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Hilary: [00:00:00] Hi everyone, and welcome back to the Body Trust Podcast. We are thrilled you're here, and we're thrilled to be here. We have a guest with us today. So excited Dear friend. Long term body truster Trust, amazing human Savala Nolan.

Savala: Oh, thank you for

Hilary: that. Yeah,

Savala: I,

I don't mean to interrupt, but I love the idea of thinking of myself as a long-term body truster as opposed to a former chronic dieter.

Hilary: Yeah.

Savala: Different size at the same point. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. But one, it's way more juicy and beautiful.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Feels more affirming.

Savala: Heck yeah.

Hilary: So, I'm also here with Dana and Sirius Dana.

Dana: Hi.

Hilary: I'm serious.

Dana: Hey everybody,

Hilary: and we are thrilled to be [00:01:00] talking with Savala today about her new book. Good Woman. A Reckoning. It's so good, folks. It's so good. I spent the weekend with it, which was, um, in sharp contrast to also a Super Bowl weekend and then everything else, uh, gesturing wildly, but yes,

it spoke directly to my heart, which was. Challenging when I am not always visiting my heart. Um, because everything's so difficult right now and painful and hard to feel. So thank you Savala for humanizing my weekend

Savala: Anytime, and I'm glad you loved the book. You know, when you book these conversations before someone has read the book, it's always possible that you'll get to the studio and they'll be like, I've got a bone to pick with you about.

You know, and you're welcome to pick any bones you have, but I'm glad that overall you loved the book. [00:02:00]

Hilary: Thank you. Yeah, it was, it was a delight to read. I carried it everywhere with me.

Dana: Seems especially timely given where we're at and all this Epstein files stuff coming out. Mm-hmm. We had the Super Bowl. Um.

One thing we were gonna just touch base about is particularly the Super Bowl and the number of GLP one ads, and I know right in the middle of the game, I think you were maybe still watching the game Savala and you went on and did a very quick social media post or on Instagram about trying to like counter some of the rhetoric we were exposed to.

Mm-hmm.

Savala: I did. Yeah. With, with. With mixed feelings in some ways. You know, Tony Morrison says about racism, that part of the function of racism is to keep us distracted. Mm-hmm. And kind of hustling to prove our [00:03:00] humanity and hustling to counteract it. And so, you know, don't get distracted by it. Don't get too distracted by it.

So I, I always have that in mind when I have this urge to kind of immediately respond to some cultural moment, oh, I'm being distracted. You know, I'm being pulled off my center in order to try and hold up a shield in this direction. But it was so egregious and outrageous, the ads, and especially the Mike Tyson ad, which I think, you know, we'll get into that.

I felt like I just need to throw out. I mean, the post is just like language and concepts around divesting from diet culture. You know, it's not profound. It's not an op-ed, it's things that preexist me that other people have come up with, but I just wanted to share them as a possible handhold or foothold for people who were, um, kind of spiraling in that moment.

Like, oh, there is this thing called health at every [00:04:00] size. You know, there is this thing called weight neutrality, so on and so forth. So, yeah, I did it even though I knew I was being distracted,

Hilary: it was hard not to be distracted. I was, you know, people watch the Super Bowl for the ads.

Savala: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Hilary: Uh, you know, it's considered a place where you might see the best ads, and I was disturbed and blown away by the sheer number of GLP one ads.

I was just like, wow, this, I don't remember, and I might not remember correctly, but there being that many ads targeting the same type of product.

Savala: I noticed that too. I mean, yeah. Oh yeah. Like it in a way though, I wasn't surprised by it, Hillary, because when you watch like a streaming TV with ad breaks, which is what I watch because.

All the [00:05:00] ads are GLP ones. Mm-hmm. I mean, almost all of them.

Hilary: They are. That's true.

Savala: Like two or three per ad break. Mm-hmm. So I feel like I have been sort of plunged into a wormhole back into like the late eighties as far as media consumption goes. Um, and when I watch TV with my daughter, you know, we watch cooking shows and things like that, it's like not a safe relaxing thing anymore because every ad break is gonna feature.

At least two or three attempts to convince me that there's something wrong with me and I'll be happier if I lose weight. And it only costs \$99 a month now, you know, and happily ever after.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Savala: So I wasn't surprised either, but I think you're, you're right that it, it's not typical that one type of product is, or one ideology you could even say mm-hmm.

Is so emphasized with Superbowl ads. The variety is usually kind of the spice of it.

Dana: Mm-hmm. [00:06:00] Yeah.

Sirius: I, I feel like the closest historical parallel is probably right before the tech bubble burst in the late nineties, early two thousands. And there, you know, there's been some. Journalism over time about how that Super Bowl, the ads were taken up by tech companies who had a bunch of money and didn't know what to do with it.

And so we saw some ridiculous things. This feels like a really different animal. Like it's very coordinated. It's, um, it's a, a singular message, I think so a lot your, your spot on around it, participating in a specific ideology. Um, but yeah, like this, it is, it's different. Like it, it, the ads don't show up like this usually.

Um, but I think it speaks so clearly to the moment that we're in this, of, of course this is what's happening right now.

Savala: It's also the government doing it. Mm-hmm. And, you know, I don't remember the government telling [00:07:00] me I was a dumbass if I didn't get in on the, you know, tech boom.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Savala: But the, the Mike Tyson ad last night was sponsored by.

The, the Trump administration effectively, I mean, it was real food.gov mm-hmm. Was the sponsor of the ad. Um, so that is, that is a, that feels like an even heavier hammer coming down than what I am used to anyway.

