

Tiffany: [00:00:03](#) Hi, welcome to the one love fits all online conference benefiting Embody love movement. My name is Dr Tiffany Denny. I'm executive director of Embody love movement and today I am excited to share with you my conversation with Chelsea Bonner. Chelsea is based in Australia. She owns Bella management, which is a modeling agency dedicated to inclusivity and to challenging the status quo in fashion industry. Chelsea also is an author. She's written this book, body image warrior. If you want to learn more about Chelsea's story as well what drives her and her business, it's a great read and we talk a little bit about her book and so many other things in our conversation. I am really grateful that I get to share it with you. I hope you enjoy it.

Pura Fe Sings: [00:01:00](#) (music) True freedom involves the 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....

Tiffany: [00:01:24](#) Chelsea, welcome. Thanks so much for joining me.

Chelsea: [00:01:28](#) Thank you for having me.

Tiffany: [00:01:30](#) Of course. I'm so excited to talk to you. I have read your book, which you so generously sent to me. Yes, here it is. It was really enlightening.

Chelsea: [00:01:44](#) I get nervous when people start talking, I'm like, Oh, which bit? Yeah, I think it's because it's big, it's my life story. So it's a big story and I've had a big life and so there's been a lot of different things that people have gotten from it. And it's, you know, been a little bit triggering for some people who've had not just weight issues and weight bias, but also, you know, my dad was an alcoholic and, and we had a pretty traumatic childhood. So that's, you know, there's a few little triggers in there, but it's a very honest story, you know, it's just who I am. So, yeah.

Tiffany: [00:02:19](#) Yeah. I felt like it was really vulnerable. You really did put a lot of your really personal story into the book alongside a lot of things that are kind of universal for women and fashion. And so I thought it was a really interesting juxtaposition. Yeah, it was really good. I want to start off and just like let people learn a little more about you. So I'm curious, because I feel like this will get into your story a little bit at as to how your personal relationship with your own body has changed over time.

Chelsea: [00:02:56](#) Oh so dramatically. I, I can't even, I almost, I can, when I start talking, I do a lot of keynote speaking and when I really go back

there in my head and when I was writing the book, I really, and you go back into that, you know, 16, 18, 20 year old self and that the vulnerability and the, and the poisonous words that get thrown at you every day and that, that feeling of just shame and grace for just being alive, just, you know, it, it's hard to, it's hard for me to go back there because it hurts so much as well. But also because I have made so far from it that I really have to work to go back there. You know, too, I'll have to work to dredge up that emotion again. And, so I do share that with people when I'm doing public speaking, obviously, because I think it's really important that, you know, I do connect, but most of the time I don't think about my body at all, at all, at all, at all anymore. I just, it's a, it's a amazing, beautiful, incredible thing that I have a working body that gets me around the world, that I can do anything that I want to do. I can climb mountains, I can bike ride, I can swim, I can, those are the things that I've come to really appreciate and what I look like doing that I really couldn't care less anymore. And that's, that's where I'm at.

- Tiffany: [00:04:30](#) That's a nice place to be and kind of an amazing place to be running a modeling agency. Yeah.
- Tiffany: [00:04:39](#) It's just not something you expect to hear from someone who owns a modeling agency.
- Chelsea: [00:04:43](#) I think I've always been, you know, what they call sort of emotionally intelligent. So really early on in life when I was working as a model agent for other people, I could see what models were going through in order to maintain their physique in order to keep themselves working. And I just couldn't, you know, I was like, do I join them or do I, you know, and I, I dabbled around for a few years. I tried all sorts of hideous diets and, and horrible diet drugs and things like that. Um, and then I just, the more I saw behind the scenes and the more models that who became like personal friends and the more intimate details I got to see of how they had to leave in order to be fashion models. I just, after a few years in the industry as a junior agent, I thought, absolutely not, no way.
- Chelsea: [00:05:43](#) I am not doing this. If people had any idea that this is what goes on in the industry, they would not be doing it either. And so, and that was sort of, I guess that first, the beginnings of the crystallization of the fight for body image and body diversity in media.
- Tiffany: [00:06:01](#) Yeah, absolutely. Which seems like it's been a really interesting journey because, I know you, you started, you actually modeled

and, and because you're, I, you know, I read in the book, your mom was like very well known.

