I watched these, these plastic surgeries show sometimes on TV, and there are individuals who have gone so extreme that they become botched. You know what I mean? And they have these regrets. And they're trying to like, you know, fix them. But what does that do to that person's mental health? Yeah, for sure.

**ALEX**

Because what you said earlier about trying to be different. You're just focusing on the things you want to change. You're focusing on things that you wish were different rather than focusing on the things that you do enjoy? Or even just, I think there's such a disconnect between the way that we talk about ourselves and then the way that we talk about our bodies like, you know, there's a lot of times when people say, Oh, my body needs to eat right now or like, you know, instead of saying, I need to eat this is my body. This is me. There's no, there's no my body without me. Yeah, there's no, me without

**AUSLYN**

it's not a separate entity.

**ALEX**

So taking care of yourself means taking care of your whole self.

**CHAD**

Well, that definitely hits on another kind of trendy linguistic turn and how we've come to understand our bodies, which is namely, the idea of body positivity. Yeah. Which was a big movement, five-ish years ago. Yeah. And now that's morphing into something that people are terming body neutrality. So I guess, Alex,



in your perspective, how have you seen this shift between claiming maybe even reclaiming yourself and your body and not bifurcating the two? And where the conversation is heading now?

**ALEX**

Yeah, well, in working out, there's now that I'm older and stuff, and I'm trying to, you know, realizing that everything is connected with myself, when I work out, I'm no longer trying to look a certain way, I'm trying to take care of myself, you know, I would rather have a healthy back, and a little bit of jiggle, then, not be able to, you know, show up, but with whatever body shape I want. So taking that into account, that- it's about what I, how I'm living, and the way that I'm moving through life is what I want to be focusing on. And not just what I see in pictures, or in the mirror.

**AUSLYN**

Yeah, I felt the same way. Alex, it's like reclaiming yourself, you know, what I mean? And, and through your mind, because, like you said, with the exercise, you know, before, when you probably used to exercise, at least for me, exercising extends to achieve a particular thing, or like you're going on vacation, so you need to like lose, like 10 pounds or so. So those things, instead of doing that just maintaining a healthy, like a healthy lifestyle overall. And just doing this because you want to feel good, not necessarily look a particular way. I felt like as far as body positivity. Now, there's been, like you said, more of a push for the body neutrality. Like if you look in social media to see how Lizzo has been so open, and, you know, has been pretty much spreading the word through her own, like self-love and confidence. And I feel like that is so refreshing to see. I've also seen a lot of clothing companies starting to- like us, right? We have sizes that are more inclusive. So a lot of when you go online is a plus size is no longer a size ten Or a size eight, you know, it's, what is the plus size anyway? You know what I mean? Correct? Correct? You're gonna say something?

**ALEX**

Oh, I was gonna say with Lizzo, she is very open on her social media, and least she'll do things like working out and be like, I'm working out because this is how I take care of myself, I'm not working out because I'm trying to look a certain way, or I'm making this meal for myself, because it sounds really good. And it's not because I have different goals. My goals are to enjoy this meal. And I think that's like a really,-

**AUSLYN**

And yeah she has like, a huge following, you know, on social media. So can you imagine the positive impact that would have on anyone who was struggling, or just in general. So I felt like I, when I see that, it's, it's so refreshing to see. And then, you know, just knowing that more clothing companies as opposed to before, where you couldn't get a size over like a four or six, in a particular style, it's more, it's more inclusive.

**ALEX**

And one of the ways that is really helpful is like, if you're on Tik Tok or Instagram, and you follow different accounts that are more fashion based, following different accounts that have similar body types to you. Yeah, does a world of good like, you know, because, you know, they're having specific conversations or mentioning things that are directly applicable to your life and where you're at. And so I think finding people that look like you on social media is an accurate representation of yourself, but also an accurate representation of the world we live in, you know, so much of media has such a narrow representation, Somebody who is, X amount of weight and X amount of height is such a narrow perspective on the world. So finding things that reflect you helps you view the world more accurately.

[music playing]

**BECKY EBERT:** Hi there, it's Becky Ebert, TWLOHA's editor and producer. I want to talk to you for a moment about something specific: T-shirts. To Write Love on Her Arms has always sold t-shirts as a way to help fund our mission—the mission of hope and help. But the products we sell in our store do so much more than help us financially. Each piece of merchandise is a conversation starter. It spreads the TWLOHA message to someone who may not have found out about us otherwise. So whether you wear our shirts, hats, hoodies, or rain jackets, we want to thank you for bringing a message of hope and help wherever you go. To see our latest designs, head to [store.twloha.com](http://store.twloha.com) now and use the promo code **PODCAST20** to receive 20% off your entire order.

