

Jamie Hanson: [00:05](#) Hi everyone. Welcome to One Love Fits All for Embody Love Movement. My name is Jamie Hanson. I'm one of the faculty members of embody love movement, and today I am so thrilled to be able to have a conversation with Melanie Klein. Melanie Klein is a writer; she is a speaker and a professor of sociology and women's studies at Santa Monica college here in Southern California. She's also a media literacy educator and an advocate for positive body image. Melanie Klein is the co editor of two books. One is the Yoga and Body Image: 25 personal stories about beauty, bravery and loving your body. And then the second is Yoga Rising: 30 inspiring stories from yoga renegades for every body. And she's in the process of a third anthology that will be coming out in 2020 called Embodying Resilience, which is an additional group of stories around that. And so I'm so excited to have Melanie Klein here who is also the cofounder of Yoga and Body Image Coalition, which is working towards building a more diverse representation in the world of yoga, which is just, you know, a small, small piece of the larger piece of media we have out there.

Jamie Hanson: [01:28](#) So thank you for being here and I'm excited about having this conversation

Pura Fe Sings: [01:34](#) True freedom involves understanding of our true human spirit within. It dispels the lie of inadequacy and helplessness who are we? Powerful beyond measure. Who are we? Power of the creator....

Jamie Hanson: [01:59](#) I'm so thrilled to be here today with Melanie Klein and um, we'll just go ahead and get started with the interview. And the first question I have for you, Melanie, is just to share your experience or your story around your relationship to your body and how and why that has become a catalyst to the work that you do in the world.

Melanie Klein: [02:22](#) Yeah, absolutely. And first of all, thank you for having me. I'm a huge fan of Embody love movement and Dr. Melody Moore's work. It's been an honor and a pleasure to have her, kind of collaborate over the years and to continue to do this work. A lot of times people think like, "Oh, we're still having conversations about body image, is this really a necessary conversation? Hasn't this conversation been going on for decades?" And in many ways it has been going on for a long time. And at the same time I always point out there is still a constant need to have this conversation. And the same way, to answer your question, when I was a girl, right, there was a very different proliferation and level of media at the time. And yet it still had a

profound influence, which I'll go into more, and the world that we're living in now, you know, we have more and more and we spend less time away.

Melanie Klein: [03:13](#)

So this conversation is continuously needed and it needs to be updated and upgraded. So all of that, again, is to say that I'm super grateful for this platform and the fact that people are continuing to have these conversations. And so we give a little bit of my story, which was, you know, growing up, a huge part of it was, you know, I was part of the MTV generation, right? That was sort of the beginning of the music video genre and really having a massive exposure to all of the stereotypes and tropes of women within that genre, which are obviously very limited, very much, you know, based on the body, not a lot of character development, if you want to call it that. And also at the same time growing up in a family, I write about this in my chapter in Yoga and Body Image where I didn't really have the body type that my mother or my grandmother or great grandmother had.

Melanie Klein: [04:05](#)

I, you know, was much taller even though it's funny to say that at five, seven, I was much taller than them. Wider shoulders, you know, larger breasts all around, more, bigger. And at the same time, you know, I don't think, you know, in retrospect, I look back that anyone would have looked at me and thought that, you know, "Oh my goodness, she's unhealthy." Even though that was still part of the conversation. The truth was, that was what was happening. Doctors were telling my mother to put me on a diet. Um, that was a very common refrain. We were being weighed in our PE classes. The body mass index was being used. There were conversations about me being a big girl and at that time, and I would say to a certain degree, even now, even though things have changed, the idea of being a big girl, there was a lot kind of loaded in that particular label.

Melanie Klein: [05:04](#)

It was about being too much, taking up too much space. Also the idea of big and girl, like they didn't really go together. In the family and culture that I grew up with, the idea of being delicate and dainty and petite was much more in alignment with what it meant to be a woman, what it meant to be feminine. So it was very gendered language around big and small, you know, burly and petite. And so, you know, would just say like, "Oh, she's such a big girl." And I knew instinctively that that was not a compliment. That there was a judgment there and there was also a lot of, you know, very harsh body talk in my house. There was always an evaluation of other people's bodies. There was always conversations about people who had lost weight and a

celebration around that and people who had gained weight and lamenting that, and talking about workouts and what was the latest diet.

Melanie Klein: [05:57](#) And you know, my mother had a calorie counter in her purse, and she was always sort of up on whatever the latest trend was, whether it was Dr. Atkins or at one point, I think I was 11 and they put me on the pineapple diet where all I could eat was pineapple for three days. And then apparently pineapple was supposed to eat your fat. Right? So my family was not remarkable in any way...is kind of what I'm trying to say. It was the sort of standard family experience at that time and in that place. I also don't look at my family as, uh, that they had any bad intentions. They weren't trying to shame me. They weren't trying to make me feel bad. They certainly didn't want me to have a poor sense of myself. In fact, I know that in many regards they felt that they were helping me.

Melanie Klein: [06:47](#) They felt that as a woman in this culture, that if I could be thin, if I could more closely approximate the beauty ideal, that they were going to be giving me some advantages, they were going to be giving me a leg up. So I'm fully aware that this is a typical story. And I shared my story early on because once I began to move into the process of unhooking from all the stories, which I know we'll talk more about, the freedom that I felt is what I felt so strongly compelled to share. Knowing that if there was anyone else who had felt like I did - trapped by these stories, trapped by these images, trapped by these expectations - that to get outside of that and to expand their sense of self, expand their notions of what they could be and where they could be and how they could exist was something that I wanted to do, especially because I realized how common my story was.