Sirius: Uh, Google tells me that the director of that ad is the person who directed Melania.

Savala: Indeed it is.

Sirius: Oh, way.

Savala: Yeah. Mm-hmm. I read that this morning.

Sirius: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Hilary: Wow.

Savala: Yeah. So wrapped up in that administration and its ideology and its vision on multiple levels, right? Mm-hmm.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Hilary: And then they tap Mike Tyson.

Sirius: I, I

Dana: long

Savala: silence. [00:08:00]

Sirius: I made a TikTok a while ago. It was when you had that fight with Logan Paul, um, about. Mike Tyson was like the black version of Donald Trump and vice versa. Um, in that they, they both have these like incredibly horrific pasts, particularly including violence against women. They've both sort of failed upwards multiple times, and they are like now beloved figures in American culture.

Even after these, like, actually like super problematic past histories. And I think it's just a matter of degree that like where Mike Tyson sits and where Donald Trump since that's just sort of, um, the white supremacy differential I think. Uh, but like otherwise they have kind of similar paths,

Dana: Yes. Well, and you even, I mean, it makes me think of the essay, which I think it was the Witch Men essay, [00:09:00] um mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Which you made sure, I think. Mm-hmm. An Instagram to say witch, like W-H-I-C-H, which men, yes. Or maybe that was another.

Savala: No, no, no, you're right. And that's, it's not a Halloween story.

Dana: Right.

But that one really talks about the, the realities and research around male sexual violence and challenges. Um, the challenges of naming harm,

Savala: the challenges of naming harm. Um, and I think, you know, for men, perhaps the challenges of even identifying harm. Yeah. I mean, one of the questions that I ask in that essay, um, which is about my experience with sexual assault and, but just a little bit, that's sort of the entry point into it.

It's much more about, um. The, the, the difficulty and the, the pain and the confusion of having no idea which men, you know, may [00:10:00] have committed some form of sexual assault and not really being allowed to ask because of our social training around not upsetting men and because maybe we don't wanna know, right?

Mm-hmm. Like, maybe it's just better not to know some things. Um, and one of the, the, well, it's more than one piece of data. There's a lot of studies that suggest that, um, men or the male participants in the studies at least have trouble identifying when behavior becomes coercive. Um, so. That was alarming. I don't know how much you wanna get into that, but I, I, something tells me Mike Tyson, Mike Tyson, and Donald Trump are not in that cohort.

I think there's a cohort of men who absolutely know when their behavior crosses the line into transgression.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: And they, you know, perhaps even brag about it. Mm-hmm. Um, but I also think there's a sort [00:11:00] of sub cohort of men, which I think is the greater cohort, the larger cohort that actually has trouble identifying sexual assault, unless it's called sexual assault or rape explicitly.

They have trouble understanding, um, what the actions are that constitute that, unless you name it that for them.

Hilary: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And that there's a consequence that there's an impact.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Hilary: On the woman, much less the culture. I don't think they get that at all conveniently. Mm-hmm.

Savala: Conveniently, I think socio, um, it's important for me to drop the little footnote in here that, um, men also experience sexual assault.

Women also perpetrate sexual assault.

Hilary: Yeah.

Savala: And violence. But the, the vast, I mean, over 90% of these incidents are men, um, committed, committing them against women. Mm-hmm. [00:12:00] So, yeah. And of course it all ties into the notion of women's bodies as sort of public property.

Hilary: Yeah.

Savala: As objects for use and, uh, the centering of sort of male power, male pleasure, male prerogatives, um, and the diminishment of female power and pleasure and prerogatives that, you know, have their analogs in diet culture and in body control and all those places.

Hilary: Yeah. Yeah. Do you, I'm wondering if you have such this amazing beginning to your book. I'm wondering if you. I'd be interested sharing it with us here. It feels like they're a good place for it.

Savala: Yeah. I would be very [00:13:00] happy to. Um, this is from the very first chapter, which is called Refusal, and it's about half a page, so readers can, or listeners rather, can kind of understand where they are in the flow of what I'm reading.

Refusal. I refuse to be good. This is a matter of survival, not inclination or mood. I refuse to be easy and I refuse others' preferences. I refuse to be amicable and I refuse to appease. I refuse to go along and I refuse to agree. I refuse to do what I was trained to do. Instead, I choose whatever lies beyond my social conditioning, even if I'm still looking for it, still spurring it into being.

This is work of the mind [00:14:00] cerebral and tough. This is work of new language, new concepts, new intonations, and my thinking must expand to fit the scale of all existence. It is also body work. Work that is nailed to my flesh. It is gestating of new bones and anointing of muscle and fat. It is passing through the somatic black opening of my own cervix to the bright field waiting on the other side in the wilderness.

It is a lot to take on, but I welcome the challenge and the mystery and the darkness. It was in darkness that the universe was made. It is in darkness that each day is made new.[00:15:00]

Where's your church fan, Dana?

Dana: Right.

If Angela was here, she'd be like, snap, snap, snap.

Ooh. Um. Yeah. When you were, you know, you talked about divesting from diet culture and that Instagram post we were mentioning, and it feels like a divestment like that. This book is about divesting from being a good woman. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. From that concept of being a good woman.

Savala: Hell yeah. I think, you know, the question to me is like, should we be good women or should we be something else?

Given that our culture defines goodness when you're female as quiet, pleasing, serving. [00:16:00] Pliable, relationship oriented, giving in control of your body and nothing else. You know, should we be good women or should we be something else? And, uh, the argument I'm very hopefully, clearly making is that we should be something else.