[music playing]

**CHAD**

I mean, just really wanting to hang out a little bit more on this body positivity versus body neutrality and, and realizing that mental health touches on every aspect of your existence, right, like, the way that you view your body, the way that you nourish your body is a mental health conversation, the way that you even interpret celebrity, whether that is people of influence that you follow on social media, or celebrities that you see on the big screens and in newspapers and magazines, no one reads newspapers anymore, but but, you know, that is a mental health conversation. And, you know, it's easy to point out the, the success stories of Lizzo. In many ways, when there was that flowing tide of people body shaming her when she just got famous for writing great songs and her saying, look like, don't look at me and tell me that I'm out of shape, because I dare you to play flute while dancing during fifty-minute sets, you know, in

**ALEX**

Or you know, stop calling me brave for just existing

**CHAD**

So I think that's- Lizzo did a great job, I think of passing this torch between body positivity to neutrality. It's, this is just the me yeah, this is just my body in real life. Is it the same body that I had when I was 17? Well, in some ways, yes. And in some ways, no, I'm probably paraphrasing the wrong stat here, but I feel like I remember reading somewhere that the human body after every seven ish years, all your cells have been replaced, you are a new version of yourself. And it's unrealistic to hold yourself to a beauty standard, a physical health standard, you know, any sort of standard that is seven years removed because that's just not you

**ALEX**

Or like, you know, we're - puberty, and typically in your 20s, you know, so a lot of people are trying to compare themselves to, you know, how their metabolism that they had, when they were a teenager, or when they were in college, and it's just, that's not, your body was not done growing you, you didn't have enough wrinkles on your brain to like, and your body was just still developing physically and mentally in up until your mid-20s. So, of course, things should change they're supposed to, you know

**AUSLYN**

But when we live in a world where everything is filtered, and everything is we're, you know,

**ALEX**

We're a commodity,

**AUSLYN**

Correct, it makes it difficult to feel like your body is going to change, it makes it difficult to think that's a -that's a realistic standard, when everything that you're seeing is filled, you know, you got the fillers, you got the you know what I mean? So it's that that's the I think that's the difficult part of, or the challenges that a lot of our, our young people are facing, or just society's facing right now. You know, do I get the wrinkles, am I going to get the wrinkles, what does that look like as opposed to—

**CHAD**

And what does that mean? Right. So, we you were just saying, you know, especially with the younger generation, we know, for a fact, this has been documented that the suicide rate, especially within teenage young women is on the rise or has been on the rise, and in recent years. And we know this is a demographic that is highly susceptible to marketing machines that deal with body image and beauty and attractiveness standards. And I guess, you know, to what degree as as a mother of a preteen, to what degree are you seeing the rubber hit the road and how to care for the youngest and literally the most vulnerable among us,

**AUSLYN**

Man. So this is like a it's multifaceted, right? Because I have a black daughter. And so growing up, she's seeing people around her that look different. And so a lot of her questions back then when she was maybe like three and four were around like, Well, why does my hair look like this? And why does- should my hair look like this? Because this looks prettier. And so starting those conversations from early right and what we used to do because she never felt pretty, because she felt like she should have looked like something else, or the people around her. And so I'm having those conversations, we started doing this, like affirmations. So I would like, hold her up, she was tiny, hold her up, put on top of the bathroom counter, and we're looking in the mirror and we're, you're beautiful, you are loved, you are, you know, amazing. you're intelligent, you're a beautiful black girl, like just starting to really like drive those things in her, so that she can- it can help build her confidence and see- see what we see also. So that was for me, because this started like, no one ever has this little handbook for like being a parent, you know what I mean? There's a handbook for like, what -What to Expect When You're Expecting, but after you expect it, you have to have the thing, what do you do with the thing? So there's no handbook. And so I think I never expected for those questions to start coming up when she was three years old. But it's the reality, right? And I think just having those conversations with her when she's that young. And as she's starting to view herself the way that others are probably starting to view her too. having those conversations, you know, talking about, hey, how do you feel? You know, when I do hair sometimes it's like, kinda like I hear like this. And I'm like, why? You know, and we'll have conversations about just kind of like what she sees, hey, what do you see, when you look in the mirror, Eva, you know, and she'll tell me, I see a beautiful black girl, and I'm intelligent, I am there, you know, and we repeat these things all the time, because it's so important.

**CHAD**

You hit on so many great, great points there. And I think you know, kind of chief among it is when we're talking about body image, oftentimes it gets limited to just a conversation of weight. BMI. Yeah, but we're talking about how comfortable we feel with different levels of melanination in our skin. Yes. Correct. hair textures, height? Yes. abilities, these are all pieces of it. And Alex, you mentioned earlier, look, there's nearly 8 billion people on the planet, and we're gonna pick the tiniest fraction of the smallest percentage, to say, this is beautiful. This is what we should look like, this is aspirational.

