



EPISODE NO. 347

How to Overcome Appearance Obstacles

Is there something about your appearance you don't like? Maybe it's a certain body feature or maybe it's the aging process. But when you look in the mirror, you're not happy with what you see. If that is you, then this episode is for you. I'm talking about how to overcome appearance obstacles. So let's dive in.

Welcome to the School of Self-Image where personal development meets style. Here's your hostess, Master Life Coach Tonya Leigh.

Hello, my gorgeous friends. Welcome to another episode of the School of Self-Image podcast. I'm feeling good today. I am in Sausalito, California, and it is gorgeous. It was not in our plans to stay in Sausalito, but it just turned out that we had some extra time. And so we decided to come over here and we got the last, I think it was probably the last room in Sausalito. So my room doesn't have the best view. However, it has a little alcove with a desk with a small window. And so when I look to my right, I can see the water and it just makes my heart so happy.

We really do live in a beautiful place. And I hope that you all stop and look around for the beauty that surrounds you. But more importantly, I want you to look for the beauty within yourself. And that brings me to today's topic. I want to talk about overcoming appearance obstacles. What is an appearance obstacle? Well, it's when you think your appearance or some part of your appearance is holding you back from feeling the way

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you want to feel or accomplishing what you want to accomplish. What I have discovered is that appearance obstacles are simply thinking obstacles. Yep. It's your thoughts, my friends. And still, I understand how difficult it is to change your thoughts about a part of yourself that you don't like.

A great example is for many years, I did not like my stretch marks. I have stretch marks from my belly to my mid thigh. And I used to believe that it was my stretch marks that was causing me to feel insecure. And that made me less beautiful, made me less perfect. And so if I could just get rid of those stretch marks, my life would be amazing. And I know some of you all have thought something similar about some part of your body. And so I would buy all of these creams and potions and I would exfoliate and I would try desperately to get rid of these stretch marks. And they didn't go anywhere. And so I was like, OK, I can either spend the rest of my life arguing with these stretch marks or I can figure out how to make peace with them. And so I started to notice my thoughts about my stretch marks and the thoughts that I had were they're ugly and they're unacceptable, meaning they're not acceptable as beautiful according to society, i.e. the media. And that's what I realized, because one day I was asking myself, why do I think they're so unacceptable? And it's because everything that I was seeing as beautiful was these perfectly photoshopped models who looked like they had satin for skin.

Many of these women had stretch marks, but I didn't see them because I wasn't seeing that version, that real life version of them. I was seeing the very edited version of their bodies. But I'll never forget reading an article about a supermodel and I can't remember which one it was, but she talked openly about her body and its perceived flaws. She had cellulite, she had stretch marks, and she was talking about the process of how they go about photoshopping. And she talked about her journey of learning to love herself, because even for her, she was looking at pictures of herself that didn't look like the real her. And so it made her feel like her real body wasn't good enough because they had to change it to present it to the world. And I'll never forget just reading that article and thinking, oh my God, even these women that I think are so perfect are not loving themselves because they're human and they have very beautiful human bodies. And I realized I could spend a lifetime hating on my body, resisting my body, or I could do the deep work of learning how to love my body as it is. And that's been an ongoing journey for many, many years. And what I can share with you all is as I get older, I have to do more of this work.

Because what's really interesting for me, and I don't think my mom went through this or our mothers and grandmothers went through this because we didn't have social

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media with this real life, ongoing journal of ourselves and pictures. Like our grandmothers would have occasional pictures at holidays and celebrations maybe, but they didn't have pictures of themselves every single day that maybe they had a filter on. Maybe they had professional makeup done. And so they're looking really amazing. And then all of a sudden you get older and you're looking at yourself five years ago, 10 years ago, and you're like, oh my goodness, I'm seeing things that were not there five or 10 years ago. And so aging online is a real thing. And so the other day I noticed I'm like, oh wait, my chin has dropped a little bit. Y'all know what I'm talking about.