- Chelsea: [00:06:16](#) Yeah. She's like an Australian supermodel.
- Tiffany: [00:06:22](#) So you've been, I mean you've been in lifelong exposure to the fashion industry.
- Chelsea: [00:06:28](#) It's my, like I was saying to someone the other day I was like molded out of the clay of the industry.
- Tiffany: [00:06:33](#) Which I think makes it all the more interesting.
- Chelsea: [00:06:38](#) Sorry guys my dog just wants to say hello.
- Tiffany: [00:06:42](#) He's got to say hello and be present.
- Chelsea: [00:06:44](#) Hi. Hi. Yeah, he doesn't know who I'm talking to.
- Tiffany: [00:06:50](#) It's just a mystery voice going on here.
- Chelsea: [00:06:51](#) Dogs and Technology and she's very confused.
- Tiffany: [00:06:58](#) It doesn't make sense to them, I'm sure. So, as you were modeling... It was really interesting to read how your experience was different because you were modeling as was the term, what was the term plus size or plus size was the term, I guess still is.
- Chelsea: [00:07:21](#) It's changed again, recently. So inclusive sizing now. Inclusive sizing.
- Tiffany: [00:07:26](#) Oh inclusive, I like that. Yes.
- Chelsea: [00:07:30](#) Much better.
- Tiffany: [00:07:32](#) I hate plus size...that's not even accurate. It's average size actually.
- Chelsea: [00:07:33](#) Yeah, I just, I mean labels in general, I can't stand, you know, you don't walk around in the world saying things like I'm a plus size business woman or on a plus size mom, you know, that's you, just a person.
- Chelsea: [00:07:53](#) And so for me, categorizing people according to weight, like a chicken at the bookshop is a really bizarre thing to do. So, but it

was an industry term that was there before I started modeling. And so it was embrace it or, or you know, get another job.

Tiffany: [00:08:10](#) So it is a little bit like walking around being like, you know, I'm a blue eyed accountant and whatever it is...

Chelsea: [00:08:17](#) Exactly. It is a weird thing to do. So, but then on, on the other side, I kind of, I understand the plus size culture cause I'm a plus size woman. So I, and I completely understand the fact that we've been ostracized from the rest of, you know, society and the fashion world and that we've had to create our own industry and our own opportunities. And, you know, we are often underestimated. Our health is underestimated, our intelligence is underestimated.

Chelsea: [00:08:50](#) You know, I, you know, just being female, you get underestimated. So, you know, it's, it's, I, I get it. And, and so I know that the safe place to go is to be surrounded by your community and people who understand you. That's what we naturally, belonging is so important as you know. You know, belonging is everything. And when you don't belong anywhere and you finally find a group of people, who completely get you and honor who you are as a person. You feel safe there and you want to stay there forever. So I totally understand that people have chosen to separate themselves out completely. And I'm quite happy to be a plus size person in a plus size world. I get that 100% totally. But my fight is, has been, I guess for me, I don't want to be considered other, you know, just like, you know, African people don't want to be considered other or Chinese people or women or, you know, we don't want to be subcategorized. We want to be human beings and treated as such. And that's, that has been my, you know, I guess my passion if you can't tell.

Tiffany: [00:10:07](#) Yeah, and we can make that distinction too... right, like it is okay to find that group where you feel like you belong for your own mental health. But at the same time, like you're, you're whole, it seems like your whole career, whole life has been built around actually fighting to change a system in a lot of ways.

Chelsea: [00:10:30](#) Yeah. Well for me it, it is, it is very much segregation. Um, you know, when you say you can't be a part of the rest of mainstream society, you must shop here and you, you know, you belong on this dating site and you must go to this place that is segregation, on its, on the most basic of levels. And so, you know, for me, I just, I don't know, my mom said, I came out just asking why, why, why is it like that? Why does it have to be like that? Why aren't I considered a, a whole human being and

complete woman because I'm a plus size woman. Why, why can't I just be referred to as a woman, a woman, you know, and it's even insults. Have you noticed that when people throw insults at you, they always relate it to your weight, right? Oh yeah. Always a fat B or stupid fat B or an ugly cow or you know, it's always weight references and you know, and even on the opposite end, if you're thin, you, you know, the insults are the same but different, that just, I'm like, just call me a bitch.

Chelsea: [00:11:47](#) If you want to insult me just keep it simple.

Tiffany: [00:11:52](#) Yeah. Well, and I'm thinking about, you know, you're saying you want to be like seen as a whole person and I know when you were writing about when you were first modeling, and I would never have even thought about this, but you know, looking through some of the pictures and thinking about it now and say, you were talking about how you would be dressed like, yeah. A plus plus size model. And you would always be dressed like baggy and you know, like while other models are being hypersexualized, right, in like little clothing as possible. You were being like shrouded in as many clothes and like dull colors as you possibly could be. And I'm like, Oh, okay. So you're, you're not really an object, but you don't actually get to be like a human woman either.

