

Sawbones 515: Brazilian Butt Lifts

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Clint: *Sawbones* is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme music plays]

Justin: Hello everybody, and welcome to *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: And I am so excited to get started, Sydnee.

Sydnee: I'm gonna take my glasses off and enlarge my document, 'cause even though I'm sitting— How far would you say I'm sitting from it?
[chuckles]

Justin: Um...

Sydnee: It's from here to here, like what would you—

Justin: Two, probably two feet.

Sydnee: Two feet, I— it is blurry. Hold on, I have to enlarge it more.

Justin: What's goin' on with you, kid? What's goin' on, Sydster?

Sydnee: Oh. Well, I mean, generally speaking... I have 2400 vision.
[chuckles]

Justin: Yes, but why are your glasses not getting the job done? This seems like what they were made for.

Sydnee: No, it's because I was making you a harvest stew, and...

Justin: [wheezes]

Sydnee: I had to chop—

Justin: You can't just say that.

Sydnee: — shallots as part of my harvest stew. And I don't know, I feel like I'm more sensitive. Man, I hate saying— Ugh, never mind. Just the onions got me.

Justin: No, go ahead Syd.

Sydnee: I don't like saying I'm more sensitive to onions, [in a brattier voice] "I'm more sensitive to—" No, I just— I— They just really got me.

Justin: Now I finished—

Sydnee: They just really got me, and it's like clinging to the inside. I don't know, there are fellow glasses wearers out there who know exactly what I'm talking about.

Justin: And I hear people—

Sydnee: Where you're wearing glasses while you're chopping and onion, and it feels like it clings to the inside of the lenses, and so you have to take them off and clean them, or else it just feels like they're permanently onioned.

Justin: That's the adjective. Syd, tell me, when I finished up that job for you, I didn't seem to have any problems with it, and I don't think it's a sensitivity issue. Why didn't I?

Sydnee: You wore goggles.

Justin: Oh.

Sydnee: You wore pool goggles.

Justin: Pool goggles, now did I go all the way to the pool to get those pool goggles and—

Sydnee: No, we keep some goggles in the kitchen.

Justin: [chuckles] We do, for what purpose?

Sydnee: For chopping onions. [chuckles]

Justin: Okay. So what happened?

Sydnee: I was just vibing. I was like—

Justin: [cackles]

Sydnee: I'm going out of town for one night, and Justin is going to be alone with the children for one night, and so I was making him what he calls my harvest stew, which is—

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: — [chuckles] a— It's just everything that's fresh from my garden with some beans, and then I put it— I make it saucy. It doesn't matter, the point is I was making that while I was watching the children build a Halloween-themed haunted gingerbread house kinda thing.

Justin: Y'all got lives.

Sydnee: And we were listening to the *Buffy* musical episode soundtrack, and they really liked it, and it was just like— I was just feeling really good, and I just didn't get the goggles. So it doesn't matter.

Justin: Okay. Yes, the harvest stew. And I'm sorry, but you're recovering?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: You're doin' okay?

Sydnee: No, I'm okay now. I'm okay now.

Justin: That's a— That's the only thing I've ever found that works, folks. We've tried the gum, we've tried everything, but the only thing we've

ever found that works is just some swim goggles, keep `em by the— keep `em in by the sink, use `em to chop your onions.

Sydnee: And I cry a lot.

Justin: And sometimes onions want that.

Sydnee: Tears, naturally.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Clean out your eye. Anyway. We mentioned on a previous— recent episode, I think it was our medical questions episode, we talked about fat necrosis.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And we mentioned BBLs, Brazilian butt lifts.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: In passing.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: I mentioned it.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Do you remember this?

Justin: Yes. Not... as it's sometimes use on the internet, big beautiful ladies. That was—

Sydnee: That's not what I mean.

Justin: I know, I was just— The parlance—

Sydnee: Oh.

Justin: — of BBW or BBL was... a popular internet parlance, and I wanted to clarify that terminology.

Sydnee: I'm talking about the surgical procedure known as a Brazilian butt lift, BBL.

Justin: Got it.

Sydnee: So when I say BBL in this episode, that's what I mean.

Justin: Alright.

Sydnee: We got an email from Madison, thank you Madison, suggesting that we talk about the history of the BBL. I assume it is because we mentioned it in that episode, I don't know. It may have just been one of those moments where... the universe, coincidence, Pluto has left Capricorn.

Justin: Ah yes.

Sydnee: It is time.

Justin: Ah yes.

Sydnee: I am entering my villain era as a cardinal sign, as an Aries, if you know you know. And—

Justin: You're entering your billionaire— villain era.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: That's bad news for me I guess.

Sydnee: No, it— all it really means is that I'm setting boundaries, and I'm going to start self-actualizing and being concerned with what I need and want as well. Not instead of, just also.