Um, not only that we should, but you know, that we can, I do a lot of kind of unpacking and a little bit of smashing and destroying around the ways that I was socialized as a woman to be good. Um, but I do also, I hope a fair amount of rebuilding, you know, and envisioning. It's like, as much as I wanna take down the process of this gendered socialization, I also.

Want to think about and try to think about how we can build lives that are beyond, like really beyond the goal of being good.

Hilary: Yes.

Savala: And experience lives that are much more complex and [00:17:00] thick and authentic and juicy and satisfying and whole. So yes, this is absolutely a divestment and um, and it is, I hope, a sort of call to creation that sort of divesting and recreating work together.

Ultimately, you know, when, when you're, when they're most effective, I think they work together.

Hilary: It reminds me like through the Body Trust lens of how, you know, folks show up in that, in that reckoning of like, I can't go back to what I was doing before, but I. I don't really know how to go forward and I'm not sure I want to, like, I'm, this isn't super appealing either. And how, um, I think in the like, body liberation, anti-D diet spaces, we talk a lot about [00:18:00] divestment and we talk a lot about what we're not gonna do anymore.

But I don't know that we're always describing what we get from this process. Um, and this passage brought that up for me as you were reading it. You know, that, that we're not describing liberation. I think sometimes we're describing a shared vision of liberated bodies, but, you know, I think there's also a lot to be said about what that looks, um, and feels like, like what exists there.

In my mind, I'm like, well, what doesn't exist there? Like anything? And anything's possible in this, in this state of, um, refusal that you're saying that I'm just not participating anymore. I know that you, well, we introduced you as a long time body truster, and I'm wondering what do you think we get for this [00:19:00] work?

Savala: I'll answer that in a couple of ways. Um, in one chapter in the book, which is probably the chapter that's most, uh, specifically about my history as a dieter and sort of leaving that behind and also raising a daughter and kind of figuring out how do I do this, um, for my child? How do I keep her from having to do what I had to do?

Um, I talk about how there's a way in which when you give up dieting, you become a non woman. Or an UN woman. Yeah.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Savala: And um, so I think that's one of the things that you get and that might sound like, uh, quite alarming and awful or strange or sort of incomprehensible. Um, and it can be at times, I mean, here's, here's what I mean.

Let me like unpack that idea a little bit more. There's a [00:20:00] scholar, Sandra Gilman, who wrote that dieting is a way that women show they understand their role in society. I think that. Women are expected to perform body shame, perform the body project. It's like, uh, considered essential to being female in this culture is to kind of project the right mix of dissatisfaction with your body and like sexiness and to always be performing some sort of dance of control or effort of control while also appearing effortless.

You know, there's this very complicated like tango that we're supposed to be doing at all times, and it's, it's one of the ways that we are legible as women in this culture is that performance. So when you stop, when you stop that performance, um. [00:21:00] You're not acting like a woman in the quote unquote right way.

And so from a cultural perspective, from a kind of mainstream cultural perspective, um, you no longer read as female in quite the same way. And I'm talking, you know, on the normative level here, what you read as instead. I think over time what you read as to yourself and to others is something, um, far more kind of earthy.

And, uh, I hate to use the word natural because it's like misused, but you might say unmodified, untampered with, um, a little more wild. Not in any aesthetic sense. You know, it's not about like bleaching your hair and like, you know, being a bad girl who [00:22:00] flips her hair and looks amazing that way, but like you become something other than what your society recognizes as a woman while still retaining your essence as a woman.

You become something that has a more, um, it's like less swimsuit edition of Sports Illustrated and more like Venus of Willendorf, not even in terms of body type, right? Because your body could look anyway when you stop dieting. But in terms of kind of what you signify to the culture, um. To me that has been a really beautiful process and I really enjoy feeling unmodified and uninterrupted.

Um, I think that is one of the things you get when you stop the performance of being female, is you get a way of being in your femaleness that is uninterrupted [00:23:00] and not so culturally prescribed. I mean, I recently had a, a little birthday celebration at work for a colleague and I brought in some croissants and really gorgeous French pastries and maybe 15 people came through the room.

They all happened to be female. Every one of them. Every one of them. You know what I'm gonna say? Don't you? Every one of them said some version of, oh, thank God I went to the gym this morning. Or Ugh, I need to cut it in half. Or, oh God, I'm, I'm just gonna, I'm gonna go for it. Like, some performance of the sort of body shame, body control thing.

That's what I mean when I say we perform this in order to be legible in the culture.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Savala: And I, you know, I, I was just like, okay, whatever as well. Just let them do their thing. But after like 15 minutes of this, somebody said something and I was a [00:24:00] little snappy and I was like, y'all, let's just enjoy the food.

We don't have to earn our food. We don't have to, you know, moralize about it. And you could have heard a pin drop. It was like silence. And it's because I wasn't legible in that moment. What I said was not legible. I was no longer doing the choreography. Does that make sense?

Dana: Yeah,

Hilary: yeah.

Savala: I feel like I'm rambling a little bit, but what I'm trying to say is, um, you get a sort of, Ugh, it's hard to, it's hard to describe it Hilary, like you were saying, but you get a level of freedom that is not performative.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Savala: You know what I mean? So you're legible on a much bigger scale. It kind of blows the little cultural scale out of the water.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Savala: Yeah. That's what I'm trying to say.

that's what you get. I think ultimately that's what she cut.