Chelsea: [00:12:39](#) That's right.

Chelsea: [00:12:42](#) And it's, yeah. And then, I mean, I was tough enough, I guess, you know, growing up in the industry, I had some knowledge of how I was going to be treated on set and you know, but a lot of people, you know, most people when they go into modeling, even as you know, as much as you try to prepare them, they never prepared to be treated as objects. No human being can be prepared for that. And it's, you know, the, the mainstream size girls obviously are treated much nicer. You want better work, you know, they're more accepted and it's more usual. So it's more familiar. So everybody, you know, everybody on set knows what's going on. But with, you know, curved models plus models. It just, you can see photographers and stylists and they're trying to wrap their head around it, you know, not so much these days, although still still they say in a lot of areas. But back when I started I was one of three models in the whole of Australia, that modeled plus size... And we'd fly all over Australia doing shoots. So yes. So we'd walk on set and people didn't know who we were like hey, who are you? I'm a model. And they'd look at you and go, what? And you had to just be really, you know, like Teflon and go yup, I'm your model. Make me look pretty, and let's sell some clothes.

Tiffany: [00:14:09](#) Except it almost sounds like they made you look less pretty. Honestly.

Chelsea: [00:14:14](#) Oh my god. Some of those shots you'll agree cause you've read the book. So you've seen some of the, some of the worst of them. I couldn't put the worst of the worst in there. It was just, it was just too horrific. I do sometimes put them up on Instagram and all my models message me and say, Oh my God, I'm never complaining again. I'm so sorry. I'm sorry. Sorry, that outfit. You know, we weren't allowed to have any shape back then. You know, everything was sort of from the neck down and just, just felt like a tent around us. And you know, you weren't allowed to have foods or a waist or a bum or you... sorry, I'm just going to put Bills up on the table.

Chelsea: [00:14:56](#) She'll sleep there now. And yes you weren't, you weren't allowed to have any shape. So it was, it was really bizarre in the beginning. And my best friend and I, we actually met modeling 20 something years ago and she was over the other night, and we still laugh, like laugh until we cry at some of the outfits. We had to wear back then. It was just ridiculous. I mean, we wouldn't even wear them now. They were just, you know, well they weren't even for 60 year olds. I don't even know who they were for actually.

Tiffany: [00:15:30](#) Well, and it, you know, and it's, it's kind of funny to look back but the same time, I feel like, you know, that's what people were seeing over and over and over again. Yeah. Like what a plus sized woman was allowed to present like, you know, it's like, I've got this like whole generation of women who are like, yup that's what I have to look like.

Chelsea: [00:15:55](#) Yeah. we were so offensive to the human eye that we had to be completely covered from head to toe in the baggiest thing possible. You know? And that's how it felt as well, you know. So I mean even though I say you had to be like Teflon on set, you would walk off set and go just, I don't even know, like am I making a difference? You know, cause that was the whole reason I got into it was I felt like to be, to make change you have to be a part of change so you have to be involved in change. So that's how I started doing plus size modeling. Cause I thought like I can't carry on at the agents and the clients and everybody else and say you have to do this, and there's nobody for them to actually book to do it. So I just put my hand up and went, well, you know, I'll go, I'll go first.

Tiffany: [00:16:49](#) Well, and I feel like you almost like you did a similar thing when it came to, at one point you, you only represented models of

what, size 10 and up? Yes. You got ostracized for that pretty significantly at the time.

Chelsea: [00:17:07](#) Yeah, yeah, yeah... Well, I mean back then it's, you know, we're talking 2002, you know, it, I mean it was a completely different world back then. There were no Robyn Laureles or Ashley Grahams or Tara Lynns or, you know, they did not exist. They weren't even born actually, I think half of them, so you know, it was just, it was just a completely, completely different world and no one in my work life could believe that I would leave a job as an agent for some of the top, top creatives in the country. We were shooting, how was the Vogues and covers of Harper's bizarre in the biggest fashion campaigns and beauty campaigns in the country. And why would I leave a job like that to open a plus size agency? I had to be insane and you know, so yeah, it was really bizarre because I'm growing up with all of these people and I was invited to every party and every function and you know, everywhere.

Chelsea: [00:18:10](#) And then all of a sudden the invitations stopped coming, the ...stopped coming, you know, and I was just left out there, you know, I say alone in the wilderness by myself, they just, nobody knew. Nobody thought it would work. Everybody considered it to be less than, you know. And to me that was the whole point of opening Bella, was that I just refused to be treated less than anybody else. Like just refused to do that. And so almost the more ostracized I became, the more passionate I was about the business and about creating change because I want people to be seen for who they are and what they offer the world. And not the body suit that they got born into, that they had absolutely no control over whatsoever. And makeup of seven generations of gene pool all wrapped up in one little baby.