Justin: Mm-hmm. Well, does—

Sydnee: I'm not putting myself on the top of the list, I'm just adding myself to the list. Justin.

Justin: I— Let me know how I can help in this endeavor, Syd.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: As always, I stand ready.

Sydnee: Well right now you can listen to the history of the BBL.
[chuckles]

Justin: Hey listen, that's a low bar to clear and I will do it handily.
[chuckles]

Sydnee: I didn't— So, to be fair, I have never been in an OR where I have witnessed a Brazilian butt lift, I have not participated in any really cosmetic procedures in my medical training.

And of course I'm a family doctor, so I wouldn't now, but even— You know, I was in the OR for a lot of surgeries that I would never do, and had a lot of experiences that wouldn't be part of my career.

Justin: But never—

Sydnee: This was not one of them.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And I think it's important when we talk about cosmetic procedures and medicine and aesthetics that we remember a couple things, I feel like it's important to preface with this.

The procedures that are being done... by plastic surgeons, and then other aestheticians, people who are involved in sort of that intersection between where like a medical need and an aesthetic... desire? Need? Want? I don't know.

Justin: Is plastic—

Sydnee: I think this is philosophical at this point.

Justin: Can I ask you a quick question before you go on?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: Is plastic surgery still a term that's in use? Or is that like pejorative?

Sydnee: Yeah, we still say plastics.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: No, we still say— We definitely say plastics, I'm doing a residency, a fellowship, whatever, I'm still—

Justin: It's still the name,

Sydnee: Yeah. So our— But our definition of what we might seek changes, place to place time to time, in history, right? So the sorts of things people sort out for cosmetic purposes.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: You know, a hundred years ago are different from now, and will, I assume, be different a hundred years from now. So I think it's really important to mention that because all the things that go into influencing someone to seek out a cosmetic procedure, some of those are positive.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Perhaps things, and then some of them might be negative things. And so when we talk about the history of cosmetic procedures, you have to start talking about things like racism and eugenics.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: And those sorts of topics, and I feel like it's important to preface with that because when you hear that we're gonna talk about a butt... lift procedure. [chuckles] It sounds— I think a lot of people wanna joke about it. And I'm not saying that there's not room for humor with the BBL.

Justin: You're saying this like to me.

Sydnee: But I'm saying it's nuanced.

Justin: You know you're looking at me while you're saying "people."

Sydnee: Yes, this is why I'm saying this.

Justin: Like you can't "some people" your co-host.

Sydnee: Mm.

Justin: Like it's just you and me here.

Sydnee: Well I'm— I guess this is also a warning to listeners, like I'm not just talking about like, "Isn't this goofy? Like what we do to do butts," it's—

Justin: [snorts]

Sydnee: [chuckles] It is more complex than that, and it intersects with a lot of things that are...

Justin: You're just—

Sydnee: Truly terrifying and horrific about humanity as well.

Justin: You're saying— You're basically just kinda giving me a heads up at the beginning that if I at any point during this episode find butts funny, I am racist. Is this what you're selling?

Sydnee: No, this is not what I'm saying. We— I think we can all find butts funny.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: We all... Don't we? Don't we all?

Justin: I don't know.

Sydnee: Isn't that universal? Doesn't that unite us, that on some level, we all kinda think butts are funny?

Justin: I mean I still think it's legal to think butts are funny.

Sydnee: Whatever we like about butts, or don't like about butts, I think we all agree they're kinda funny.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like butts are funny, like at the top of our legs, there's this...

Justin: It's great. It's great. We all—

Sydnee: Extra tissue, and it's made— it's put there so we can fall on it.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Which is great.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And sit on it and not be in pain. Anyway. And if you— I am not gonna debate any ethics of plastic surgery. I think that there are a lot of strong feelings people have about should you pursue a surgery that is purely for a cosmetic benefit? I think that that is a very personal decision, and we all have our own opinions, and we can keep them to ourselves. [chuckles]

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: And I will not be talking about whether or not you should get a BBL, just what is it.

Justin: Opinions are like buttholes. [wheezes]

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: The thing that makes this surgery, a BBL, different and special from a lot of other cosmetic procedures, especially when it comes to previous butt— [chuckles] butt focused procedures, is a lot of them might be implant based, and this one is exactly the lack of that.

Justin: When you talk to other doctors, do you find yourself saying “butt” most of all the butt words?

Sydnee: Uh...

Justin: Okay, ‘cause I’m going through my head now and I’m trying to think—

Sydnee: Yeah, we just say, “butt,” I mean I don’t say—

Justin: You just say, “butt,” right? Like as a thing. You can’t use the swear, that’s not a professional thing.

Sydnee: And I know that—

Justin: You can’t say, “hinder” for sure.

Sydnee: No, we don’t say, “behind.”

Justin: “Rear?” [giggles]

Sydnee: Bottom, rear.