Melanie Klein: [07:45](#) I was not an outlier, and there were far too many girls and women and also, starting in the nineties, increasingly boys and men who were dealing with these really sort of toxic body environments which were limiting their potential. And my goal, ultimately, was not just about having a healthy body image - Of course that was part of it - But the longer range goal was, okay, if we can rectify this relationship, if we can create something new, then what does that mean for our potential? How are we able to move more fully into that potential? And then how does that benefit all of us?

Melanie Klein: [08:25](#) That was a long answer.

Jamie Hanson: [08:27](#) No, that's so wonderful. And that's so much what Embody Love Movement is about. Like how can we get this obstacle out of the way so that we can make meaningful impacts in the world, right? Without worrying about some of these things that we're being indoctrinated with all the time. And since that's how you answered that question, I wanted to go into just a little bit about, I'm a mother myself. I have an almost four year old daughter and I certainly can resonate with your story. I grew up mostly in the 80s. I was born in the 70s.

Melanie Klein: [09:01](#) Um, same

New Speaker: [09:03](#) But yeah, I would love your - I don't know if advice is the right word - but

Jamie Hanson: [09:13](#) Small nuggets for those of us who are either mothers or aunts or, you know, anybody who has young people around them. And it doesn't just have to be on females, but just like young people of any gender on the spectrum. Like, how can we try to disrupt this? Because I know for myself, like I've studied this for a long time and I feel like I have an understanding of it, but I still find myself falling into the same trap of body negativity. And, you know, I live in Southern California. I know you do as well. And so we're in a climate where we're, you know, wearing swimsuits a lot and all of that. And I would love just a few really simple nuggets or tips for how, not only can I shift my own behavior in a way that Louisa, my daughter, sees me not hating on my body, but also if she comes to me with some language or some comments about her own body, how can I navigate that with, I guess the least amount of harm as possible.

Jamie Hanson: [10:22](#) That might be a big, big question and too long, and I'm sure there's tons of resources online, but at any way that you could point in that direction would be helpful.

Melanie Klein: [10:31](#) Yeah. I mean, the wonderful thing is there are tons of resources, which is fantastic because there's more and more people and more and more organizations doing this work, especially around this area, which is the media literacy component, which for people who are not familiar with the term, media literacy was part of an educational movement that started in late seventies, early eighties, as there was the awareness of like, okay, this media juggernaut is going to continue to grow. It's going to take up more space in our lives. It's not going to shift. And in fact, we don't want to go into censorship, but we want to go into consciousness, right? And if we're going to be living with this entity, if this force in our life, we want to make sure that people

are as, um, you know, armed and prepared as possible to navigate that.

Melanie Klein: [11:18](#)

So media literacy education was really about how can we become informed and conscious consumers as opposed to passive receptacles of all of these continuous, ongoing prolific messages and images. And I was really fortunate that media literacy education was part of my early training, my bachelors, undergraduate degree. And I also was able to work with a woman who, interestingly enough, she was a nun and she was one of the first media literacy educators who is located here in Santa Monica and was able to take a workshop with her and have that be one of the foundational pieces, because for me, in order to raise children with a healthy, positive body image, a positive sense of self, it's really impossible, I would say, to do that without having conversations about what we're taking in. And not only looking at what are the images and the storylines and the characters and the value systems that we're taking in, but then what is the language that we use because both of those things then construct our reality and our experience of ourselves.

Melanie Klein: [12:26](#)

Right? So one of the first things that I think is really helpful is to implement an element of media literacy education into just our everyday practice with our children. I never did that in terms of, with my own son, like intentionally in terms of like, "now you will have your lesson," but I would just have conversations where we were driving down the street or I would make a comment about an image and kind of deconstruct it without saying that that's what I was doing. Right? Or if he made a comment about something, ask questions and break things down. And what I found is, to be honest, by the time he was four or five years old, he was doing that practice himself. Now he's 10 and if there's a commercial, he's like, "Oh wow, they're really trying to sell you this. "

Melanie Klein: [13:11](#)

Like he sees that. So we got into the conversations of essentially, without making it a lesson, "what are the images that we're seeing? Who is creating them? Why are they being created? What is sort of the intended outcome and the effect of that and just having a much more dynamic and active relationship with what we're seeing and what we're taking in. So I think that's very crucial. And at the same time, I don't care how media literate anyone is, if we are taking in, you know, streams and streams and streams of images, they are still going into our subconscious and having this cumulative impact. And so we can be media literate. We can deconstruct-- I love pop

culture. You know, I really do. And I can have two trains of thought. I can be enjoying it and at the same time

Melanie Klein: [14:01](#)

I can be looking at the sexist, racist, ageist, classes, sizes, ablest images, right? Yet, if I continue, no matter how much I'm deconstructing, that's still going into my framework of reality. And so the other piece is we need to limit our level of mediation. It doesn't mean that we completely abolish it, but if we're being conscious with the images that we're interacting with and having it be more dynamic and alive as opposed to being a passive receptacle that's being spoonfed well, that consciousness also extends to being aware of what it is that we're taking in, being more discerning with that, and how much, right? I chose the other weekend to completely just shut off my phone for the weekend and not go into social media. Years ago, I actually wrote an article called "social media detox" and I wrote it for the Proud to Be Me site, which is the teen body image site for NEDA, where at the time I went a month without being on Facebook and talking about what I felt. Because early on, in the late nineties, before we even had social media and smart phones, I kind of fell into this experiment accidentally where my boyfriend at the time was not doing enough of his share, let's put it that way.