Chelsea: [00:19:09](#) And that's what you get for life. Unless you're going to go and spend \$1 trillion on plastic surgery, to carve yourself up. Okay. But for most of us, we wouldn't do that. And for most of us don't have the money or the resources to do that either. Well I hope that's the last thing we worry about. But you know, it's just why are we cutting ourselves up in order to fit into a mold that only 1% of society of, of women, sorry, are genetically born to look like. 1% of women worldwide, are born with the genetic makeup to be a fashion model.

Tiffany: [00:19:51](#) And that's what we see all the time.

Chelsea: [00:19:53](#) And that's all we see, everywhere. And they're normally white as well. And if it's a couple, it's normally a straight couple. So thin, white, straight people, that's it. And that is, you know, the

idea that that is any in any way a visual representation of the diversity of humanity. I just, I can't, I can't fathom how anybody in business, anybody in business has not run those numbers or they have now. Some of them have done really well. You've got a brand in America called Aerie, amazing brand, incredible brand. I just love everything they do. I've been watching them from the beginning, you know, and they literally carrying the whole company at the moment without the sales from that. And that all was from a decision to stop retouching photos in 2014, look at what, they have changed and the amount of people that feel included in that brand and represented. They use every kind of different looking human beings. Every ability that you can think of. And they, and they don't do any retouching and they are nailing it. So there are some people listening, but not enough.

Tiffany:

[00:21:17](#)

Well, and it's interesting because I could see how people would say, well, you know, we want to give the people what they want, what people want to see. And I'm like, I can see where people would, would try and make that argument. I feel like, look what you're talking about, we're, we're proving that that's not actually, the only way to sell things. But you know, you, you talk about like there's this way of selling and advertising that's all about stoking fear, stoking insecurity, and then selling things to fix that. And I know that you believe things can be and should be done differently. So I'm curious like what do you say when people sort of make that argument of like, eh, it's not our responsibility. We're just trying to sell stuff. We're not trying to change the world, you know?

Chelsea:

[00:22:10](#)

Well, my argument is if you're trying to sell stuff, you're going around it the completely wrong way because you're marketing to less than 20% of the population. So as a business model, if that's your job to sell clothes and fashion and lipstick. You are doing a really bad job. Secondly, why can't you do the right thing and make money at the same time? Huge brands. Dove, Aerie. Oh, look at Tommy Hilfiger's show that he just did last week. Many, many massive multi, multimillion dollar brands who have woken up are, selling multi-millions of dollars worth of product? Why can't you? And feel good. And go to bed at night and feel good and know that you're not creating another generation of women who are dying to, you know, chop themselves up into little pieces in order to fit these ridiculous ideal of beauty that nobody, well, very few people, are ever meant to acquire.

Chelsea:

[00:23:09](#)

Ever. So, you know, and this whole, I don't know, I think that people are so worried about the environment and sustainability

and rightly and as we should be. But I have these picture in my head where we're walking around in this beautifully organic or solar panels, you know, electric car world and we're all chopped up into little, you know... ourselves with plastic surgery wandering around in the middle of it. It's just, it's just weird, what about the sustainability of people's health and their mental health and their physical health? Why aren't we worried about that as well? You know, and the thing is starving people can't make great decisions. Their minds are addled. They're not thinking straight. Anybody who knows anybody with an eating disorder will tell you straight away that they can't process information in a productive way. So we've got hundreds of thousands, millions of women walking around in the world unable to make constructive positive decisions for themselves because they're starving themselves to death to fit into an ideal of beauty.

- Tiffany: [00:24:17](#) Right? Which should not be our number one concern in the world, really. Right?
- Chelsea: [00:24:22](#) Yeah. So if you're selling fashion, get on board. If you're selling art, if you're selling avant garde fashionable art pieces, go and sell them to the 1% off you go. I've got no problem with that. But don't go to the papers and you see it every week people are in the papers, in the, in the magazines and the, all of the business industry things are, we're going broke. There's no customers out there. Retail is going down the drain. Oh my God, what are we going to do? I'm like, hello, is there's 80% percent of us over here!
- Chelsea: [00:25:00](#) Talk to us please. We've got money, we've got nowhere to spend it.
- Tiffany: [00:25:06](#) Yeah. Because why would we, you know,
- Chelsea: [00:25:10](#) I mean, yeah, so you stick to the few brands, you know, you're not going to stock your size and you know, but you can't, you know it's an awful thing when I know my sisters and my mom are all, are much smaller than me, so we can't go out for a nice day shopping together because I can't shop in any of the stores that they shop in. We can't go, Oh, let's all go and buy a dress for some function together. It doesn't happen. And most of the time, you know, I end up ordering something online from London or something like that because I just can't find it in a store anywhere. So, you know, and then retail is like, nobody comes into my store anymore.