Justin: The bottom. If any of you said, “bottom,” I would call the security. [laughs] And get you escorted out.

Sydnee: The gluteus— Gluteus just feels—

Justin: I mean that’s it.

Sydnee: It feels like you’re intentionally trying not to say butt at that point.

Justin: It’s— Yeah, it’s like overly technical at that point.

Sydnee: And you can’t—

Justin: Like an alien that’s afraid of butts.

Sydnee: And you’re not supposed to cuss at work, so you don’t use the A word.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: So the implant, so to speak, in a BBL is your own fat. This is— A BBL is an autologous fat transfer, which means we're taking fat from one place in your body and we're putting it into another place in your body. That's what makes this procedure special when it— That's why it has kind of risen above—

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: — other like butt focused cosmetic procedures.

Justin: It's less of an implant, more a Jim-plant. And I'm assuming by the way that your name is Jim for the joke to work.

Sydnee: Right.

Justin: And if you're—

Sydnee: And if you're Jim and you got a BBL, it would be a Jim-plant.

Justin: [chuckles] Yeah.

Sydnee: If your name is not a Jim, it would—

Justin: This doesn't apply.

Sydnee: That has nothing to do with this.

Justin: Doesn't.

Sydnee: So basically when you go in for a BBL, they're gonna liposuction, so remove— Liposuction I think we're mostly familiar with, removing fat tissue. And you can do that on its own and then they just dispose of it. And then I guess if you're in *Fight Club*, you're gonna collect that and make soap out of it, so.

Justin: [snorts]

Sydnee: So there's a use for that. But we're gonna liposuction—

Justin: Look it up on AIM— American Movie Classics, kids.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: For all the— [chuckles] For all you youngins out there. That's a— People our age know. We know. We were all— Listen.

Justin: We were legally required to see *Fight Club*, everybody was.

Sydnee: And you— [chuckles] you as a man watching *Fight Club* had a moment where you're like, "Is this it?"

Justin: "Is this it?"

Sydnee: And then you grew up and realized like, "Oh, it's satire."

Justin: No, we had a—

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: We had a— We made Food Club.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: Where it was exactly like *Fight Club*, but we would just go to a buffet and see who could put away the most Pizza Hut or what have you.

Sydnee: Well not exactly like *Food Club*, 'cause you just talked about it, so.

Justin: Oh.

Sydnee: Or like *Fight Club*.

Justin: Oh.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: That's a good point, Syd.

Sydnee: So they're going to liposuction fat tissue from another part of the body, usually the thighs or the stomach, and then they're going to inject it back into specific places in your buttocks.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Buttocks. I think buttocks, that's an acceptable term, if you don't wanna say, "butt."

Justin: Who— Hey doc, who you tryin' to convince, Syd?

Sydnee: And then they're—

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: And they're trying to give you lift... probably volume, like generally the idea of the BBL is that you want a larger buttock, you want a rounder... behind.

Justin: Hey, Syd.

Sydnee: Mm.

Justin: You tryin' to describe a big, beautiful bottom on this program—

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: — is really slowin' things down. We all know, we don't have to get in the weeds of this.

Sydnee: And—

Justin: We all know what the goal of the BBL is, alright. [makes a kiss sound]

Sydnee: This was special and different because you don't have to deal with implants, which—

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: I mean, and that's not to say that everyone who's ever had an implant, 'cause there are lots of— Like you can get breast implants, obviously, I think we're most familiar with those, breast augmentation.

You can get calf implants, you can get— I mean you can get implants lots of places, so I don't think— Now obviously most people who get implants have no problems. But there are specific concerns with implants and this avoids those.

Justin: I—

Sydnee: Because it's your own tissue.

Justin: Okay. Can I say that with my understanding of the human body, it feels weird to me that this works. Because I— in my head, if tissue got like moved around like this, that it would not be a long-lasting thing, you know what I mean? It just feels like everything would kind of... redistribute.

Sydnee: It depends on where you're putting it, and this was part of perfecting— Like they had tried different cosmetic procedures on the buttocks before, and you have to know what planes of tissue to insert things between in order for it to stay. Now, this is a concern, not just—

Justin: Would've been rough, would've been rough to be one of the guinea pigs on that particular learning journey, to see what exact—

Sydnee: Well that's still happening.

Justin: Oh, okay.

Sydnee: We'll get to that.

Justin: Alright.

Sydnee: That's still happening.

Justin: I don't wanna get in the weeds here.

Sydnee: But let me say, what you're talking about is— And if you watch TikTok, you know what I'm saying, there is a ton of discourse about this right now when it comes to filler in the face.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And I don't mean your own filler, I mean getting some sort of synthetic compound injected into different areas of your face.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: In order to reshape your face. There's a ton of concern now that that stuff doesn't dissolve like we thought it would, or resorb, and it also doesn't just sit there, it can move, it can migrate. And also it can absorb water and expand over time.