Melanie Klein: [15:24](#)

And we're spending a lot of time watching TV and so I cut our cable and so we didn't have television anymore. The only thing we could do was, let's say pop in a movie, like an actual VHS. And what I found was about a couple months into not having television, which ultimately was most of my media content, I'd get no phone, no computer. I felt a lot better. I felt very differently about my body, about being a woman. And that was also coupled right around the same time that I got very deep into my yoga practice. So it's hard to, if we're talking about research, tease apart the data to see which it was - was it the not watching the TV or was it the practice? And I would say it's both. And so I have continued to talk about that in my work.

Melanie Klein: [16:11](#)

It's like, Hey listen, I had a very visceral and tangible experience about feeling differently when I cut out this media. I was still reading magazines. I was still seeing billboards when I was driving down the street and I was still going to the movies. What was different is I simply pulled that piece away from it. And so if someone, I'm spending this much time -- I've had students do media logs -- well what if we can reduce it, what if we can minimize one of these components, what if we choose at a certain time in the day to turn off our phones? Which is what I do, I just put it on airplane mode and then it's done, right? What

is, if we can just pull apart these little things, almost like an allergy test, right? And start to see what is the difference.

Melanie Klein: [16:58](#)

So for me it's like having a new level of interaction and conversation with what we're seeing, and at the same time, being mindful about how much we're consuming and making some really clear, conscious choices about how much we choose to take in as opposed to constantly having it pour in. In the same way when they talk about reading, there's research has been done that if children read scary books, let's say like Grimms fairytales, like I read that as a kid. They're pretty gruesome, right? Cinderella's story then is very different than the Cinderella we've seen in Disney. Like they're cutting off parts of feet to fit into those shoes. They're pretty intense. And yet, the process of reading the story and being able to actively start and stop, go back, close, is very different than

Melanie Klein: [17:50](#)

just being in front of the screen and having it pour into your eyeballs. I've had students over the years as well, one of their assignments has been to watch someone else watching a movie or TV for 10 minutes. Glazed over. I mean, literally just pouring in. And so that notion of, I'm going to be an active participant and make these choices, we just have a greater ability to navigate the impact to perhaps diminish some of the harm or the toxicity and be more in charge of what we're doing. Those are two of, I would say really the biggest pieces. And then naturally what extends from that is we tend to also then become more aware of how we're speaking, what we're role modeling. And in my own house when my son was born, his father and I had a conversation prior to that and I said, I'd just like to not have body talk.

Melanie Klein: [18:46](#)

I just don't want to have body talk. That's not to say that saying affirming things about yourself are not helpful. Of course they can be. But let's just not make the body a topic of focus in the house. Let's just not have body talk where we're talking about how good someone looks or how bad someone looks or whatever it happens to be. Let's just eliminate that. So that was a big piece. And then if there was something that came up, it's like finding ways to have the most affirming and loving conversations with self, you know, cause sometimes it's done out loud, or relating to oneself and setting that standard. And I think it's worked pretty well because to be honest, even the other day I needed to take out the trash and I was in my pajamas and I said, "Oh gosh, I don't, I don't want to go there right now in my pajamas,

Melanie Klein: [19:35](#) and my hair was down. And my son was like, "well, you know, does that really relate to the work that you're doing?" I'm like, what do you mean? He's like, "Well, you know about body image and everything. Do you mind if you're going out of your pajamas?" And it wasn't quite a perfect match cause I just didn't want to go out with no bra and pajamas because I didn't feel it was appropriate. But I got what he was seeing. Like he was even saying like, "Hey, you should just completely accept yourself. Rock it." And that was one of those moments of like, okay, this has done really well in his life, and he is set up to have a very different relationship with himself and to see others in a way that is 180 from what my experience was. So those would be my tips and I'm vouching for the fact that they've worked pretty well.

Jamie Hanson: [20:21](#) Yeah. That's awesome. I want to circle back to the media literacy piece cause I'd just be curious from your experience of teaching this over the last couple of decades, how has your teaching shifted or how has our intake of media shifted with the introduction of social media and have you seen, I mean, these are sort of separate questions, do you think things are getting better? In terms of representation, and not just body size, but you know, the whole representation and you're obviously in it every day because you're teaching it. So I'm just curious from your perspective, first, how has social media changed? I guess, how we're influenced by media, and is there better representation?

Melanie Klein: [21:13](#) So I mean, it's been interesting. So when I think of social media, I really think back to maybe, Facebook came around 2006 we had Myspace 2004-2005, and it wasn't until about maybe 2008 where people who were not part of a university could be on Facebook. So I would say it's really been the last 10 years, social media has taken such a hold. And then of course, bringing in Snapchat and Instagram and everything that has filters. I would even say maybe the last six years have been the biggest period of time that we can look at to incubate, if you will. And I mean there's been a massive shift in terms of, on one hand you now have the ability to have young people create filters and kind of, in effect, "Photoshop" or digitally altered themselves.