- Chelsea: [00:25:51](#) I don't know what to tell you. I had to buy a dress from London. You could have put it in your store and I would have come in. So I, you know, I know, I laugh and I joke about it. That's just my way. But I'm actually deathly serious about this. I just, you know, giant whinge about losing your business when you're not even looking at what the market really is.
- Tiffany: [00:26:15](#) Yeah. Because I, you know, and I, we do, we have a little bit of a shift going on. I think, you know, there's a lot more body diversity, but I'm wondering like, are, are you seeing that reflected in retail and in the support that you get for, for your models and your agency?
- Chelsea: [00:26:41](#) Yeah absolutely, I mean, more and more and more every day, but it's still 95% of the images that are going out are still thin white women and men.
- Chelsea: [00:26:54](#) Right. So, you know, yes, when I first started, there was no market at all and now we've got maybe, maybe three to 5% of the market, you know, covered. So we've got a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of work to do, in this field. And, you know, I think that a lot of people underestimate how passionate women are about change. And men, you know the amount of husbands, I get and boyfriends and dads, who reach out to me and say thank you so much, I can't even tell you my wife saw this or read that, or watched a documentary about this and one of your models or you or whatever, we're in it. And it has completely changed the way they think about themselves. And like how even I've been telling her a few years that I love her just the way she is.
- Chelsea: [00:27:49](#) But the problem we have with that is, that images are 60,000 times more powerful than words. So if you're saying say, just on average, I mean most people see way more, lets say 50 images a day saying you're not good enough. And then you go home and your husband or your brother says, you look great. Who wins?
- Tiffany: [00:28:10](#) Right. Yeah. Like what, what actually gets soaked in there, and I think there's, there's neurons that actually...
- Chelsea: [00:28:18](#) And the other thing we have is, you have to say that because you love me. You know, something like I don't. I don't actually have to tell you that, but, and I do love you, but also, I just love you how you are. But then, you know, and then you go out into the world or you switch on the TV or you pick up a magazine.

- Tiffany: [00:28:39](#) Well, you know, I love those historical drama dramas, you know, like, um, queen Elizabeth and you know, all of those. I love costumes. So course I love costumes and, you know, but the actresses they use, you know, queen Elizabeth or queen Victoria. Queen Victoria was a very short, very stout little woman who was considered a great beauty of thier time, the actress that they've used, she's, well, I don't think she's even a size zero, you know, the real Queen Victoria was at least a size 14 or 16. So, you know, this is these lies that we're told every day, couched in, you know, entertainment. But it's not, it's not entertainment is brain washing, you know, and we're so brainwashed, generation after generation of brainwashing, you know, very into our, like what, third generation now coming into our fourth generation of mass marketing.
- Chelsea: [00:29:38](#) And it's not, you know, it's gotten worse, not better as an overall picture. You know, it's just, I don't know. It's, it's the, the brainwashing is so intricate and so deeply woven into the fibers of your being that you don't, even notice they're there and when you start, and now I do it every day. I pick out a few and I think, Oh, there's some, some left. I thought I'd gotten rid of those. I don't like those thoughts or those, you know, and I, I'm like, okay, go away. And then like, Oh hang on, there's a whole cluster over there. A whole cluster of brainwashing, I didn't even realize was still in there. So I try, just get rid of it all as it's....you know, I'd love to go somewhere where you can have like a mental cleanse or something. Wash out my brain.
- Tiffany: [00:30:34](#) Well until the actual environment shifts, right? Because we can, you know, practice loving our bodies and giving ourselves positive affirmations all day long. But, and at the same time, we live in a world and a society that, that feeds us a lot of information and you know, you talked about belonging, and people just want to,
- Tiffany: [00:31:03](#) you know, be a part of something. So I think that, that like, that desire to belong and to be accepted, you know, that that's so powerful. And so I can, I can see why there's this impetus like, well, I want to fit in, I want to fit whatever is going to help me feel like I am going to be accepted and I'm going to belong. I get it. Yeah, yeah,
- Chelsea: [00:31:33](#) yeah. And you know, we get a lot of hate on social media and trolling and stuff like that. And not just me personally, but the business and also my models because there's body positive and they, you know, often get quite upset and I always said, and it just, you're dealing with a really young brainwashed human here. You know, you've got to think about in, in, they've almost

got like a PTSD response to fat, you know, they've been told their whole lives that, you know, this is wrong. It's wrong to the point of evil and you know, so to see someone happy with themselves is actually offensive. Like how they just can't deal with it and you have to remember they're so badly brainwashed and so you can't never ever listen to those people. You know? I feel so sorry for them. I wish I could help them all out.