So there's a lot we— I think we're still learning about we know what this cosmetic procedure looks like, if done appropriately, in a year, in five years, in 10 years. I think we're starting to hit the limits of what— You know what I mean?

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: So I mean there is discourse about that, what happens long term. Now there have been a lot of implant-based cosmetic procedures that accentuate different areas of the body, if that's what you're trying to do, for a long time. We have been doing breast augmentation since the 1800s, which blows my mind.

Justin: Wow.

Sydnee: And that will be— As I read this I thought "I'm not gonna get into it, 'cause this is an entire episode of *Sawbones*—"

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: "— all on its own." The stuff we tried to do to boobs in the beginning. Well it won't shock you, if you're a— [chuckles]

Justin: *Sawbones* listener, yeah.

Sydnee: If you're a *Sawbones* listener, it won't shock you. We started using silicone back in the '60s for breast implants, and so it was only natural that after that, and some success with some— And obviously there are other things we do now, but in addition to silicone as well, but we started to wonder "Couldn't we put implants other places?"

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: Now why then... Why would buttocks be the next frontier?
[chuckles]

Justin: Are you asking me?

Sydnee: And I think—

Justin: I mean I can explain it to you, I guess. I mean I guess it goes back to like art and bi— stuff.

Sydnee: Well that's— I mean that's what I'm getting at. I think—

Justin: "Rubenesque" I know is a word people say—

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: — when they're being classy and talking about boobs and butts, so perhaps Rubenesque would apply.

Sydnee: I think that's part of the story that's really interesting is why... butts.

Justin: Mmm.

Sydnee: Now I mean— And I mean, you know, it... Maybe this is— And this is me talking from my own cultural bias, for me breasts seemed more obvious.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: If you see someone with large breasts and you're talking from a purely biological perspective, if we are imagining that we are driven to be, you know, excited by and attracted to someone who can help us further the human species.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: So reproduction. If you look at, you know, any sort of sexual interaction that could result in offspring as that being the primary driver of that interaction.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Which I'm not saying it is, I don't believe that personally. But if you look at it that way, then someone with a— We talk about that golden ratio of waist to hips.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Someone with larger hips and someone with larger breasts would be an ideal partner for bearing children.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And so I think from a biological perspective, are we more attracted to— Is it our mammalianness?

Justin: Ah.

Sydnee: Bigger breasts can feed more babies. A larger... behind—

Justin: Can give—

Sydnee: — and a larger hips can—

Justin: Could poop more babies out—

Sydnee: Not—

Justin: — from a larger— Well.

Sydnee: Not like that. [chuckles]

Justin: Just speaking.

Sydnee: So is it about biology? But I don't— I mean obviously that's— that simplifies it, right?

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: Because we are thinking, sentient creatures, and we are not purely driven by these instincts of... You know, reproduction, and—

Justin: You also have to consider what movies the person liked.

Sydnee: [chuckles] There's also a lot— Well and there's also a lot of attraction that does not result in any— like the coupling would not result in any offspring.

Justin: Whoa, I thought you said, "There's also *Law of Attraction*."

Sydnee: No, a lot of attraction.

Justin: And I was like, "Whoa, okay Sydnee, let's do it!"

Sydnee: But clearly we're still—

Justin: This is a pivot!

Sydnee: — they're still drawn to each other.

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: So it— I think if you wanna talk about the BBL specifically, you have to get into the history of Brazil.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Especially prior to its invention, like what led to the sort of culture where someone would say... "I need this surgery." So slavery was abolished in Brazil in 1888, about 20 ish years after slavery was abolished in this country.

And in a lot of colonized parts of the world, even though the lighter skinned Portuguese descendants in Brazil were outnumbered by the darker skinned African descendants, the people of Portuguese descent were in the positions of power and wealth, and in control of society. And you see that in a lot of places that have been colonized, right?

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: The— The number of people shifts in the direction of the oppressed, but the power and money is in the direction of the oppressors.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Right? And at this same time, as we're moving into the early 1900s, you see this interest in race as a scientific pursuit. As in can we perfect the human race?

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: By... breeding us in certain ways. And this is eugenics. So eugenics is an area of interest for scientists all over the world, and white people who had oppressed Black people and brown people and other people of color all over the world for years through slavery were looking for other tools of oppression.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And this is— I mean this is all sort of coalescing at this same time. And these alternate routes of oppression can look like segregation, economic policies, I mean we could go on and on about that in the US, right?

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: We have lots. Hopefully we are learning the history of that. But some of it is in the guise of science, and eugenicists believe that white traits were more desirable than Black traits, and that the mixing of different races was dangerous to the, quote unquote, "purity of the white race," right?

Justin: We have done, by the way, several episodes about eugenics in previous *Sawbones*—

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: — and a lot of history there to unpack.