If you look at it from the side, it's like, oh, it's hanging. It wasn't doing that a couple years ago. The texture of your skin changes. The texture of your hair changes. No one told me that, that my hair texture would change. And so I'm dealing with all of these changes in my body and I'm noticing that my brain wants to present them as a problem. My brain is telling me that this isn't acceptable. The JLo isn't aging like this. So why should I? And because I've gone through this so many times, I have to remember and remind myself, oh wait, the photos I'm seeing of JLo are probably edited. Although JLo looks amazing. I'm not going to take that from her because she looks good and JLo works hard. But there are so many factors involved. And when the world around us becomes altered and we're not seeing real life pictures, then we start to think that we need to alter ourselves. And so I want to have just an open conversation about this because I was actually just coaching someone within the membership on this. And she's like, listen, I know it's my brain.

I know that it's my thinking around aging that's causing me to freak out, but I'm having a hard time changing it. And she's not alone. My brain wants to resist the idea that all I need to do is change my thinking and I can find happiness. And so what do we do here? Like, how do we approach these appearance obstacles? And I want to share with you how I'm approaching them. Because there are things that we can change. There are things within our control that we can do to change our appearance. We see people doing them all of the time. You can get a facelift, you can get a nose job, you can get all kinds of enhancements. You can get fillers, you can get Botox, you can get implants. And so we can literally change just about every part of our body if we choose to. But is that the answer? And I'm not here to tell you what your answer should be because I don't know for you.

There have been cases where people do change their appearance through different measures and they experience life changing results. There are also cases where people change their appearance and they're no happier than they were before. In fact, some are less happy because they realize, whoa, that wasn't the answer. Cost me a lot of

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money and I'm still not happy. What's going on here? And so it's not a black and white cut and dry kind of answer. It's an exploration into our motivating factors. It's an exploration of why we're doing it and what we are truly after.

One of my favorite books that was a game changer for me, it was a life changing book, is a book called Psycho Cybernetics by Maxwell Maltz. And he was a plastic surgeon who did a lot of studying and thinking on this topic of changing our physical appearance. It was his job to help people change their physical appearance. And so what he noticed is that some people, whenever he would do a surgery and alter their physical appearance, would have an immediate boost and self-esteem and self-confidence. And it would have such a positive impact on their lives. And so initially he thought, oh, this is the answer. If I can just transform my patient's physical appearance, they're going to think more positively and they're going to show up in the world differently and have more success.

However, his theory didn't hold up because he also noticed that some of his patients show no change in their personalities after surgery. They continue to think and feel and act exactly as they did before surgery. Nothing changed. Their outward appearance changed and sometimes drastically, but they didn't feel any happier or see themselves differently. And so their level of success didn't improve. So what Maltz concluded was that self-perception is far more important to success than physical appearance. So the key to improving yourself and to reaching your goals and to have a more fulfilling and successful life, whatever success looks like for you, is not simply to change the external circumstance, but you have to change the negative thought patterns that cause you to see yourself in unhealthy and unsuccessful ways. And so this is where we get it wrong. How many of you at one point changed something about your appearance and you may have felt a little bit better for a moment, but you went right back to feeling negative about yourself.

An example from my own life is that I lost a bunch of weight and I thought in losing that weight, it would be the secret that I would miraculously wake up and feel amazing. So I changed my external appearance, but I didn't remove the negative perception of myself. I still thought of myself in a very negative way. And so I wasn't any happier changing the circumstance, changing my outside appearance didn't change the inside. And that's what Maltz discovered. The true key to happiness is changing your inner world. Your self image defines your experience, not your appearance. There are many people right now who look the way you want to look and you think if I could just look like that, I would be so much happier. I would be

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successful. I would be confident. And they are not. Why? Because of their thoughts about themselves.