Melanie Klein: [22:03](#) Right? I mean there's that element of creativity that you get with the filters and everything else that I enjoy as an artist. And at the same time, you can really do a lot of self-manipulation. So there's that piece happening, which I would say errs on the side of negativity because we're going into really creating more unrealistic and kind of these illusions of what we look like, what

we should look like, and we're seeing more of them, right? So it's not just the fact that we are going into this fantasy escape, but that we are exposed to it more and more because there's more time spent on devices and with social media and in those feeds. And at the same time, what has been so powerful with social media is that ability, which I've talked about a lot over the last 20 years, is to bypass media gatekeepers.

Melanie Klein: [22:53](#)

So on one hand the media can be really harmful. There's also a lot of power in it when it comes into our hands. And for me and the Yoga and Body Image Coalition specifically really looking at the importance of representation and to diversify that. And we were able to do that using Instagram and social media. We created a video, What a Yogi Looks Like. We created new images and campaigns and hashtags that we would then share and regram and circulate to disrupt those images, which then eventually - this is going back to 2014 - led to major media outlets covering the work that we were doing and looking at these images as examples of what could be possible. And you know, the very first campaign I wrote, I was like, okay, if you're not going to create those images, we are going to be the media.

Melanie Klein: [23:47](#)

We can show you how you can create representations in which people are not totally digitally altered. And we did images of people who did not have hairstylists, makeup artists, who didn't have people putting their outfits together. Like we really wanted to show this is what humans practicing yoga, practicing mindfulness look like. In all of their diversity across the human spectrum. And what I've seen more and more is that has now been a growing trend over the last six, seven years. I see it in Athleta. I see Dancing with the Stars has featured dancers who have prosthetic legs, blind, deaf. I see so many examples of it in catalogs, and we can see that on larger yoga platforms that have diversified their content, and it's not just there obviously, but it's across the spectrum -this attention to how can we create more equitable and diverse representation is really across the board.

Melanie Klein: [24:51](#)

So definitely there's been a huge shift, one that was intended and happened much more quickly than we could have even imagined. And at the same time, there are like these two tracks and we're these two sliding doors that are happening simultaneously. We have those voices and those sorts of images and storylines and new value systems that are getting lots more exposure that we're seeing on many more platforms. And it's much more common. And at the same time, listen, the cult of the celebrity still reigns supreme, like that has not changed that

much. You know, it is interesting. I will say for example, Chloe Kardashian - her denim line and her clothing line, she has a lot more diversity, size diversity, racial diversity. There are some things happening and yet at the same time there is a lot more on the other side in which that's not happening, right?

Melanie Klein: [25:49](#)

We still, we have our Instagram celebrities, we have yoga celebrities, we have our reality stars. And so there is still this element of the manipulated, the managed body, the manicured body, the filtered body. We still see that. And yet at the same time, what is inspiring to me is at least we have a sort of train of thought and a train of action that disrupts that and challenges that where before it was much smaller than it is now. But I would not say that this other element has really dissipated. I feel like it's still as large and as strong as it was and potentially even stronger. It's just that we have something else that's starting to keep pace a little bit more. And so, you know, it's not uncommon now for young people to be familiar with the idea of diversity and equity.

Melanie Klein: [26:45](#)

It is not unfamiliar to be having conversations about representation. For people to talk about intersectionality where we're looking at how things like race and gender identity, sexual orientation, size, class, how they all intersect. Those are more common conversations. There are more public conversations about privilege and how we can build longer tables and we can bring more people into the fold. There's conversations about radical self acceptance. That is so fantastic. I mean, four years ago I didn't hear those words being used in public discourse. It was only an activist spaces and academic spaces, but it's much more common, and I'm not going to deny that there's still a lot more work to be done.

Jamie Hanson: [27:34](#)

And then sometimes you also then you'll see some significant backlash when these types of conversations are being had more mainstream of course, which, you know, we're certainly seeing around us all the time. Yeah, I mean the social media piece is such a double edged sword because it's allowed, each of us to be in a relationship with people that maybe we never would have been able to because they're on the other side of the globe or whatever. A different kind of relationship than, of course, face to face in person. But there's some significant benefits to it as well as, we're also seeing in most people's feeds and social media, they're showing you the best if not fake version of who they are too. So like there's that whole element too.

Jamie Hanson: [28:23](#) But it's just so interesting to see how things have shifted. And like you said, it's only really been six years since it's been this much of an influence. It'll be interesting like from the sociologist perspective to look at this in 20 years and just to see the impact that it's having on our young people in both ways. Cause I think as you said, it's going in both directions for sure and can be in a very positive way and a detrimental way as well.

Melanie Klein: [28:57](#) Can I say one thing about that? It's really about how we use it all. You know, and that's why when I was saying, you know, I've done so much work around body image and using that as a gateway into empowerment, into our full potential. And yet at the same time my one central hub of my work is consciousness raising, where there's all of these different spokes in terms of how I've worked and where I work and with whom I work. But that is the central spoke and it really applies to everything in the same way where you're talking about here are these tools. When we create this consciousness, we then get to make decisions about how we're using this tool, when we're using this tool, how much we're using this tool, right? And so, yeah, it's a double edged sword as really so many things can be. Are we using it as a point of connection or are we using it as a way to divide?