Sydnee: Can I tell you if you're someone who is interested in the history of science, or medical science specifically, it is... it is something you need to accept right now, as you research medical history, a lot of the people you may have known their names, or admired them, or been taught to idolize them for their contributions to medical science.

A lot of them dabbled in or fully embraced eugenics, and it is really hard as you start unpacking that history to realize how many people were drawn to this... completely... made up and... racist and misogynist, and you know just horrible way of thinking, that is unscientific ultimately.

So, there were a lot of people who were concerned about whiteness as a concept being erased, as different— people from different races produced more offspring. And their idea was that we would be erasing these more civilized and culture traits that we— that they associated with whiteness, right?

And so that's— Again, this is all based on racism. So how to do you prevent that? Well the initial thought was, and this was true, right? This was true in the US, you just ban it.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Don't like people of different races marry. Don't let them have children. We'll just make it illegal. And then we can demonize people of the race that we, the ruling class, do not feel is desirable.

This wasn't very successful, there are a lot of reasons that we could get into, and... I think the most stark reason is that the evolution of that, what you ultimately see is what happened under Hitler and the Nazis.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: And a lot of people were put off by that, even though they were thinking in that same line of “These are the people who should reproduce and these shouldn’t.” This was a step too far.

So instead some scientists and politicians and thinkers began to advocate for the idea of race mixing as a way of diluting out the traits that we don’t like.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: And perhaps creating a melting pot of a new national identity, and this is what you start to see in Brazil. The idea that we are going to sort of capture the ultimate picture of femininity and beauty by combining the best features of different— like this multi-racial culture that we have here.

And then you see the rise of the Brazilian beauty. Light-skinned, full-figured, a tiny waist, but large breasts, and a full, round butt. And... Before we go to the Billing Department.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: We’re about to go.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Just for a second, I think that if you are— I mean I am 41 years old, I was raised in the United States. Did you have this cultural perception when you were younger, if you were about my age and raised in this country, that Brazil is where the most beautiful [chuckles] people on Earth lived?

Justin: Yes. And— Yes, and it—

Sydnee: Think about that for a second.

Justin: 100%.

Sydnee: And let’s go to the Billing Department.

[transition theme music plays]

[ad break]

Justin: So Sydnee.

Sydnee: So I found this— This was a stark realization for me.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: I—

Justin: It's an— It's one of those unexamined biases that when you take it out, you're like, "Whoa, I'm an ignorant— [wheezes] I don't know anything about this."

Sydnee: It really shocked me that I had always— I remember thinking that, and I remember thinking also, and again this is something that I think it's important as we get—

Especially those of us that are white, to unpack these sorts of ingrained beliefs that aren't necessarily negative. Like it is not— In what way would it seem negative for me to say, "Brazil produces the most beautiful people on Earth?"

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: Why is that an insult? Well because in my head I'm seeing one image of what someone from Brazil looks like.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And obviously people from Brazil can look myriad different ways, just like people from the US. So—

Justin: Oh yeah, I understand, yeah.

Sydnee: So making one the beauty and culture ideal, then makes everyone who doesn't meet that beauty and culture ideal less than.

Justin: You're also making a— like an entire— You're reducing a nation to a silhouette, basically.

Sydnee: Exactly, and while I am talking about this happening in Brazil, because we are talking about this specific surgery that is developed in Brazil, 'cause we're about to talk about— and is called the "Brazilian butt lift," this happens in every place on Earth, right?

Not just every country, if you look across the US, you see different like perfect standards of beauty from region to region. So this is not— I am in no way suggesting that Brazil is unique in this particular form of sort of, I don't know, oppression. We all engage in this, the idea that there is a one way that is best to look, we all engage in this thinking.

So... We know that no matter what color your skin is, you may not necessarily have the figure that I just described, this sort of hourglass shape, right? And the plastic surgery industry in Brazil was ready and willing to meet that need. So if you were a Brazilian woman who did not meet that perfect cultural sort of epitome of, "This is what we look like."

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: "This is what Brazil is giving to the world, the most beautiful woman that could exist."

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: "If you don't look like that, we can fix it. We can make you look like that."

Justin: Ahhh.

Sydnee: Which again, happens in every country. So Doctor Ivo Pitanguy is widely known as the father of the BBL. So he started back in the '60s with just a butt lift. The idea was that over time, if— because of changes in your body's shape or figure, or just you know aging, your butt starts to sag. You could remove some skin and tissue and make it look firmer.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: Right?

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: Okay. You— I mean we do that, right? I mean we do— It's tummy tuck, but of the butt.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Same idea. But no volume is added in that procedure, you're not making the butt bigger.

Justin: It's not juicier.