Dana: Oof. It's like a record scratch moment in the in the [00:25:00] room

Savala: or all

Dana: I just

Hilary: hear like

Savala: hundred. Mm-hmm. I couldn't believe it because it was like, really? Every one of y'all. Every one of y'all. And what I know, because I've lived my life.

It's like you, you're performing that.

Dana: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Savala: Doesn't mean you're lying about it. It could be authentically how you feel. It could be that you don't feel that way, but in either case, it's a public performance of a role.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: And we all know what it means. That's where the legibility comes in.

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: And it was a record scratch girl.

Dana: Yeah. Like you were the weirdo in the room.

Savala: A hundred percent.

Dana: Well, and you, you're not supposed to call people on it. Mm-hmm.

Savala: Which is why I waited as long as I could. 'cause it was like, just let people be.

Hilary: Yeah.

Savala: But then it was like. You know, hearing it so many times, it was just like, for fuck's [00:26:00] sake,

Hilary: yeah.

Savala: You don't have to have gone to hot yoga in order to get your half a croissant.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: You know, and maybe that was my own trigger. 'cause it's all a work in progress.

Dana: No,

Savala: but it was like, let's not do this to each other.

Dana: No,

Savala: let's just not do this to each other.

Dana: Mm-hmm. And that's the thing is it's not just them.

And the fact that so many people said something was just reinforcing that narrative. And so for you to be like, I've had it, I'm gonna say something, it's like, next time let's just, maybe we need to sell some plaques, like some, a little a like name tags that you put in front of your food and in meetings and say like, take it or leave it.

But just no diet tuck. We don't have to hear about your workout. Or you know, why you're only gonna take half. Just take it. Don't take it. Who the fuck cares?

Savala: Yes. And I don't put it in your

Hilary: tracker.

Sirius: Mm-hmm.

Dana: Yeah. Don't put it in your tracker. Mm-hmm. [00:27:00]

Savala: I do have sympathy for what it feels like to be in that place.

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: Because I've been there myself and. It's a very complicated swirl of pressures and emotions I think, that are often behind the way women use body control and food control. To bond and to be legible.

Dana: Yeah. Right.

Savala: Yeah. It's not, it's not evil. Mm-hmm. It's a coping mechanism. It's like an attempt to belong.

And I understand that. At the same time, it's like, I please, let's not do this to each other.

Dana: I met it. Go ahead. It's not ign.

Sirius: I was just gonna say diet. Culture is culture. Yes. And culture is how we talk to each other. Culture is, um, signs and symbols. Culture is communication,

shorthand and performing diet culture is one of the main ways that American women have to communicate with each other.

A

Savala: hundred percent.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: Hundred percent. [00:28:00]

Dana: When you were talking Sava, the word that was coming up for me was feral. Like leaning into your feral nature, like what would I be if I didn't have this conditioning? There would be a more, you'd be connected more to this wild essence.

Savala: Yes. I think that's right.

The, the reason I hesitate when I am picking adjectives is because women are so kind of bound tied up to aesthetics. So it's like when I talk about being bad instead of being good, right? I don't mean like Sandy at the end of Greece. I don't mean, you know what I mean? Mm-hmm. It's like when I say feral, I don't mean.

Like the feral love interest in some romcom. Oh. How Hollywood would portray that. You know, that's the trouble for me with adjectives that have a sort of physical association. [00:29:00] Yeah. 'cause I wanna, I, I don't want women or anyone to think I'm, that's the level at which I'm talking. This is not an aesthetic conversation.

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: You could be wearing pearls and Chanel and be feral in this way. Yes. So, yes, feral is a great word. I just, uh, I stumble to come up with adjectives. 'cause I'm not talking about like what color lipstick you have on or how you dress, you know? Mm-hmm. This is much deeper and beyond

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: The level of aesthetics.

Although aesthetics could be part of how you manifest this in your life. Um, this isn't like art direction, you know? Mm-hmm. That's not what we mean, or what I mean.

Dana: Yeah. Yeah. What do you think has helped you divest from being a good woman?

Savala: Oh, I thought you were just gonna say from diet culture, and I was like, you have,

[00:30:00] uh, um, well, let me tell you kind of how this book came to be. Mm-hmm. Briefly. Mm-hmm. And maybe that will kind of give you some answer. Um, so I hit 42, like the beginning of midlife, you know, and, uh, I was a mom. My career was like going pretty well. Um, I was married, you know, ticked to that box and sort of had done all these things that I was supposed to do, then chosen in the ways that I thought I was supposed to be chosen.

Um.

I still was not happy. You know, the bargain, I think of female social conditioning is that if you are good, meaning if you prioritize what we tell you to prioritize, if you make yourself [00:31:00] attractive to men, if you're kind of feminine at work, even though you're powerful, you know, just if we, if you do what we tell you to do to be good, you'll be happy.

That's the bargain. And I realized in midlife, at the beginning of midlife, oh shit, I'm not happy. I did all the things and I'm not happy. You know, it's like when you make a recipe and it doesn't turn out.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: It's like, but I, I double checked everything. I know I use baking soda. Why is it flat? You know?

And, um, I started writing about it. 'cause that's what I do. I'm a writer, you know, I have to write to know what I think. I wrote about motherhood, I wrote about my marriage, and my marriage ended not long after that. Um, sort of beginning of an awakening. I wrote about my art a little bit just for myself, you know, not thinking I'm gonna publish anything.

And I realized, oh, there's a common thread here. Um, [00:32:00] all these things I thought I was supposed to do in order to be legible and perfect and

likable. Um, I did them all and it didn't work. I'm not happy. I'm not whole. If anything, I'm kind of a husk of what I think I can be, you know, and motherhood helped seeing my daughter, who at that time.