Now, you may be thinking, but Tanya, what are you saying? We shouldn't try to change how we look. We should just accept it and work on our thoughts around it. Listen, I don't know what you should do. What I'm suggesting, though, is that just changing your appearance is not the answer. You have to also change your thoughts about yourself. And as Maltz concluded, as he discovered in his work as a plastic surgeon, changing your appearance alone is not the answer.

Now, changing your appearance and using that change to help you think new thoughts about yourself. That can work. And it's worked for many people. It's worked for me. I know it's very hard for me to think amazing thoughts about myself when I'm not eating well and I've neglected myself and maybe my hair is looking a mess. Could I think amazing thoughts about myself? Yes. But it's going to be a lot more difficult. It's going to require a lot of effort versus when I eat well, when I exercise, when I'm taking care of my physical body, when I'm doing my hair and I'm doing my makeup and, you know, taking care of my appearance.

It is so much easier to think more positive thoughts about myself. And so the way I approach this is I think about what can I change and what can't I change? Now, this is where it gets really tricky, y'all, because in this day and age, you can change just about everything. Right. So, for example, I can look at my neck and I can say, can I change this? And the answer is yes. OK, what is going to be required to change this? Probably surgery. And then I can ask myself, do I want to go through surgery to change this? And the answer is no. And so then the next step is, well, you got to make peace with it. And so then I start working on how can I accept it? How can I love it? And we'll talk about that in a moment. And so write down everything that you're not happy with, with your appearance. Once you've done that, I want you to go through each thing on that list and ask yourself, can I change it? If you are five, four and you are unhappy about that, you would rather be six feet tall. You can't change that. That is unchangeable.

We can't change our ethnicity. We can't change our hair texture, even though I tried. I want to curly hair so bad. And so I remember back in the day, do you remember perms? I guess you can change your hair texture a little bit. Can't change the texture, but you can change the curl. I digress. There are certain things physically we cannot change, although in today's age, as I was saying, you can change a lot of things. So you may come upon something that you're like, I can change this. Then you're going to have to ask yourself, how would I go about changing this? For some of you, it may be a lifestyle

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change. Maybe working out, maybe eating healthier will help you create a physical change. For some of you, the answers may be more invasive. Maybe it's getting Botox or getting a surgery. So when you think about changing your physical appearance, you can ask yourself questions like, does this change align with my personal values and goals? So let's just play around with an example.

Let's say that your desired change is to fix your neck and sagging skin on your face. And you've done your research and you realize the only way I'm going to be able to do this is to get a facelift. And they are quoting me \$75,000 for this facelift. And you look at your savings account and you realize, ah, this is going to really stretch me. And you think about your personal value of security and wealth. You may decide, you know what, this doesn't align with my personal values. And you can make peace. It's a no for me. You can also ask yourself, do I have a realistic understanding of the effort, the resources and the potential risk involved in making this change? Because you need to decide if it's worth it for you. Do you really want to put in the effort? Do you really want to spend that money? Do you are you willing to make peace with the worst thing that could happen if something goes wrong? You have to decide that.

Another really useful question is, am I considering this change for myself or am I doing it to meet some societal or external expectation? Now, when you think about this and you get really honest with yourself, a lot of you are going to realize that the reason why you're wanting to make a change is because of what society has told you is beautiful. And is it worth it? You making this change to meet some expectation that's always changing? Have you noticed it used to be really trendy to be skinny and it became very trendy to be curvy. You know, what's going to be next? That's when I was like, I'm just going to embrace myself because if not, I'm going to have to change every decade to keep up. And hopefully my decade will come that it's trendy to be my body type. But I just didn't want to play that game. And as I am aging, I'm asking myself this question. What is for myself and what am I doing to meet societal and external expectations? And to be honest, a little bit of both. Right. Like I'm not going to sit here and say, oh, I only do these things for myself.