Sydnee: No, it's just firmer.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: It's just tighter. In the late '60s and '70s, the same sort of silicone implants that we were seeing in breasts started to be placed elsewhere, and there were people who started to request, "You know maybe that would actually look kinda good in my butt."

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: "Because my butt's kind of flat."

Justin: [whispers] I've just had this thought though, Syd. With the chest implants, they're just sort of hanging there, I get it.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: If you get a butt implant.

Sydnee: Yes?

Justin: You're gonna feel it every time you sit down.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: That's wild!

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: I've never thought about this.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: That's wild. You're gonna feel it every time you're sit— Is it gonna feel like you're sitting... How do they dial in the exact squishiness that I crave?

Sydnee: Well, it was a—

Justin: Is it adjustable?

Sydnee: Okay, so you are not—

Justin: Now that would be a product.

Sydnee: That would be a product, where you could just like—

Justin: Oh, stadiums—

Sydnee: Like the Nike— Oh, like the Jordans that you could pump?

Justin: The Reebok Pumps.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Yeah, the Reebok pump, that's like—

Sydnee: Were they Reebok? Yeah. The ones that you could pump.

Justin: "Oh, stadium seating, I'm gonna need a few extra pumps of pressure."

Sydnee: I feel like this was an *SNL* sketch actually as you're saying it.

Justin: No, this is a billion-dollar idea, Sharks.

Sydnee: So, Dr Pitanguy came from a wealthy, supportive family with a valued education, he studied medicine in Brazil. He had a very like illustrious educational background.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: He studied at esteemed institutions in the US and France, in the UK, he came back to Brazil in the '50s as a— I mean like a top plastic surgeon.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And I will say initially, because there's like the whole range of plastic surgery. Plastic surgery I think gets pigeonholed into cosmetic surgery procedures, and it does—

I mean like certainly, there are many who do that, but there are also plastic surgeons who do a lot of reconstructive surgery. And so initially he was kind of known for doing like reconstructive procedures on people who had suffered some sort of trauma or burn or injury, right?

Justin: Incre— Yeah, incredible.

Sydnee: And he made an—

Justin: An incredible field.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Truly, truly incredible.

Sydnee: It really is, and what he really— So he was part of this— There was this moment in his life that really pushed him in this direction. There was a large fire that occurred in a circus tent in a nearby Brazilian town, and he helped with the reconstruction—

There were like 500 people in there. And there were a lot of people who perished, but there were also a lot of people who were just burned badly. And he helped with the reconstructive procedures on many, many of these burn victims, and it led him to really believe that aesthetics matter. They matter to our quality of life, to our ability to live rich, full, happy lives.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: It is not just you wanna be pretty. It matters.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And—

Justin: It's not simply vanity.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: It's embodying how you want to be in the world.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: And so he wanted to make this sort of surgery, this sort of reconstruction, available to everybody. Especially people who had undergone some sort of trauma, he wanted it to be, you know, not so unaffordable that you wouldn't be able to access this as well.

And so he was a surgical expert, and he was a philanthropist. I mean he did a lot of pro bono surgery, he did a lot of work trying to make these sorts of procedures accessible to the masses.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And a little—

Justin: So he's Bono's guy too? Wow.

Sydnee: No. [chuckles]

Justin: [snorts]

Sydnee: So he did both, he did reconstructive and then procedures that were more just elective.

Justin: On Bono.

Sydnee: Cos— Not on Bono.

Justin: [wheezes]

Sydnee: I have no evidence that he did surgery on Bono, I'm not saying that.

Justin: Then stop insisting he's pro-Bono, Sydnee.

Sydnee: [chuckles] And at this same time that people are doing the implants everywhere, and then we're also seeing like liposuction and body sculpting become part of like, "Let's just take fat out and reshape your body."

At the same time that all this is becoming popularized, especially as we get into like the 1990s, it occurs to him... that maybe we could take fat out of these other places, instead of just getting rid of it, giving it to Brad Pitt, maybe we could—

Justin: [wheezes]

Sydnee: [chuckles] He was in *Fight Club*, for those of you who don't—

Justin: [in a deeper, gruff voice] "Hey thank you. I wanna say thank you for giving me this fat man, I really appreciate it."

Sydnee: [chuckles] And—

Justin: "Put this to good use."

Sydnee: [laughs] And Edward Norton. Honestly it was really just Edward Norton, right? 'Cause Brad Pitt didn't— Anyway. [laughs]

Justin: Whoa, Sydnee! Calm down, okay? We just talked earlier about how nobody's seen this flick you referenced, you're not gonna go Rosebud it for everybody, alright?

Sydnee: What do you mean nobody has seen *Fight Club*?

Justin: I'm just saying if we broke down the reference earlier, we're assuming some people haven't seen it, so let's not spoil the film. Jeesh.