She was really just under my sphere of influence. You know, she wasn't yet getting all the external messages and seeing her diviv and how at home she was in her body, and how little she cared what other people really thought about her, you know? Um, it was sort of an epiphany over the course of, I don't know, 50 pages.

And I sent them to my agent and I said, what do, what do you think? You think there's something here? And he said, hell yeah, there's something here. So then I got more into it and then I started to be like, okay, well let me [00:33:00] look at religion. Let me look at how, uh, I was taught by my sort of spiritual community to be good.

Is that working? Let me look at my relationship with food and my body, my sexuality, how I spend my money, and the ways that I was taught to be good, agreeable, kind, pliable, relationship oriented. Is it working? Shit, none of it is working. So. That's how you got 12 essays about this covering different topics.

Mm-hmm.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: Um, so all of which is to say, Dana, what has helped me divest is, is they the, the searing clarity that it didn't work. Like I was sold a bill of goods.

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: And I think a lot of women kind of hit that in midlife. Mm-hmm. Right. It's like perimenopausal, uh, midlife thing that happens, I think for a lot of women where they kind of look around and realize, oh my God, I'm running this entire little [00:34:00] ecosystem that I live in and I did all the things I was supposed to do, and, and somehow it's not enough.

It's not working. Mm-hmm. And I'm sick of doing it. I want something else for myself. A lot of women hit that point. I just, you know, being a writer wrote about it.

Dana: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Wasn't fulfilling. And it makes me think of when you've spoken at our body story. Workshops about your relationship with your body and how it's changed over time.

Savala: So I left my marriage, you know, um. I dug deeper into various aspects of my life that needed tending to and needed a little more feral energy.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: And, uh, I think I'm, I think I'm much better for it, you know, just in my own little garden. Of course, I only occupy my little corner of the world. But, um, yeah, if I could, you know, I dedicated this book to daughters, especially mine. And, uh, I certainly hope that if I, if I can, if I can help any woman, especially my little woman, my little child, get to this epiphany before [00:36:00] midlife, you know, when her life is half over, like, oh, this checklist is bullshit, actually.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: Rip. If I can help anybody get there a little more than, like, a little sooner than halfway to their life ending, that will be. Wonderful.

Dana: Yeah.

Your daughter is 10. And we often say that, you know, if most of the people that we've worked with by the age of 10 have come to, to believe that there's something wrong with, with their body. Um, and we know, you know, we, in talking with you and learning more about your body story over the years, we, we go through that narrative arc of like the rupture, the reckoning, the reclamation.

And for you, body Trust was, was taken [00:37:00] so young from you that you said, I can't even relate to this idea of reclamation.

Savala: Mm-hmm.

Dana: Because I don't,

Savala: there's no re

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: Yeah. I think I know I, I was two or three when I was put on my first diet.

Dana: Yeah. And so here you have this daughter who's 10, and at this precipice where probably, you know, prepubescent close to getting, starting their first period.

That's where parents often start intervening with, you know, weight loss stuff. And you dedicate the book to daughters, especially yours. And I wonder, I know listeners would certainly be interested, and Sirius has an 11-year-old daughter as well. So, you know, maybe you two will be meeting up after this to be in solidarity with one another about raising these, these kids.

But it makes me wonder, like, what, how are you helping your daughter?
[00:38:00] Like, how are you helping to raise your daughter not to be a good woman to, to maintain some of that wild nature?

Savala: Mm. Well. As any parent knows, you're building the plane as you fly it, so.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Savala: You know, it's like, hammer, hammer.

I think this goes here. It's like, so I say all of this with humility. Um, I can describe my efforts. I can't say that they're the right efforts or that they will quote unquote work, but, you know, on a very basic level, she has never seen me do anything to try to control my weight or what I eat because I don't.

Um, she has never heard me speak ill of my body because I don't, um, and I speak positively of my body. She knows what thought phobia is. You know, [00:39:00] she's a tween now, so there's a little bit of an eye roll if I try to kind of create a teachable moment. But when she was little, we talked about this stuff. So it's, it's in there.

Um, I follow the kind of division of responsibilities around how I have fed her, especially when she was little. So that comes from the Ellen Satter Institute, and the idea is that the adult is in charge of what is on offer at a mealtime, and the kid is in charge of what they eat at the mealtime. So she has had a lot of, um, autonomy around food her whole life.

And, um, yeah, I mean, I think anything I do for myself, I sort of scale it to an age appropriate. Thing for her. Our house is full of like images and figurines of different kinds of bodies, including fat bodies. Um, it's in her genetic inheritance. I don't know where she will land at various [00:40:00] points in her life, but I do want her to have a very rich archive of positively depicted fat female bodies in her.

So, you know, I make sure to give her that. Um, so those are kind of some basics. I would say. Another thing that has been a little more philosophical, um, is learning to let her be bad, quote unquote, and learning to honor. Her instincts to be naughty, quote unquote, or villainous in a game. I write in the book about how when we first watched The Wizard of Oz, I was, she was probably maybe six or seven something, something in there, and she hated Dorothy.

She just thought Dorothy was like, big whoop, like this, this girl's a sap. And she loved the wicked [00:41:00] witch. Like she would run around the house going, you know, like she would take, I bought her some green eyeshadow so she could like, put it on her cheeks, you know, at a down the road. She just was so into the witch and, and just thought Dorothy was like.