Melanie Klein: [29:47](#) Are we using this as a way to create more truth or are we using this as a way to completely fall into illusion? Right? Which by the way, I love fantasy and illusion, but not when it, you know, colors my entire reality. And so those are the important conversations to be had, I think. It's just really about how conscious are we going to be in our life, in this world, and in the decisions that we make? And also, there were folks that began to really kind of see what was on the horizon a long time ago. A woman that I met many years ago wrote a book and I interviewed with her for a publication that came out in 2006, I believe, called generation myspace, right? It's so dated now, generation myspace. And she interviewed me about the "myspace girl." Like this was an interview we did in 2005 for the publication for 2006 book.

Melanie Klein: [30:42](#) And we can just now put in the "social media girl" or whatever, and she's like, "Should we worry about this and the thing with hookup culture and sexting?" And all of these other things, and what I had said is, you know, in a lot of ways what we're seeing is not that much different than what's always existed. It's just more magnified. It's much more public and that becomes the problem. But in terms of girls dressing up, sending sexy pictures, taking sexy pictures or doing certain things that's really not that

unusual. It's just that back in the day we could take the negatives and get rid of them. Right?

Jamie Hanson: [31:22](#) Millions of people wouldn't see them.

Melanie Klein: [31:24](#) Right. I really wanted to move away from vilifying certain people or acting like this was something unusual going on, and let's actually look the medium, let's look at the context, look at the larger culture and kind of pan outward to solve the problem, as opposed to potentially creating more shame or blame or pointing a finger.

Melanie Klein: [31:43](#) That's really not that different or unusual and in a lot of ways that can be healthy. It can be creative, it can be role playing. It's like, how are we using it? In what context? What are we doing with that? And let's take a look at the tool and the medium as opposed to just solely focusing on particular groups.

Jamie Hanson: [32:03](#) Yeah, that's true. I was just thinking as you were saying that, my daughter not did not get this from my side of the family, but she is a performer. So she'll stand up and sing and find anything to be a microphone. And just recently, some of the facial expressions that she was doing and the way she was moving her body...Like I'm trying to not make her feel bad about any of it or shame her in any way. But I'm like, Oh my gosh, she's not even four. What is she doing? Where's she learning this? You know? And, and like you said, it doesn't have to be bad either. Like that might just be how I was conditioned to believe. You know, I was raised in a fairly Christian background where, you know, sensuality and feeling your body in that way was not encouraged. And so, you know, just trying to find that balance of holding my own emotions, you know, and not projecting that onto her and allowing her to express herself as much as she feels she wants to. So that was just coming into my mind as you said that. It isn't necessarily maybe unique to it being everything she's seeing and it may be related to that, but it also just might be her creative expression of being in her body, which is so beautiful. So that was helpful.

Melanie Klein: [33:19](#) And I think with that one thing that comes up for me a lot is like if we can and really expose them to as many expressions of self as possible, diversify the role models, then they can kind of pick and choose and find their way. I would say that if she'd only been exposed to Instagram images of women and women's bodies, I'd be like, well, she probably learned that from things that she saw, right? Where a lot of times that's just part of what they play with. And so, you know, again, trying to figure out

what component is it -- why not just diversify it and just give them the free rein and have the conversations. One thing that was really, I think, helpful for me as a young person is I didn't just grow up with my parents.

Melanie Klein: [34:08](#) I grew up with my parents, my grandparents, and my aunt and uncle. So I had six adults as role models. And I find different components of each of them in my personality and the way that I am. And so I feel like I really got the benefit of picking the best parts of everyone and taking them on and playing with them. In the same way, I know for a lot of my friends and colleagues doing this work who have daughters, you know, they expose them. Sure, they may have Barbies, maybe there's princess culture, but then there's also the mythical versions of warriors and heroes. They teach them about Ruth Bader Ginsburg. They've had conversations with them about all of the fearless leaders in the 1960s and seventies. They have exposed them to many, many different kinds of women.

Jamie Hanson: [34:58](#) And we're so lucky cause we have all these books available. Like I have stacks of children's books that are about all of these amazing women from all over the world that I get to read to her. I don't feel like that existed, or I wasn't privy to it when I was a four year old, you know. So I feel like we have so many more resources available to us about the representation of women outside of just the beauty myth, if you will.

Melanie Klein: [35:22](#) Absolutely. And I think that's what's so wonderful is that we have all of these resources, we can have these conversations. And so if those women are not the ones that are going to be primarily on magazine covers or the things that are right in our face, well then we have the ability to pull them in. When the Ruth Bader Ginsburg documentary came out last year, called the notorious RBG, one of the women in my community who, as part of an organization that was screening it had invited me, I took my son and then he took his friend and his mother, and we took our sons to that. Like it's just as important for them. It's like look at all the different expressions of femininity, look at all the expressions of masculinity, what are all the different ways that we can be... Fill in the blank.

Melanie Klein: [36:05](#) That there's not one particular way that it looks, sounds, appears or acts. And I think that that's really one of the most important things that we can do is just have that exposure to a broad spectrum of possibility as opposed to just sticking narrowly with what is immediate, what is convenient and what is, essentially right in our face. Cause you can just walk down

the street, drive down the street, and we don't have a choice about what we see. It's just there. At this point, no matter where you're grocery shopping, there are magazine covers, and at the gas station, like we don't get a choice. So as much as possible, I like to insert the possibility of having a broader range of choices. You know, I'm making choices about those other things.