I think you see things long enough and you're like, oh, this is what it looks like to be, you know, an almost 50 year old woman. Realizing that what I'm seeing are other 50 year old women who are doing things to try to slow down the aging process. I get Botox. My mom didn't get Botox. And so there are things that we can change. And I've made peace with the things that I have chosen to do. But there are also things that I'm like, I don't want to do that. Like, that's too much for me. And that's OK, too. What I'm wanting you all to understand is that there's no right or wrong. I think there are people

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on both sides of the aisle screaming each other. Like, if you really love yourself, you won't do this. And other people are like, if you love yourself, you will. And I just want us all to take a moment and to answer these questions for ourselves. As Huffy said, between right doing and wrongdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there. And that's where we all need to go to figure out our lives and to figure out what we really, really want to do. And so, you know, just be curious if you're doing this for yourself or if you're doing it to meet some societal or external expectation. And if you decide to do it because of a societal and external expectation, just be honest with yourself.

Tell yourself the truth of that. But then there are things that we cannot change. And there are things that we just will not want to go through what is required to change. And I even encourage you to try to run all of the features about your physical appearance that you don't like through these questions, because I want to spend more time working on loving myself the way I am and enjoying this body I've been blessed with and enjoying aging. And I'm hoping that in doing so, as I age and get older and older, I won't want to do these things because I'm loving myself and I'm appreciating this stage of my life that I'm in. And so ask yourself, how does focusing on things I cannot change impact my self-esteem and overall happiness?

Wanting your appearance to be different and knowing that either A, you don't want to go through what's required to change. Maybe it's a major surgery or it's just something that you can't change or you don't want to put in the effort of changing. Just noticing how wanting it to be different than what it is, how it's impacting your state of happiness. Because at the end of the day, the reason why we want to change anything is because we want to feel better. And I'm just inviting you to consider that you don't need to change anything to feel better.

Another great question is how can I appreciate and value other aspects of myself beyond my physical appearance? Our physical appearance is actually such a small part of who we are. I was having this conversation with Vons this morning. We were talking about this podcast that I was going to be doing today. And I was like, you know what? There's so many more interesting things than our physical appearance. Like when I think about the people I love to be around, it's beyond their physical appearance that I'm so attracted to. It's their laugh. It's their funny mannerisms.

It's their perspective of the world. It's how their brains think. It's the conversations that we have. It's so beyond their physical appearance that I've been around many beautiful people that I'm just bored with. Right? Like to me, what makes someone beautiful is way more than just their physical appearance. It's the whole package. And

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yet we spend so much of our lives just focusing on the shell versus what the shell houses. Like what's inside the shell is the best part. And so many of you all do not spend enough time appreciating and valuing that part of you. The other question I encourage you to ask yourself is how can I shape my environment to make it easier to love myself? One of the core pillars of the school of self-image is our surroundings, because what surrounds us becomes us. And so when we are surrounded by images of perfection that we cannot obtain, even the people in those images can't obtain it. They have to edit them to be this perfect representation. And so when that is our surroundings, when that's our environment, we start to think that that's real. And so

I'm very mindful of what I consume. I'm very mindful what's on my social media. And I love to have diverse representations of beauty. I love to see curvy women. I love to see slimmer women. I love to see women who are ethnically diverse. I love to see women who have different noses and different hair and different shapes and sizes. I like to see all of it. I like to see women who are in their 20s and also in their 70s and 80s. I don't want to consume just one idea of beauty because there is no one ideal of beauty. Beauty comes in all forms and sizes and shapes and colors. And I want to be surrounded by all of it because then it makes me appreciate my contribution to that beauty as a whole.

I also love to surround myself with very positive and healthy examples of aging. And so you get to decide what that looks like for you, because I imagine that many of you listening to this, you're aging. In fact, everyone is. Everyone that's listening to this is aging. But depending on what stage of life you're in, it might be a really hot topic for you right now. It might be something you're very aware of, how your body's changing. And so decide for yourself what it feels like healthy aging to you and make sure that you surround yourself with examples of that.