This golden terrier, like, not that interesting. You know? And initially I was really embarrassed and almost like worried and like I would tell her, no, no, no, no. Dorothy is the hero. You know, trying to kind of steer her away from her affinity for the witch. And then I realize, oh, uh, if I want her to be an, an adult and a young woman who, who doesn't feel pressure to be good, I have to let her practice it.

Now, you know, there's a reason you practice and rehearse in life. Mm-hmm. And it's so the skills are there when you need them. So that was like a [00:42:00] philosophical learning curve for me as a mom. Like, oh, I have to not be embarrassed. That's my own conditioning, you know? Um, and let her like the villain and that's who she likes in stories, you know?

Um. So that's kind of a philosophical thing that, that i, I write about in the book and that I, I would encourage any mom who's like, huh, that kind of throws a spark to think about. Um, the thing that I'm dealing with right now, and I wanna say this in a way that really respects her privacy, um, but also gets across what I wanna say is like managing the influx of messages from outside of my home, which I have made into this beautiful, loving, um, shelter and kind of repository of body love and neutrality.[00:43:00]

You know, she, she's not having a screen-based childhood by any means, but she has friends who have teenage siblings who are on TikTok all day. You know, things filter in commercials like we're talking about at the beginning. So trying to kind of. Manage my desire to micromanage all of that stuff is difficult because I am often on red alert for the, the faintest sign that she is getting sucked into that diet culture.

Just for example, the other day, um, she came home and she was like, oh, dang it, I didn't finish my water. And I was like, what do you mean? And she was like, well, I'm trying to drink 24 ounces of water every day. And I was like, I mean, it was just water. But because of my life I was like, oh God, you know, and imagining her in some like.

Maha [00:44:00] Spiral, death Spiral on TikTok when I'm not there, you know? And so I was like, where did you, where did you get that number? Where, you know, trying to kind of, and she was like, oh, it's just what the water bottle says mom. And I was like, you know, but I am, I'm on red alert and that's hard. It's not fun to be on Red Alert.

I also, um, this, I was able to clear up very quickly once I got, you know, like I really clocked what was happening. But you know, as you grow as a child, it is often healthy, normal, expected that you will get bigger, you will get heavier, you'll need bigger clothes. I mean, that's the nature of going from being like three to 40, you know.

But in my childhood, my growth was always cause for serious concern and some kind of intervention. I was like, nevermind the fact that I was literally a 2-year-old trying to get to the [00:45:00] stature of an adult, you know?

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: I was not supposed to grow. So another thing that I just have had to do as she has reached this kind of more tweeny stage and is naturally growing in the way of all, you know, children, is manage my own reaction to that and see, oh, this is my own flare of concern that is, has nothing to do with my child.

It's completely rooted in how I grew up. Um, and being able to get that sort of allows me to very quickly kind of be like, okay, I'm gonna put it over on the shelf. I don't, I don't need to focus on that. Thanks for sharing old lizard brain and we're moving on.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Hilary: it, it, they're like, um, I mean, my kids have been raised similarly. Um. And it's like raising different animals, almost kids that have been like, well tended and attuned to, and introduced to some of these [00:46:00] concepts, um, that I relate to that lizard brain reaction. I'm like, zero to eating disorder.

Savala: Me too.

Hilary: No moments. Um, and there is this, you know, developmental, I think process they go through of rejecting things on their own. Um, and that's cool to watch, but my lizard brain isn't very patient around that process. But, um,

Savala: and you know, in our defense, Hillary,

Hilary: yeah.

Savala: It's like, just 'cause you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't following you.

Like stuff, that's the thing is a threat.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Hmm.

Savala: You know? Mm-hmm. It's very, the volume is very loud and. All of us on this call in one way or another, understand that that is a potentially very dangerous path to go down. And the first few steps can be, [00:47:00] I mean, you can barely notice them.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: You know?

Mm-hmm. So in our defense, it's like we are alert to a real danger. Mm-hmm. Um, it's not so great for our nervous systems, but nor are we imagining the threat.

Sirius: Right. You

Savala: know?

Sirius: Mm-hmm. Yep. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. I mean, I think, I think it's this constant question of am am I protecting you enough?

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Sirius: And then there's a slow transition to a slow and difficult transition to have I given you enough tools to be able to identify and escape the danger?

And you're watching it, you're, you're, you're watching it in real time and you're wanting to intervene. You're wanting to snatch 'em outta the way of the danger, but they have to experience the test themselves, and you're just sitting there praying, like, to whoever, to whoever, [00:48:00] to whoever the universe, goddess, whatever.

Uh, have, have I given you what you need to survive this test?

Savala: Yeah. It's a letting go and a letting go and a letting go, but I'm still here if you need me. Mm-hmm. You know? Mm-hmm.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

I know it's most making me think serious of when Ellison came home and was like, uh, talking about needing to go to the gym. Mm-hmm. And you're like, wait, what? What? It's like a records scratch. Ah,

Sirius: yes.

Dana: And you just wanna pounce, like, wait, where's this coming from?

Sirius: Yes.

Dana: Yeah.

Sirius: Yes. And we never made it to the gym.

Um, but, you know, I mean, you know, I, I, there was certainly like really trying to take that seriously, both from the perspective of what is the threat [00:49:00] here? And also is there a need that my kid is expressing that we can meet in some way?

Dana: Hmm.

Sirius: And I think we're still trying to figure that part out there. I think that maybe she does have more, um, of a need to get out some physical activity, and

then it's just a matter of, all right, well, what's the way to do that that feels fun for her?