Chelsea:

[00:32:25](#)

They just don't even realize what has been done to them. And you know, and this is, this is something that I talk about a lot because I can see people in the room that want to agree with me, but they're scared to kind of agree with me because that means I have to let go of an entire 20-30 year programming. Their whole belief system crashes in on them. And what does that mean to them? Have they wasted how many hours of their life have wasted on worrying about what they think of what they're eating when they have to go to the gym? How many crunches did I do? How many calories did I eat? Years and years and years of life wasted on worrying about that stuff. And not worrying that things like the environment which is actually collapsing around us because we're too distracted by the calories we're counting.

Tiffany:

[00:33:12](#)

Absolutely. And I mean, and I think about that too and you know, like there's that level of it right where we're getting, we're getting distracted from the things that really matter. Yeah. And you know, I, I thought it was really interesting how you, you talked about in your book, you know, cause you've been, you've owned a business and been in business for quite a long time. Like you are a business woman too. But you know, it's interesting because I, I remember reading where you sort of almost had this, this like break down and because you were just working yourself to death. And I want to touch on a little bit about sort of that breakthrough of worthiness that you had where it was like, Oh my gosh, I have been working myself to death because I still have some of this internalized, like not enoughness that is, you know, even after everything I've done, I'm, so, that part of the book really hit me. So I wanted you to say a little bit about that.

Chelsea:

[00:34:23](#)

So I guess for me, how to, how to be, passionate about changing the world is that your business and personal life just gets completely tangled. And you know, I was getting very, very tired, working crazy hours and I was getting very tired and my doctor said to me, you need to do a hobby or something that you're passionate about outside of work. And I'm like,

- Chelsea: [00:34:51](#) my work is my passion, you know, so I don't, I don't really, I couldn't at the time understand what he meant by that or I, I could, you know, logically understand it, but I was still like, but I'm doing something I love, so why would I be tired doing that? You know, it's what gives me joy and gives me energy. So it was, but I, I hadn't realized that, you know, I was probably averaging about four hours sleep a night, this was over about a four year period when the business was really starting to grow. I had a lot of models around the world. I'd go days without eating and just completely, completely forget to eat, unless my assistant put food front of me. I was just running on pure adrenaline and cortisol and I, I just broke. I just completely snapped and I still can't remember what happened in that time period.
- Chelsea: [00:35:51](#) But I was, I was choreographing a fashion parade and I was listening to the music and working out steps in my head. And a friend came over with a bottle of wine and we sat down on the lounge room couch and cracked the bottle. And the last thing I, that's the last thing I remember. And then I wake up in bed in the fetal position in the morning with my best friend in bed with me. And her husband was there as well. And my dad was also there, and after I'd posted something on, on Facebook and another friend saw it and got all panicked, so she came over to the house. Anyway, I had a complete psychotic break. My brain just went *click* and my doctor explained it to me that the human brain is like a computer. If you overload your memory chip, it just goes nope.
- Chelsea: [00:36:42](#) And closes down. And that's exactly what my brain did just then. And I was just trying to be everything for everybody. You know, I'm so, I am so passionate about this work that I do. It's, it's overwhelming trying to articulate that even, you know, how much of me is in my work and then I'm a natural, I think mother, so every, if anyone has any sort of issue, I want to fix it straight away, I'll fix it. No problem. Anytime day or night, you know, I just want everyone to be happy and everyone feel good and everyone would be well anyway. And I forgot about myself completely forgot about myself, you know, all of that. And it took me the break, to reveal myself. So yeah, I feel better than I ever have in my entire life.
- Tiffany: [00:37:32](#) And so what are you doing differently?
- Chelsea: [00:37:35](#) I'm turning the phone off at night.
- Chelsea: [00:37:39](#) When I'm finished at work, I'll put it on silent and I do not look at it again until I wake up in the morning. I don't use alarm clocks or anything like that. So I go to bed now when I'm tired

and that's seven o'clock at night or 10 o'clock at night or midnight, whatever that time that is, and I wake up when I'm meant to wake up, when I've had enough rest, I don't, I'm not strict about all of those things anymore. And you must do this by this time. I must do that by that time. And I just let my body tell me what it wants to do. I eat when I'm hungry, you know, I move when I feel like I'm stagnant and my blood needs to get going and I need some oxygen. I go for a walk with the dogs.