Finally, the last thing that I want to say about this is to meet yourself where you are. It's very normal to feel frustrated and anxious and worried about your appearance because we live in a very appearance focused society. I was just coaching a woman within the membership recently, and she was like, listen, I know it's my thoughts. I know that's what's going on, but I just can't seem to shake it. And so I just invited her to hang out where she is right now, not to try to change it, to be OK with the anxiety from aging. Because if you ever notice when we try to change something, when we're fighting against and trying to change it just makes it harder to change. And so I just said, hey, what if we just accepted that right now you're having a really difficult time with aging?

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You're having a difficult time with the thoughts that you have around aging and you know what you're thinking. And right now you're having a hard time changing it. And we just hung out there for a while. We don't try to change it, but we just accept. Yeah, it's difficult for me. I really believe that that is the first step to changing it. Like, yeah, aging is hard for me because I'm having a lot of hard thoughts around it. However, at the same time, what I encourage you to do as you're holding space for meeting yourself where you are right now, also begin to celebrate you.

Begin to look beyond your physical appearance, begin to appreciate all of the other amazing things about you and look for the things about your physical appearance that you do love. And as you begin to focus on what's amazing about your appearance, what's amazing about you, what's amazing about growing older because it beats the alternative. And there is an alternative. We just don't grow older. But that means we don't grow older. Right. So as you are accepting where you are and holding space for yourself, at the same time, begin to move in that direction of where you want to go and where you want to go is just to feel better. And no matter what we do, we can get all the surgeries, we can get filler, we can do all the things. But we're all going to age. We're not going to be able to preserve ourselves and stay stuck in time. And I don't think we want to.

At a certain point, we have to be willing to be like, yes, this is part of life. And I'm so grateful for this amazing opportunity to age because some people never, ever experienced this. And so it's a yes. And yes, I'm finding it difficult. And I'm learning how to make peace with it. I'm learning to appreciate other parts of myself. I'm learning to appreciate my own appearance. Just this morning, I'm getting a little emotional thinking about it. I was looking at my face in the mirror and I could hear that little voice saying, oh, my God, look at the neck. Look at those extra lines around your eyes. Like I could hear that. But there was this other voice of like, oh, my goodness, look at you. Look at who you've become. Look at the smiles that you've had and the evidence of those smiles. Look at how beautiful you really are.

Beyond the crow's feet, beyond the little one hanging part of my neck, beyond all of that. Look at the beauty of you. And it's so much more than my face. It's so much more than your face. It's our heart. It's our intentions. It's our love. It's our passions. It's our joys. It's our excitement when we see each other like that is our beauty. The shell will change, my friends. But what's on the inside? That's within our control. And that's something that can get better and more beautiful over time. And so if there's something you want to change about your appearance, be OK with it and like your

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reason for wanting to do it. But also know at the end of the day, any appearance obstacle is just a thinking obstacle.

I want to invite everyone listening to do whatever it takes to love yourself. And if you need to change a part of your appearance, just know that that may not be the answer. Because if you don't change what's going on inside, what's outside will never matter. I would love to hear your thoughts on this topic. Find me on Instagram at Tonya Leigh and let me know what your takeaway was from this episode. And let me know if there's something around your appearance that you are struggling with because you're not alone.

Being a woman in today's world has its challenges and the constant need to be perfect and to look a certain way is definitely one of them. But we can surpass that. We can define what is beautiful for ourselves. And I always encourage you to make sure that your definition of beauty leaves a lot of room for you because you belong in that definition. And I've just decided that beauty goes far beyond the outside appearance. What's on the inside really does matter the most. I know that sounds cliché, but it's true. And so as I take care of my outside appearance to the best that I can, I'm focusing on my inner world and making sure that that feels beautiful. Have a beautiful week, my friends. Love you. And I cannot wait to see you on next week's episode. Cheers.

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