Jamie Hanson: [36:52](#) Good, thank you. I wanted to shift a little bit over towards when you shared whether it was your yoga practice or, something else that gave you some sort of a shift in how you were living in your body or how you related to your body. I'd like to shift a little bit to your yoga practice. I know that you've been practicing yoga since the early to mid nineties. And how do you think a practice like yoga, and I know because I've read some of your story, that one of your primary teachers is of course, Brian Kest, a very body positive type teacher. But how do you feel like this practice of yoga, your practice of yoga, helped support you on your path towards loving your body in a new way?

Melanie Klein: [37:46](#) I love that question because those two things, the intellectual awareness, all of the studying and deconstruction and analysis that I was doing, was such a key point. And then it was coupled with the practice. Actually, before this conversation, you shared a quote of mine and it's kind of the epitome. I would love for you to read it and I'll talk about it.

Jamie Hanson: [38:08](#) I would love to share it.

Jamie Hanson: [38:13](#) And I had shared this with you before because it so resonated with me as well. "Feminism freed my mind, yoga freed my body. It's one thing to intellectualize self love and another to embody it." And so maybe looking at your experience studying women's studies and media literacy maybe in your university years, and learning all of that at the head level, and then shifting towards, okay, what did that actually feel like done in your body as you started your practice of yoga?

Melanie Klein: [38:40](#) Yeah. That quote sums it up so well. And yet if I were to elaborate on that, it would be that the first thing that happened was, you know, Gloria Steinem has this great quote, the truth will set you free, but first of all, piss you off. And that's kind of what happened with me. I started to really understand the systems and the structures, the web of values that were learned and began to understand that, like I shared at the beginning of this conversation, my story wasn't unique really. I was a woman. That was, in many ways, soothing in terms of the individual

blame and guilt and shame that I carried was alleviated. Yet it really ignited my anger because I realized, Oh, I'm part of a larger statistic, like, this is common.

Melanie Klein: [39:35](#) So, OK, I'm relieved to know I'm not bad. I'm not stupid. I'm not unlovable. I'm not all of these things that I kind of have carried with me. Yet what I also know is there's tons of other women and girls who have felt that way and that we're part of this larger outcome of the patriarchal, racist, sexist, ableist, agist, sizist, you know, classist systems and structures that we live in. So those things happened and it was an exciting time because I felt liberated while simultaneously ignited and compelled to do this work for my life, which is what I've done since. And at the same time, it was a lot of headiness that was happening. I was deconstructing, I was analyzing, I was reading, I was being exposed to theories and they were wonderful. They offered this beautiful web of explanation.

Melanie Klein: [40:27](#) And yet, the fact is that when we have lived a certain way, we take that actually into our bodies, our way of being, our way of moving through the world. Like I really didn't know how to be different. What I knew was this sucks, this wrong, this is screwed and I'm going to reject that and I'm going to take on this particular way of thinking. Yet I couldn't really feel it. Be it. It's like, I know I'm not supposed to be self harming. I shouldn't be self shaming, I shouldn't do this. And yet there were these, you know, residual effects of having that become part of the larger sense of self. Not just here - over my entire lifetime. And so when I got into my yoga practice, it was the first time being with my breath, coming into stillness, coming into conscious observation, accepting the things that I was experiencing on a sensory level and just going into exploration. Noticing really allowed me to begin to experience a new way of being, where I could talk about self love, I could talk about forgiveness, I could talk about acceptance, but I didn't know what it was like to experience it, to feel it.

Melanie Klein: [41:49](#) And so my yoga practice helped me actually get back into my body. So much of my life had been about rejecting it - had been about comparing, competing and had been about evaluating it and punishing it. Everything happening from here, right? The intellect and the will dominating the actual body that I didn't know how to get into the body or to honor the body. And this allowed me to kind of climb fully back into myself, mind, body, spirit, the wholeness of my being. And I was like, Oh, this is how forgiveness is practiced. Oh, this is how moderation is practiced. And, Oh, how all of this leads to self love potentially. It's very

helpful to have the understanding. It's very helpful I think to have the theoretical prognosis and to be able to deconstruct, as we said with, you know, media literacy, why is that happening, who's benefiting, what is the outcome, all of that.

Melanie Klein: [42:46](#) And then it's another to then go into your sense of self and go, okay, well what does that feel like? What does that look like? Um, what happens when I can become that? And so that all happened in really, the laboratory of myself, right? With breath and movement and also of course incorporating seated meditation, and really realizing, Oh, I can observe and I can be in this body and in this experience and not have to react to everything. I don't have to have an answer to everything. I don't have to punish. I don't have to change it. It's going to change on its own anyway.