**AUSLYN**

To go back on your point of generational things. I remember, a couple of years ago, I was having a conversation with a friend of mine. And we went to the gym together. And she said to me, she said Auslyn, you know, yeah, I have body image issues. And she said, but I feel like it stems from when I was when I was a child, she's a part of like, the Hispanic community. And she said, Listen, I remember my parents used to put food in front of me, and I could not leave the table unless I ate all of it. You know, and so sometimes she will just eat until she throws up because it was just so much food, but she she had to eat it all in that setting. And when I say to bounce back to the conversations with with my daughter, if she's - she's full, she's full, The things that I've learned, I think over the years, you know, just interacting with people and just learning about other people's experiences. I just don't want- if I want for her to be able to tell me, Hey, this is enough for me. this is this is how I feel. Because I don't want for her to feel like she has to internalize any of that or deal with that on her own. I'll feel forced into a particular thing, you know, and then, you know, let's say she were to gain weight and then she's gonna feel bad about that. Or if she wants to lose weight, she's gonna feel bad. I want for her to feel comfortable and confident with who she is and be able to say no, you know, so So yeah,

### **CHAD**

And Alex kind of with you, I know, one thing that you're supremely proud of is being an uncle and seeing a younger generation grow up literally before your eyes. I mean, what a joy to live in physical proximity to, to these young people that you love. Have you seen even at the young ages of, of, you know, the next generation of your family, have you seen celebrity culture, warp or influence the lens of how your family sees themselves?

### **ALEX**

Um, not necessarily, they're still very much in animated films. So, I think they're aware that those kinds of animations are not realistic, or, or reflections of reality in their lives. But, you know, again, it's one of those things where you have to model the behavior that they want, that you want to see out of them, you know, you have to show them the tools that you are using, and eventually trust that they will be able to use those tools themselves

### **CHAD**

in some way. You're the celebrity, you're like, you're the one that they look up to, you're the one whose approval they ultimately won. Yeah, what a gift to, to be on the the teaching side of it instead of just the receiving side.

### **CHAD**

I love that this conversation even though we're not experts in the field of psychology and physiology and the interplay there in this is a conversation that I believe we all literally have a seat at the table for, like, because we're all human. We all do have bodies, as it turns out. I guess back to Marvel, Arnim Zola is the only one that doesn't. We talked a lot about devices associated with social media about how this can give us unrealistic expectations and unrealistic models in every way that can be meant and how we view ourselves and how we just understand what a body is. But we've also been able to see tremendous good come from it. Alex, you were mentioning earlier about how you have the ability to follow people that look like you people that think like you people that are on a similar journey, as you so I guess, you know, just kind of paying homage to the diversity that is laid out in front of us in terms of the human experience of the body, what's something that, was a literal culture shock for you in the years before social media, you you go to a new place, and all of a sudden, they're new, new standards. So I guess, through that lens, how have you all seen social media really rise to the occasion to elevate the conversation about mental health and body and body image almost combating the myths that we've were handed when we were younger about celebrity culture? And what we should hopefully look like?

**ALEX**

Yeah I think there are so many different ways that it can show up, there's so many different fitness influencers on Tik Tok or Instagram, who are, you know, in their early 20s, who have not lived through, major changes in their bodies, but there are also, you know, fitness influencers, who are mothers who are, training for a marathon, and it's like, you know, I'm running a marathon, and this is what my body looks like, but I'm still competing in a marathon. Yeah, things like that, where, you know, again, it's more about focusing on the life that they're living and the goals that they have, and not simply about how they look has really benefited.

**AUSLYN**

I think so too. Just even outside of the fitness instructors and stuff, you get to see like, individuals have different abilities also, you know. I think outside of the body stuff, there's so many more things that you can view on social media, that you don't have to just be so tuned in to one particular thing. You know, I guess, the algorithm, does it's thing.

**ALEX**

Yeah the algorithm, you know, again, it's very responsive. So as you were saying, you can invest more time and energy into different kinds of media, besides just bodies, you know, if you want to spend time reading about history on TikTok you can do that, or if you want to spend time, learning different skills, learning different hobbies, it is a great platform for that. And it's not all about just the visual aesthetics of the human body, it can be more experience based or knowledge based, or education, whatever.

**AUSLYN**

So I think it's just really the way how the person utilizes social media that you can maybe, and just tap into, like different aspects of it, where you're not necessarily looking at one specific area. I think that that's probably a more healthy way to view social media, you know, in general, have that, like more positive experience,

**ALEX**

and, you know, social media is, from its conception, it was supposed to connect your friends, or loved ones. So, you know, spend time just interacting with people again, or, you know, messaging back and forth, rather than, you know, just trying to live up to certain standards. Yeah.