Sydnee: So he started popularizing “Hey, we’re taking this fat out of other places. Why don’t we go ahead and inject it into these areas of the butt? We can make the butt bigger, rounder, this more desirable shape that people are seeking.” And it’s kind of a two for one, because you’re also having—

Justin: You then do both cheeks, obviously.

Sydnee: Well— [chuckles] Well yeah, both cheeks.

Justin: [wheezes]

Sydnee: But also you’re having fat extracted from places that maybe you didn’t want it.

Justin: Ahhh, right.

Sydnee: So maybe you don’t like the size of your thighs or you don’t like the size of your stomach, you want some fat taken out of there and then you can put into your butt. And so if you—

Justin: You can like— Do they do muscle? Like if I start tearing—

Sydnee: No, it’s not muscle.

Justin: I keep tearing the sleeves of my shirts, and I thought maybe they took some of the muscle out of my arms, and could move it to my butt.

Sydnee: And then you want really thick butt muscle?

Justin: Just more, just evenly distributed.

Sydnee: A muscly butt.

Justin: `Cause my arms are so big.

Sydnee: So a muscly butt.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: A butt that can lift weights.

Justin: Don't, just move on.

Sydnee: Okay, the point is that if you look at before and after pictures of BBL. I—

Justin: There better not be a point, I paid a lot for this butt. [wheezes]

Sydnee: You're gonna see— [chuckles] You're gonna see a difference. If you're getting butt implants, you're gonna see someone with this size butt, and then the after picture'll look like a bigger butt, right? Like obviously.

Justin: Presumably.

Sydnee: But if you get a BBL, you will see a difference in their entire figure, right?

Justin: It's a butt reborn.

Sydnee: Becau— Well, because it's not just the butt. You—

Justin: Oh, right.

Sydnee: Like if you look at their before and after their entire shape looks different, and it's because you've removed fat from other places.

And so this is what really got people excited is "I am looking at this procedure and maybe I'm a layperson, I know nothing about medicine, I know nothing about surgery. But what I can see is that that after is more desirable to me than the after of just a butt implant."

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Right? And so people sought that out. And I think it's interesting because Dr Pitanguy got to carry the Olympic torch for Brazil in 2016, like he is a revered figure. In Brazil, and a lot of what he did was revolutionize reconstructive plastic surgery techniques, I mean he was really— he was a genius in his field.

And I think a lot of people are going to remember him as the father of the BBL. Which is fine, again, this is no shade on the BBL, but there are other things that he contributed to medicine, that I would bet, if you asked him, he would like to be remembered for all of these contributions.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: And not simply the BBL. So... as this procedure took off, and especially as you move into the 2000s, you see more and more people desiring this shape, right? They want the big butt, and when we get to the year 2014, this is now known, especially in plastic surgery circles, as "the year of the rear."

Justin: [giggles]

Sydnee: Which I didn't know that. And you— And then you start to talk about the celebrities that we know for their butts, right? We know J-Lo, about— I mean we know a lot about J-Lo nowadays, like I feel like this is a whole new era for J-Lo.

But like we talk about the size of her butt, and with Nicki Minaj, and Cardi B, and of course Kim Kardashian, who— And all the Kardashians, but Kim specifically.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Who was so accused of having... a fake butt, basically, that you did something to augment the size of her butt, that she had an X-ray done of her butt on her reality show, to prove that she didn't have implants, which she did not. Butt, butt.

Justin: Butt.

Sydnee: If you got a BBL.

Justin: Butt. [chuckles]

Sydnee: It wouldn't show up. [mutters] 'Cause it's your own fat. [normal] So who knows, I have no idea. I don't know if Kim Kardashian got a BBL or not, and honestly, I can't say that I care. The problem with all this is a couple things.

One, we're setting beauty standards and a feminine ideal that really doesn't exist. For the most part, the kind of shapes that some people are achieving with a BBL are extremely rare [chuckles] in nature. And especially is we're associating this, which a lot of this gets associated with the shape that Black women are supposed to have.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And obviously not every Black woman has that shape either. And then a lot of Black women are still suffering from discrimination because of their skin color, and sexualization of that kind of proto-typical Black woman shape. And so they're not necessarily benefitting from this like idolization of that specific body form. Do you know what I mean?

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Like you would think like, "Well everybody wants your shape, so obviously life must be great for you," and we know that that is not the reality of existing as a Black person in this country or most countries. And then the other problem with this is that a lot of people who are doing these surgeries don't know how to do surgery.

Justin: Oh, well that is a problem, Sydnee.

Sydnee: So in this country, we have a for-profit medical system. We also, this is interesting, I am a family doctor, I was never trained in liposuction.

However, my medical license, if I were able to purchase a medical facility with an operating room and liposuction equipment, if I were able to do that on my own, my medical license allows me to do liposuction. It does not put any limitation on what I am allowed to do. Now certainly if I tried to do it at a local hospital, they wouldn't grant me privileges.