Jamie Hanson: [43:25](#) Right. You know, I so resonate with your experience. And, I think too, you know, the quote that you just offered of Gloria Steinem, "the truth will set you free, but first of all, piss you off." Like I've lived in a pissed off body, I feel like for a very long time. And part of that is, I think, at the real visceral level, I knew something was not right in our culture. But when I started studying it just like you, I was like, Oh, now I'm really pissed. You know? Cause it was like, it's intentional, like you're trying to keep us down, you know? Um, but the yoga practice for me was everything that you just said, but it also, I feel like it's been a place for me to find more sweetness, find more softness within myself, of course, to open my heart,

Jamie Hanson: [44:14](#) but also perhaps to connect with joy. And I think that this is such an important piece of anybody who is in some way, shape or form working towards social change or, you know, identifies as a social activist in some way. It's really easy for us to get into this like place of just like, we're so serious and everything's wrong, but how important it is for us to find and experience joy and not to feel guilt and shame around that. And I'd love to hear your take on that, like how your practice, your connection to spirit, and how you've brought joy into the work that you do and why you think that might be important.

Melanie Klein: [44:57](#) Yeah, I mean I would imagine that obviously, you know that I've been doing the work with the Joy Revolution.

Jamie Hanson: [45:02](#) I did. Yeah. I love it so much. It's been such an important piece of my last couple of years of trying to incorporate more joy. Otherwise I feel like I'm just like drowning in despair.

Melanie Klein: [45:20](#) Yeah the joy creates a sustainability is what I have found, you know? And just to go back to what you said about what you found on the mat. I want to also add, for me it was finding space. It was finding peace, and also, connecting it to media literacy, it was really one of the only places and spaces where I could separate myself from the cacophony of voices and messages that were vying for my attention. That this was one of the only spaces where I was not being hooked in or plugged in. And that in itself was a really sacred kind of landing pad for me. It was a place of solace, and quiet, from those voices and noticing how those voices led to the negative inner dialogue and being able to separate them and to quell them both.

Melanie Klein: [46:10](#) So that was something else when you were talking that I was like, I feel really compelled to add about what I started to experience and embody and feel and be in that particular space. And yeah. So I have been doing this work now for what, 25 years, so a really long time. And I noticed that in the last few years, I was like, to have this be sustainable, this is like, listen, people who come to this at first, they're ignited, they're fired up. That fire might last for a couple of years and then you burn through it and then there has to be something else. And I mean, I've worked on so many fronts, on the ground, in the classroom, educating, writing, speaking, like every form you can think of. And at a certain point I wanted to go more and more into the creation energy.

Melanie Klein: [46:58](#) I'd spent so many years critiquing, dissecting, which is all super helpful by the way, and it needs to be done. But I was like, I want to go into the zone of creation, which is why I was like, I will create our own images. We'll create our own organization. And for me it was that I want to go more into the life force energy. And I want to feel the joy of being alive and being in my body and doing this work. And for me, it just really required that I was accessing a different energy, in my body and in my being. And you're absolutely right. Sometimes joy can be seen as, it's not serious enough, not hardcore enough. It's not whatever. And actually if we're looking at the larger picture, it's a really necessary ingredient in terms of having that long term sustainability to do this work.

Melanie Klein: [47:44](#) I've been doing this 25 years and as I pointed out, there's still plenty of work to do. There are other individuals who've been doing this longer than I have. Like if I think about Jean Kilborne, and she's been doing this work for 50 years. It's really crucial that we can find a way to create social change, go through personal transformation, but access the joy of all of it, which I

think brings a really different resonance and energy to what we are creating. Because going deeper into joy actually really represents going into a complete paradigm shift. So that's why that became a really crucial element of my work over the years is so that I don't back out. I mean, I've seen a lot of people over the years who leave these movements. It's too much.

Melanie Klein: [48:36](#) It's too overwhelming. And so if we can incorporate more joy in the various ways that we can think of, through connection, through solidarity, through having just a different energy to carry us through, we actually can do this for a much longer period of time and we're not going to see people leaving. You know, joy is not always about being happy. It's about a larger container, a different kind of container for us to hold everything that we're experiencing and everything that we're feeling. I continue my growth work all the time and you know, just even in the last month, I was like, ugh, a lot of stuff coming up. But holding the joy of like, Hey, I also wanted this, I'm seeking this, this is being given to me for really, my greatest good.

Melanie Klein: [49:23](#) And so that I can share that with everyone that I serve. And there's joy in that. So joy is this really wonderful container, is the best way that I can describe it. And I have found it's another inroad to empowerment. It's another inroad to love. Sometimes when empowerment or self love seem too far off, what about defaulting to joy? Can you feel joy in your body? Can you access joy in being alive? Can you access joy in sort of the way that you show up in the world? And inevitably those things do lead to a greater sense of empowerment, a greater and deeper sense of love and fulfillment.

Jamie Hanson: [50:02](#) Yeah. So good.

Melanie Klein: [50:04](#) Thank you.

Jamie Hanson: [50:06](#) And you have two books that were related to yoga that came out, the first was, Yoga and body image, and it was 25 stories and then the second was Yoga Rising. And I'm curious to hear how one led to the other. And before you answer that, I just wanted to say it was such a gift to read Yoga and body image for me. You know, when I studied, it was in the 1990s when I was in my undergrad and I feel like, you know, I went to a university in middle America. It was very white and the concept of body image to me, you know, for so long was solely related to the female body. And it was very white, like the beauty myth. Right? And so what I loved so much about Yoga and Body Image was just that it offered so many diverse voices too.

Jamie Hanson: [51:12](#) I think that I was looking at body image as solely a female issue. But, you know, I just love, I just want to say I love that so many diverse voices were incorporated into that book. It was really special for me too to have that. So thank you for that. And how did that book lead into Yoga Rising? I'm just curious to see the trajectory of that.