**CHAD**

I mean, just amens abound, just kind of interrogating the why, you know, certain things are stealing that much of our emotional and mental bandwidth. I mean, it won't affect my life in any way. If a stranger sees a picture of me and one says looks in shape and the other says got a lot of work to do, you know, and these are conversations that are happening already without me without me knowing. And, and I'm, I'm fine. And you know, I think that's coming from a seat of privilege, right? Like, I've been able, I've had the ability to do a lot of inner work and really ask the tough questions about how I view me, what are the parts of me that I care most about? Is it the way I look? Is it the way I dress? Is it the people I surround myself with? Is it the books I'm reading? Is it the ways I care for my body, my mind, my heart, my community. And in all of this, we hope that you hear that it's okay to still be trapped. It's okay to still feel stuck in some of these cycles. These are cycles that are familiar, and I think in many ways, cycles that were designed to keep you there. But it's our hope that, that, as we're speaking to each other, as we're speaking to the camera, as we're speaking to you all that are watching and listening. What we care about is you being here. And if you're looking for ways that you can increase your levels of health, emotionally, habitually,

behaviorally, physically, you name it, we stand in your corner as as you make decisions, hopefully, under wise guidance, to continue your sense of thriving to continue. Yeah, waking up tomorrow.

**AUSLYN**

Yeah, for sure.

**CHAD**

Any other closing thoughts, maybe things that you wish you, you could say to a previous iteration of yourself

**ALEX**

I mean, I look at old pictures of myself and just, you know, wish you could hug yourself when I was very insecure about my physical appearance and you know, wish I could tell myself, you still have so many friends, you're still doing classes and stuff, you're still living a good life. And your body's fine, you know?

**AUSLYN**

So, yeah, for me, if I were to look back at my own self in that moment, or that period of time, I'd probably just tell her you are okay with the way you are, and people are going to love and accept you as who you are anyway, So just be yourself.

**CHAD**

Yeah, our, our dear friend, Claire, gifted us the words that actually are right above your head. Alex, the world needs your presence, not your perfection. Yeah, sure. And actually, those were words that were pinned in solidarity with a specific celebrity, who has been very public about their body dysmorphia over the years. And this was meant to say, look at as much as it's true for that famous person and it can be true for anyone reading that.

**AUSLYN**

I remember when I saw those words, I was just like, oh my gosh, like this is I need to hear this in this moment. This is This is amazing. Yeah. Yeah.

**CHAD**

Especially because we established perfection is a moving goalpost. Yeah.

**ALEX**

And also, as a designer, perfection is boring. Oh, and imperfection is so much more interesting and so much more usable.

**AUSLYN**

I feel like that's where the magic happens almost.

**ALEX**

Absolutely.

**CHAD**

That's that a preach

**ALEX**

That hits on so many levels, right, I've studied, not in depth, but as much as social media would let me study at the moment, you know, ideas of Asian aesthetics, this idea of wabi sabi, which is finding beauty in the imperfections, the asymmetry of it all, the idea of Kintsugi which is the gluing back together of ceramics with gold, the idea is drawing your eye to an imperfection, but that makes it unique. Yeah. And yeah, just man, if that can be true of design, then people make design people interact with design, it can be true for you as well.

[music playing]

**CHAD:** To both Alex and Auslyn, we thank you for your time and energy. We also want to thank you for your vulnerability. These topics impact basically anyone and everyone who has a body, but we recognize that talking about our personal experiences and journeys—which are always ongoing—can feel intimidating. Your courage and willingness to be transparent are not things we take lightly.

And thank you, to you, our listener, also with a body, we are so glad you're here. We know how tumultuous being stuck in a negative-thought cycle when it comes to appearance can be. It takes up residence in your head and elsewhere. Just know that you are not alone and internal change is possible through help and healing.

[music playing]

**CHAD:** We hope this episode has been a reminder, that your story is important, you matter, and that you're not alone.

If you're struggling right now, know that it's OK to reach out, and that there are people who want to help. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources on our website [twloha.com](http://twloha.com). That's T-W-L-O-H-A.com. And Click FIND HELP at the top of the page.

If you're in the US or Canada, and need to talk to someone right now, you can always text our friends at Crisis Text Line. Simply text the word TWLOHA— again, that's T W L O H A—to 741741. You'll be connected to a crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7. For a list of crisis support resources for listeners living outside of the United States, please visit [TWLOHA.com](http://TWLOHA.com) and click on the International Resources tab.

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A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. The To Write Love on Her Arms podcast is produced by Rebecca Ebert. Music assistance was provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor. And again, I'm Chad Moses, thank you so much for listening. We're glad you're here.