And, um, doesn't sort of plunge her into some like really problematic thinking or behavior or, or like the problematic control of others, because that's often part of this dynamic as well is that you can, you, your household can be a haven, but the next coach, the next teacher, certainly potentially the next doctor

Dana: mm-hmm.

Can

Sirius: say something that would completely derail all of your efforts. And those are just like the influential adults. We all know that our kids are reaching an age where their peers are the most influential thing that they're exposed to. So yeah, it's, um, it's a wild, it's a wild experience [00:50:00] raising little humans.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: Yeah. And my, I mean, I don't know serious if, if you have data on this from your own life, but my sense, 'cause I asked my daughter and we talk about it periodically, is like, yeah, kids get teased for being fat or not being like, whether they're fat or not. The, the insult of like, hey, fatty or hey, uh, big back or whatever is wielded at school.

Hilary: Yeah.

Savala: Um, as a way to sort of punish whoever is in the target zone at the time.

Sirius: Yeah. I, I will say that I actually don't have much data to that. Um, for the main reason being that, uh, my daughter is autistic and she, uh, like her, um, processing of the world around her is such that she takes in everything.

Like every, she's hearing, listening, you know, like all of it goes [00:51:00] in. And we are often reminded that, um, that at the most awkward moments because, because we don't think that she's paying attention. But the reality is she's paying attention and observing everything, and she can't always spit it back out at you on demand.

But sure enough, the moment where it is the most awkward, the most embarrassing, the most telling, she, you know, that thing is gonna pop out of her mouth.

Savala: Ding, ding, ding.

Sirius: Always, always. So, you know, I, we. We try to, my daughter is also, um, mixed race, but, um, definitely black presenting. And so we try to have conversations around like race and racial difference and racism and, you know, your dad is white and I'm black and, and like we're both in big bodies and you know, like, what do you think about that?

Like, you know, like all the things. And she's like very uninterested in having those conversations. But sure [00:52:00] enough, um, those things will come out in ways that we're, we are never prepared for and just remind us constantly that like she takes in everything. Everything.

Savala: Yeah. Fair enough.

Sirius: Yeah.

Dana: Something that, um, I imagine is part of divesting from being a good woman or reckoning with. The subtitle is a reckoning, good Woman, A Reckoning Is You, you chose this. I can't remember what they call these quotes. So after the, the epilogue, is that what they call it when you have a quote before your first chapter of the table, but it's the what if the object started to speak by Luce Igore

Dana: Igore. Yes. [00:53:00] And I imagine part of divesting from being a good woman is, is reconnecting with your voice and your own knowing. And this is something we're protecting in our children too, that part of our disembodiment.

Part of our fragmentation that comes in our socialization is losing our agency and our voice. And so that, you know, I could imagine the number of, of quotes that you went through for this epilogue. I think it's called an epilogue.

Savala: It's not called an epilogue, but that, I think the epilogue is at the end, but I, I can't remember the word.

Maybe it's called an epilogue. It's the thing before you start the, the reading, the real book.

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: Whatever that is.

Dana: But yes, I would imagine there's a lot of quotes you could have put there and, and this was the one

Savala: Yes. Can

Dana: you

Savala: talk actually little bit about, had a few, a few [00:54:00] options. Mm-hmm. And, um, slowly, like I had a, I had a list, uh, tack to my wall by my computer where I would put quotes that felt stimulating or interesting.

And, um, then I typed them all up when I gave this to my editor at Harper Collins. And, and we kind of narrowed down the ones that meant more, and I settled on this one. Um, to me it's a magnificent question. It's so evocative, right? And it hits kind of every note. It hits the way women are objectified, literally.

And, you know, figuratively. And it hits that piece of the voice, right? That, that knowing that is uniquely yours. And I think it, um. It invites you to think about what would happen if you started to speak. You know, [00:55:00] I'll think about, you know, there's many kind of inflection points and this indoctrination around what it means to be a good woman in our culture, but I always go back to seeing the, oh, it was the mid eighties, the animated, the Little Mermaid in movie theaters and I was quite taken with it.

I saw it a number of times. It was the first Disney movie my mom, let me see. So maybe there was a little bit of kind of forbidden fruit quality. But I remember, I remember just being be sodded with that movie. And it wasn't until, oh, I don't know, a few years ago that I was like, huh, that's interesting.

Ariel literally loses her voice in order to fulfill her destiny and get her happy ending. She literally loses the ability [00:56:00] to speak.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: In order to get her happy ending. She gives it up, she trades it away. Mm-hmm. In order to realize self-actualization.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: Now, there's so many more things you could say about that movie, including Ursula or Fem Fatal.

Mm-hmm. Like who maybe was right all along, but like, like, can we just like pause on that? I'm like mm-hmm. This is like a foundational text in Girlhood, and the message is that this girl

becomes silent of her own free will. In order to get the life she wants, which by the way, is to be married to this man living away from her family, you know, in a foreign land. If that's not instructive

Dana: mm-hmm. [00:57:00]

Savala: I don't know what is.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: And by the way, it's a foundational text for like the little brothers in the room who were absorbing it too.

Mm-hmm. Oh, huh. This girl should give up her voice to get me.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Savala: Um, mm-hmm. I think in some ways we don't talk enough about how like, romantic gender socialization of women is part of the promise that is given to men.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: You know, they're sold a myth too. Um, but yeah. So what if the object started to speak, began to speak?

It takes me right back to Ariel. And, uh, I think it sums it up. Mm-hmm. Really? Mm-hmm.