Melanie Klein: [51:41](#) Yeah, absolutely. And thank you so much for mentioning that. That was really important to my co-editor, Anna Guest-Jelley of Curvy Yoga, and I, we knew that we could very easily write our own stories. We were having this conversation in 2011 when we started putting the book together. But you know, both of us came from similar backgrounds, which is why we, in a space that was just kind of opening at the time, found each other and were like kindred spirits. She had worked at a women's research center for a long time. I knew that she got it, and it was very clear when we had the conversation where we can't come from the backgrounds that we do and not create something in which we're striving for a really broad range of diversity. And so that was really important for us to show that there are many different ways our body image is formed. There are so many different experiences and backgrounds and, and what the effects are. And there was a through line obviously in those stories as a collection. But it was really important for us to shine a light on a broad range of voices, experiences and backgrounds.

Jamie Hanson: [52:46](#) It's not just about size, right? Like there's so much more to it.

Melanie Klein: [52:50](#) Exactly right. Race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, religion, national origin, age. And so primarily our desire was to focus on how a consistent and regular yoga practice could lead to a really positive transformation in our relationship with our body. And yet at the same time we couldn't have that conversation without talking about the pitfalls and problems in yoga and wellness spaces, especially around representation, accessibility. And so we started to get into that, but we knew we wanted to explore that more. So yoga and body image, again the intention was, we're going to have the critiques, we're going to look at the shadow sides, yet the primary intention was that a consistent regular yoga practice, mindfulness practices can be really transformative for our body relationship. And then Yoga Rising was more about, let's get into some more of these critiques.

Melanie Klein: [53:54](#) Let's get, more into these shadow elements. And also it built on Yoga and body image in the sense that, okay, once we have this

transformation and we come, let's say into greater, if nothing else, acceptance, maybe peace, maybe forgiveness, maybe love, potentially joy with our body. What do we do with that? And we wanted to point out that this personal transformation, which I also talk about the Joy Revolution, is for the collective as well. How what becomes possible for us in our communities when we are liberated from this sense of judgment and shame that we may have about the body that we're living in. What can we do then, and what is this new ground that we stand on? And that was really the place for Yoga Rising to fill in the gaps.

Melanie Klein: [54:47](#)

And then you had mentioned in our pre-call, Dr Beth Barilla and Dr Chelsea Jackson and I also, between those two books, um, 2014 is when Yoga and body image came out, Yoga Rising came out in January of 2018, and in 2016 we co-edited a collection for Roman and Littlefield, which is an academic publisher, which was on embodied social justice, an intersectional feminist framework. So that's more academic, more theoretical in that stance. And so that came in between, and right now I'm finishing up a series of stories, which is kind of actually the third book in the trade, paperback collection, Yoga and body image, Yoga rising, and the next one is Embodied Resilience. And that really emerged because as I was going through Yoga rising, I was like, Oh, wow, there's another theme that's emerging. Loss, grief, trauma, how our practices get us through really the most tumultuous periods in our life.

Melanie Klein: [55:53](#)

And I also wanted to talk to the publishers and my other co-editors on this upcoming collection. I really wanted to move away from using the word yoga. And I wanted to move away from even using the word mindfulness practices because if I go back to Yoga and body image, you know, we defined yoga very loosely. Some people were practicing restorative, some were practicing yin, some were practicing power yoga, some were practicing Iyengar, like it could look in a lot of different ways for some people it was breathing. So I feel like in so many ways yoga has become a loaded word and that there have been limitations to what that can even convey. So that is why the third book doesn't even have yoga in the title at all. It's just embodied resilience, right? And about how can we come into this resilience, this lived, this experienced resilience through our various practices, our awareness, our consciousness-raising, and move through life's obstacles and obstructions with as much grace and ease as possible and come through the other side to share it.

- Jamie Hanson: [57:04](#) Thank you. I can't wait to read that one. When's that supposed to be coming out?
- Melanie Klein: [57:08](#) Sometime in 2020. I would imagine probably late spring.
- Jamie Hanson: [57:13](#) Okay. All right. So I think this is a good place to wrap it up. Thank you again for being here. And just before we sign off, can you let our listeners know where they can find you and how they could potentially work with you if that's something they're interested in?
- Melanie Klein: [57:29](#) Absolutely. I'm pretty much all over the internet and social media. My personal website is Melanie C Klein, so make sure that you use my middle initial melaniecklein.com. I am on Instagram @MelMelKlein, that's M E L M E L, K, L, E, I N. And then the Yoga and Body Image Coalition is on Instagram @YBICoalition. And the Joy Revolution is on instagram @thejoyrev and that website is thejoyrevolution.org, and the Yoga and body image coalition is ybicoalition.com. So lots of stuff all over the place. If nothing else, if you just Google Melanie Klein and Yoga or body image, you will find me and I welcome any questions, emails, inquiries. I'm happy to always be of service.
- Jamie Hanson: [58:17](#) Great. Thank you so much for being here with us and sharing your expertise around media literacy and body image. I'm so, so grateful to have had this chance to speak with you, so have a lovely rest of your afternoon.
- Melanie Klein: [58:28](#) Thank you. Same to you. Take care. Bye.