

Ep #17: Shame and Anti-Racism



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With Your Host

Natalie Brown

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This is *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown, episode 17.

Welcome to *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown. If you're a successful woman who is ready to stop struggling with your weight, you're in the right place. You'll learn everything you need to know to lose weight for the last time in bitesize pieces. Here's your host, certified life and weight coach Natalie Brown.

Hey everybody. When it comes to weight loss and our minds, I know some things. I even consider myself an expert in this arena. When it comes to racism and anti-racism, I am far from it. Until recently, I didn't even know anti-racism was a thing. I just claimed to be not racist, which is really code for ignorant, uneducated, unaware, in denial, and frankly, racist.

But I am committed to becoming anti-racist. I know that starts with facing my own racism and racist thinking, educating myself, increasing my understanding, acknowledging and then using my privilege to make meaningful change in myself, in my family, and this country.

But there has been a Mount Everest sized obstacle standing in my way of doing that, and that's shame. I have felt so much shame over the years of the racism I saw in America, shame about the history of our country, shame about slavery and segregation and police brutality and so much more. I've always wanted to believe that I was not a part of the problem because I wasn't acting racist or feeling racist.

I love humans. I'm for kindness and more love in the world. But not outwardly acting racist, the way I saw other people acting racist, and not feeling racist openly in my heart excludes the most important component of racism, which is our thinking.

I am a white middle-class female in America. I have lived and breathed the racist thoughts of this system all of my life. The insidious, underpinnings of the society I was raised in have been racist since its inception. There were people screaming these truths from the rooftops everywhere, but I chose to close my eyes and ears to it, which is where the shame comes in.

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So fascinating that the signal I missed was the shame. Any time shame is present, it means we're internalizing it, taking it personally, making it mean something about us. The shame I felt about the racism I did choose to see and hear came from the reality that deep down, I felt a personal responsibility for it.

Another thing about shame, it craves hiding. It wants us to crawl back into bed and pull the covers up. It wants us to hide in the pantry and eat chocolate. It wants us to look the other way when we see people in pain and believe we have no control. So that's what I did.

I chose to believe that racism was someone else's problem to solve, that I was going to not be racist in my heart and that was the part I could play, the contribution I would make. But now I know, having love in my heart for all people is not enough, and it's not even real love if I'm not willing to look at their pain and suffering and do something.

Maya Angelou wisely said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." So that's where I sit today. I know a little better, so I'm committed to doing better. I have waves of shame wash over me all day as I'm listening to black voices and learning about history and opening my eyes and heart to so many things I've chosen to ignore.

Shame that makes me want to turn off my computer and stop listening and scroll past certain posts and pretend it's not happening. Shame that makes me want to get small and be still until the shame goes away. Shame is a feeling that comes from our thinking and our feelings drive us to action.

When shame is the fuel driving our actions, sometimes that looks like hiding. Not speaking up for fear of not saying the right thing, rationalizing all static actions that don't get us anywhere. And sometimes, it looks like speaking without thinking, or throwing money at a cause, just to get credit for helping. Actions that also get us nowhere closer to anti-racist.

Because becoming anti-racist is an active and conscious effort to work against the multidimensional aspects of racism, according to Professor

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Robert J. Patterson. The conscious part starts with our thinking. Now, if you've been listening to previous episodes, you know the most powerful tool we have to raise consciousness of our thinking is a quality question.

It's time that we question everything. Everything we know about our country, our communities, our selves. We need to recognize and become aware of our own racist thinking, our privilege, and how racism shows up in our thoughts, our language, our actions, our families, and the system at large.

We need to listen to opposing viewpoints, notice where we have resistance, and wonder why. Just like we question why we eat, not just what we eat, to gain understanding of the underlying thoughts and feelings driving our weight loss, we want to question why we think the way we do about other humans and equality and suffering and racism. All of it.

Our toddler brains don't want to do this work because it means inviting discomfort in to stay for a while. It means sitting with shame and sorrow and grief and outrage and disbelief, opening up to regret and horror and sadness. Our toddler brains want to avoid discomfort, scroll past it, look the other way, so we don't have to feel it.

But as Rachel Cargle so succinctly put it, "Showing up often means not standing for racism anytime, anywhere. It's high time that we all be committed to creating environments where racists are the ones who are uncomfortable." So that's where I'm at.

I'm leaning into the discomfort of changing who I am and how I've shown up in the world so that I can be a better human and make a meaningful change in the world outside of me too. I'm sharing in the show notes some of the resources I am studying.

I'm starting with me and my racist thoughts and with the real American history. Not the white-washed version I was taught. And I'm listening to wise and wonderful black voices everywhere I can. This list, my list of resources is in no way a comprehensive or essential one.

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I think we all need to take responsibility for our own learning and there's no one size fits all anti-racist education plan. But there is a wealth of knowledge and information available to all of us and no wrong way to go about navigating it for ourselves.

The most important part is that we all just get going. Start listening, asking questions of yourself about what you hear, and you'll find your way. I also want to encourage you to support black educators, authors, artists, activists, and causes. Sign up for courses, buy books, and research organizations that you can donate to or join or support.

I will be sharing my education and my mind's evolution on my social media accounts. Not to center my experience but because I know there are those of you like me out there, privileged, unaware, and ashamed. And I want to encourage you to open up to and move through the discomfort of facing your racism for the awesomeness of experiencing your full participation in humanity that waits on the other side with all of its beauty and pain.

I want to leave you with a poem by one of my favorite black artists, Morgan Harder Nichols. I encourage you to check out her Instagram, scroll through everything, read all the words and all the beautiful art and you can find her just at her name, Morgan Harper Nichols. And purchase a print or two from her. I just bought a mug. So excited to drink tea out of. Okay, thank you for these words, by the way, Morgan.

“Engage in the long, faithful work. Surrender the need of striving to be the best or always right and focus instead on leaning into light that reveals all things. All that is good and all that stands to be corrected and redirected.

And as you lean into light, be gentle with the word darkness. For more than it merely means wrong or bad, it is also the color of a full starless night sky, and actual bodies of human beings who have been overlooked too many times. Many, many words hold more than one meaning.

Language on light and dark may have its place, and this is also true, this very language has been used to say, you're a threat. I am not. I am worth

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more than you. It takes kindness to understand this, for even though kindness is a beautiful word, it does not mean that nothing gets disrupted.

Sometimes, a way of thinking must be interrupted in order for kindness to truly thrive. For as sure as kindness leans into what is good, it also speaks about what isn't right. It is also compassionate and gentle when long histories are pulled from mourning into morning.

Engage in the long, faithful work of awakening with your heart and mind open to the possibility that things are more complex than they once seemed. And as hard as it is to hold all of this, you are still free to dream. You do not have to be who you used to be. You do not have to think the way you used to think. You are free to take hopeful, thoughtful action in pursuit of better things.

So here's to new beginnings, knowing it is impossible to ignore the long history, opening up to the mystery that grace still finds you here. And grace is unmerited favor, but it might not always look the way you want it to. It will invite you out into the open and it will also reveal what has been broken.

You might have to unlearn the way you thought things would be. You might find that being undone is the best way to move on humbly, mindfully, wholly. For how liberating it is to pursue wholeness over perfection. Finding that grace is more than a beautiful word, but a daily act of being undone, an awakening, a direction.

I love you all so much and I'll see you soon.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Weight Loss Success* with Natalie Brown. If you want to learn more about how to lose weight for the last time, come on over to itbeginswithathought.com. We'll see you here next week.