Justin: Right, but you could have your own setup.

Sydnee: If you can set up your own, you can do it. And so we do see people who are pediatricians or podiatrists or family doctors, people with general surgery background who don't know plastic surgery, lots of different types of physicians who are doing these techniques because they

are extremely lucrative, and who do not have training in this area of medicine. And that is completely legal.

Justin: Yikes!

Sydnee: That's scary, they're cashing in on people's general ignorance on how the medical licensing system works, and their desperation for a good deal. So you'll find place where they're charging you, they're like, "Well 4000 bucks, you can have a BBL." That is not a \$4000 surgery in this country.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: That doesn't even cover operating room and anesthesia and all the other things that go into it, so somewhere corners are being cut, and you should be scared. And the result of all this, this fervor to get this shape, and all of these predatory individuals who are doing these surgeries on the cheap—

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: — without really having the appropriate training and sterilization techniques and all the, you know, all that goes into it. At one point in 2019 the mortality rate from these surgeries was one in 3000. That's an outpatient elective procedure. One in 3000 people were dying, this isn't—

Justin: That's high. Those are high.

Sydnee: Yes, that is a high nu— It's a wildly high number, it's higher than breast augmentation, it's higher than appendectomies. If you start to dig into liposuction numbers, they're actually a little scarier than you would wanna think about, but it's for the same reasons.

It's because you have people who are doing surgeries who don't know what they're doing. And they're trying to do them quick and cheap, and make as much money as they can.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: At one point it was— it was kind of called— And again, this wasn't a literal... This is not literal, this isn't true, but colloquially it was the most deadly surgery you could have done.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: Now it is not, but.

Justin: Butt.

Sydnee: But the point is if you don't know what you're doing, you could accidentally take fat that you have removed from the stomach or thighs and inject it into some of the large blood vessels in your buttocks.

And that causes something called a fat embolism, which means a little ball of fat goes through a blood vessel, and can lodge anywhere in your body, and can absolutely be fatal, often is. And so can kill you.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: In addition, obviously you can have infection, you can have the fat necrosis that we talked about before, you can have a poor cosmetic result. So you know, best case scenario, it just doesn't look the way you want it to. Worst case scenario, somebody who doesn't know what they're doing could absolutely kill you doing this procedure.

And this is true even with somebody who has been trained in liposuction, they haven't necessarily been trained in then reinjecting that fat into the buttocks. These are two different procedures, so just because somebody knows how to do liposuction doesn't mean they know how to do a BBL, but there are people who are you there doing it.

Justin: Mm, okay.

Sydnee: The recovery is really rough, which a lot of people don't know. It depends on... exactly like how you came into it, but generally speaking you have to wear some sort of corset afterwards to keep all the fat in place, so that it sort of like binds to the fat that is already there, and kinda— What you're worried about, Justin, you said like fat moving around.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: For about three months.

Justin: [exhales]

Sydnee: You have to sleep face down for six weeks. You have to sit on a special pillow all the time.

Justin: I already—

Sydnee: You need—

Justin: I already do the sleep down thing.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: So that actually—

Sydnee: So you got that part.

Justin: Maybe I'm a good candidate.

Sydnee: There are special massages that can help. A lot of people are in so much pain afterwards, and peeing specifically is so difficult, that they just end up peeing all over themselves.

There are all the— I mean you can look all over TikTok, they're all over the internet, YouTube series of people who got BBLs and had absolutely horrible recovery periods because they didn't know what they were getting into, and maybe they didn't have, you know, someone who knew what they were doing.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: If you're trying to get surgery done on the cheap, it's a bad idea.

Justin: Yeah. Don't skimp.

Sydnee: And I understand, we live in a country that encourages you to do that. Our healthcare system in America tells you to go try to get the best deal.

Justin: It's capitalism, right.

Sydnee: And that's—

Justin: We're all incentivized to do that.

Sydnee: Right, and that puts our lives at risk.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: It's wrong, and it shouldn't happen. And our culture of, you know, body shaming and these unrealistic figures leads to us risking everything to try to attain physical ideals that really, for the most part...

I mean yes certainly, there are people out there who are blessed. [chuckles] Who are blessed beyond me, but... most of us are not born to achieve those sorts of beauty standards.

Justin: Mm. Hey, thank you so much for listening to our podcast, we hope you love yourself just the way that you are. We also hope that you enjoyed yourself while you listened to this episode. We try to put one out once a week for yah, it's kinda the deal.

Thanks to the Taxpayers for the use of their song, Medicines, as the intro and outro of our program. You can find more of their music on Bandcamp. And thanks to the Max Fun network for having us as a part of their extended podcasting family.

[theme music fades in]

Justin: And thanks to you for listening. That's gonna do it for us for this week. Until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: And as always, don't drill a hole in your head.

[outro theme music plays]

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