Dana: Yeah. I'm trying to find this. Um, there was an article [00:58:00] about the New Chill Girl, like,

Savala: oh dear.

Dana: And yeah, like the age of Yeah. Maga and like, girls are starting to be silent. Yeah. As boys. The title of the article is, um, from The Guardian, as Boys Shift to the Right, we are Seeing the Rise of the New Chill Girl.

Mm-hmm. Which to me is the girl that's voiceless the girl that doesn't, um, that allows for racist comments Yes. To just go over their head. Mm-hmm.
Mm-hmm.

Savala: Mm-hmm. And the, the other little note to me that is so sinister in The Little Mermaid, the Disney rendition of it, is that she gets her voice back in the end.

So it's as if to say, don't worry, give it up now, it'll come back in the end. That's not how it works. Mm-hmm. Unless you really push and activate yourself, you know what I mean?

Dana: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Savala: So it's like it's, it's selling you this [00:59:00] idea that it's a temporary sacrifice, quote unquote, but that's really not how it works.

Hilary: Well, it reminds me of what you were mentioning about midlife.

Dana: Yeah, totally. Mm-hmm.

Hilary: You know? Mm-hmm. I dunno that they don't, I don't know that they're in, anyone's invested in us getting it back, but they don't care if we have it as much They should, but they think we're done.

Savala: Mm-hmm. You know, I was thinking about, you know, the menstrual cycle that many women have and.

How it's, you know, this idea that when you're premenstrual you're sort of crazy and like hyper emotional and you know, maybe there's occasional grains of truth to that, but there's the cultural ideas that women are kind of out of touch with reality while mm-hmm. You know, in that week before your period comes.

And I use the word women inclusively here, [01:00:00] but what if we had a culture that understood that time as like a portal?

Dana: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Savala: Like, oh shit, the women are downloading some

Dana: deep mm-hmm.

Savala: Awareness.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: Right.

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: Might be a very different world.

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: Um, Hilary, what you said just made me think about, you know

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: Menopause, midlife and kind of

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: The way, the sort of hormonal cycles of a woman's life. Mm-hmm.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

Savala: Again, women used inclusively. And a women, not all women, um, can be tied to how much people are willing to hear what we have to say.

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: And how much it's dismissed.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I'm envisioning like a new ending to the, uh, or a follow up to the Little Mermaid, which is, she's in menopause, her voice is back.

Savala: The Big

Dana: Mermaid and the Prince is, fuck it out.

Savala: Hell [01:01:00] yeah. Hell

Dana: yeah.

Savala: You

Dana: know, because, you know, and this was something I wanted to circle back to, and I know I'm aware of the time, but you know, many who've done Body Trust work, um, say, and one person in particular said, I wasn't sure my marriage was gonna.

Survive my liberation. And there was a time when I didn't think my marriage was gonna, you know, this is something she said, and her marriage has survived her liberation. Um, and there's still some sticky points, but it's, it's in a much better place. But I think, you know, we've also had a lot of people come out out and realize they're a lesbian.

And so it has, it's disruptive for many relationships, our liberation. Um. Mm-hmm.

Savala: Well, another thing about that quote, what if the objects started to speak? It's like, would it say a few words or would it say a lot?[01:02:00]

Mm-hmm. Like, would it just talk about what it's like to be a chair? Or would it have thoughts about all kinds of things that came out? You know, and so I think, um, these. These things are all tied together, and when you loosen the screws in one place, the whole structure can start to wobble in a very generative, beautiful, sometimes difficult, ultimately, hopefully wonderful way.

Dana: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Yes.

Dana: Mm-hmm.

So, yeah, I used to be [01:05:00] not quite Beyonce. Now I'm Savala Nolan.

Dana: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I, I only learned that today 'cause I went there before we started. I was like, oh no.

Does, is there a second account or is this the one? It's the one And then savala nolan.com will put these in the show notes for folks to find you. Mm-hmm.

Savala: Can I throw something on there real quick?

Dana: Yes, please do.

Savala: Um, it's also an audio book narrated by yours Truly. I have a cough right now, so if my voice is driving you crazy, I don't sound like this in the audio book. Um, and also, look, I love a book sale if anybody wants to buy this book, I love you forever. And also the library is a wonderful place that needs support.

Mm-hmm. And if you're in like a noby [01:06:00] phase or whatever, I just hope the ideas get into the world. So I'm officially welcoming People read this through their library. Mm-hmm. Um, don't tell my publisher I'm saying that, but it just feels like the right thing to do.

Dana: Yes. I love that. I love that. I was curious about the audio book and if you'd read it, I assumed you did.

Savala: Yeah. When it's got kind of like a memoir ish flavor, they often want you to read it.

Dana: Yeah. Yeah. Well, how lovely to connect with you today. Yeah.

Savala: So wonderful. Yeah. It's a pleasure.

Dana: Well everybody go check out. Good woman A reckoning. It's out in stores now. Um, we'll make sure you know how to find Savala in the show notes and we will be in touch. Savala, thank you so much.

Savala: Thank for coming. Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. I usually say straight away. Thank you so much for having me on the air, but we kind of like dove right in.

Dana: Yeah.

Savala: So [01:07:00] this is, you know, the afterward of the, the podcast. Thank you for all your work. Your work is so medicinal to me. I mean, it's literally like medicine.

Like I miss it when I don't have it on a regular basis. Wow. And just all the love, all the wind in your sails, all the energy. Anything I can do to promote your work and your projects now or in the future. I am. It's an easy yes. So thank you for letting me be part of this community today.

Hilary: Thank you. Thank you sa Paula.