Chelsea: [00:38:19](#) I just am much more in tune with what I really need and not, you know, let go of my gym membership. Cause just the mental pressure of that. Right. You paid for this thing, I have to do it, right and be like, Oh I've got to get there at least times a week. That's what they tell me. And you know, just, just sad. I got back from, I went to a, like a rehab facility, that specializes in CBT just after I had the breakdown. And, I just, you know, when I got home from there, I did a lot of work on myself while I was there and I really purged a lot of stuff. I hadn't, I talk about all of that in the book. A lot of things. I hadn't dealt with a lot, a lot. And it was quite an extraordinary month for me.

Chelsea: [00:39:05](#) And when I got home I just thought like, Hey, what does not serve me? What's not helpful? And so I just got rid of all of those. I can't even tell you the joy of not having a gym membership. I'm fitter than I ever was. You know, I'm just doing things cause I like doing them now and not, you know, because I'm paying \$60 a week, you know, and or a month, whatever it is. I don't even know anymore. Probably sixty dollars a week now. And so I just, you know, listening to myself, listening to my heart, you know, if I'm tired I will rest. You know, if you've got lots of energy, I use it. I burn all out, but do as much as I can when I've got it and then I might crash for a few days. I don't quite follow those, you know, this whole idea of balance.

Chelsea: [00:39:58](#) It's absolute horse shit. There is no such thing as anyone having a perfectly balanced life that is just not true and it's been sold to us. Well it's been, you know, sold to us a million times in a million different ways. We keep buying the damn book, but it's not true. None of it is true. There's no, all those people talking about balance. They are secretly hiding around the back of the building smoking cigarettes and you know, necking vodka that they, that's is so not true. And I can tell you, because I get to go behind the scenes of all of this, so you know, what you say on stage and what is it, what is real life is very, very different things. Not all the time, but a lot of the time. So, you know, I just, all of those I'll say, Oh, this is just, Oh, why is this so why is life so hard?

Chelsea: [00:40:46](#) It's because I'm following everybody else's rules. And every week they come up with a new rule. Every week there's a new set of rules for living every, you know, eggs are bad for you. One week there's the miracle food, the next week, next week you supposed to put them on your hair. You know, it's, it's crazy. It's a lot to keep track of too. Yeah. So I just do what feels right and I do what feels natural and I just honestly don't get care at all what anybody else thinks of me anymore. I just don't care. I'm the only person that has to to sleep with myself at night. I'm the only one that really

Chelsea: [00:41:24](#) really needs to worry about what I am and am not doing. And it's been a funny one for a lot of my close friends and family to come to terms with because I just opt out now, you know, if they say, Oh, we're going to do this, normally I'd say of course, and I'll be there, and I'd go if I didn't feel like it, and you know, life of the party and all of that, and now I decide, you know what, you go and enjoy it and I'm going to watch, you know, Netflix, I need to do that tonight. And, and you know, it's been a change. Not a hard one for me, but yeah, people around me a little bit spooked by it. But um, yeah, everyone's coming around now. Most of them, my mom's still under me about brushing my hair. I got up this morning and wash my hair and leave it and that's what I do now. And yeah, she's like "put some rollers in there." But I just, like don't care.

Tiffany: [00:42:24](#) And with your, with your agency, you know, we've talked a lot about just so many of the things that go wrong with fashion and, and advertising and all of that. So what is, what's different in your agency and how you run it?

Chelsea: [00:42:44](#) Well, I mean there's quite a few differences. I think firstly and foremostly because my parents advice in the entertainment industry, mum a model and an actor, I've seen how agents have treated them, you know, when I was growing up and, and they, you know, people in the entertainment industry to get treated as by most agencies. And we treated out talent and models as human beings first before anything. We make sure that they have options if they want to do a job or not do it, it's completely up to them. We don't pressure them, you know, so that we can keep our sales budgets aligned. I don't even have a sales budget. But I've never had a sales budget. I don't have a business plan. I don't have individual target goals for my staff. I just want them to do the best they can.

Chelsea: [00:43:35](#) I want everyone to be happy and let's get on with it and have a really nice life. And if that equates to some sort of financial success, which it has, then great. And if it doesn't, that's not

why I'm doing it in the first place. So from that perspective, it's quite different. The other difference, I think the big difference is that we have all ages, all sizes, all genders, all, every, every type of human being you can think of. And we don't, you know, if we sign someone when they're 18 or 20 years old and they're a size, naturally at that time, a size eight or a size six or whatever they are. And then as they grow older, like, you know, gain weight and fill out, become more womanly or more masculine as they get older, we don't throw them out the door.

Chelsea: [00:44:22](#) You know, most agencies, once you hit 20 you're done. And they've got a whole fresh load of kids come through. We don't do that. I've got models on my books that I've had since I first started the agency that is still with me now. Most of them actually that started with me then I'll still with me now. And you know, we always, you know, just reassure them that we will market you in the size category or the look that category, which should be, it should be about, you'll look not your size, but, that you are right now. And if that changes in a month or a year or whatever, we will just re market you to a different set of clients. So, you know, we don't go, Oh, you don't fit our interpretation of, you know, a list of bullshit that agencies go along with. We make room for everybody.

Tiffany: [00:45:14](#) Mmm. I think that's amazing.

Tiffany: [00:45:18](#) That's a really affirming way to go about it. And I feel like it takes the pressure off, which I feel like that's a really pressure filled industry. But also it just sounds like it's more about, about relationship and actually valuing a person for what they bring to the table. As I know you're passionate about the activism that you're doing and about the business that you run. But I also know that you're passionate about fashion, right? Like you, it sounds to me that always really enjoyed and appreciated and loved fashion. I want to ask about that because I know that sometimes we can like conflate enjoying and appreciating and caring about fashion with only caring about appearances. Like those two things sometimes get mixed together. Like how can we, be body accepting body, positive, body neutral, whatever you want to use. And care about fashion. I feel like you're a great person to speak to that,

Chelsea: [00:46:25](#) Well I can only speak for myself I guess, but to me fashion is about who I am as a person. It's about displaying my personality on the outside, I guess. You know, I want people to perceive me in a certain way, and get my personality and that's how I dress. So, and I think that's the quickest way for people to really get to know your personality before you've even opened your mouth.

Instead of wherein, people have kind of connected with you on some levels through art. Yeah. Okay. She's quirky you know, she's got a thing or she's like, you know, that's, that's it. You can immediately say, and even it's funny, people who say they don't care about fashion, they do care about fashion because if you take someone out of the track suit and put them in a dress. You watch how quickly they care about wearing that dress.

Chelsea: [00:47:25](#)

So whether you think you are making a choice about what you're wearing or not, you are making that choice. And if comfort is your choice, you go for it. You know, there's a lot of days where comfort is my choice as well. I'm notorious for turning up in the office to see my active wear. Cause I, you know, just don't have time to get dressed some days and you know, and then other days I'll be, you know, dressed like a Flamingo. Cause I feel like it, you know, and that's my, that's my, the way I express myself. So, you know, crazy hair or crazy shoes or, you know, that's, that's just a part of my personality and it's, it's sort of a part of everybody's really, I think.

Tiffany: [00:48:05](#)

Yeah. I think that when you were talking it, it really made me think about how we only talk about, you know, like that caring about fashion as negative when there's a right kind of fashion and a wrong kind of fashion, right? Like it's not about your own individual self-expression. But it has to be like, how do you line up with what is fashionable versus what is not? And then that's, then you have to decide like, Oh, do I care about fashion or not? But yeah, but what it sounds like you're saying is it's not about that.

Chelsea: [00:48:40](#)

No, not for me. And I think, I think for, I think most people, if I think about it, will probably find that they agree that they are attracted to a certain type of fashion or certain lipstick color or a certain aesthetic in their home or because that's their personality, that's actually, you know, their personality coming out and that's the way that they can express it. So, yeah, fashion is a lot deeper than people think it is.

Tiffany: [00:49:11](#)

Almost like what you're talking about, about like, you know, eating when you want to eat or moving, when you feel the energy flowing, it's almost like paying attention to what brings you some sense of like, joy or comfort or whatever you need in that moment and then going with it.

Chelsea: [00:49:28](#)

Yeah. Yeah.

Tiffany: [00:49:30](#) That's a really, that's really helpful and useful answer for me because I always think about that and want to ask people about their, you know, how do you use fashion?

Chelsea: [00:49:40](#) Yeah. I'm not, I'm not a big labels person. I'm like, I don't follow trends, you know, so if, whoever's doing what this season or whatever, I will go, Oh, that jacket is great, but the rest of the collection, I might not like personally, you know? But I'm not, I'm a real mixer, you know, I'll, you know, a lot of high street stores have, you know, the best stuff because it's, you know, if you're going to buy something that's on trend this season, it's probably not going to last you, you know, you're not going to want to wear it next season, so you don't want to spend \$17,000 on something that you're going to wear next season. But, you know, on the same token, you know, I think it's like staples, like beautiful black blazer and you know, a really great pair of jeans or things that are gonna last a lot longer, I will consider spending more money on, you know.

Chelsea: [00:50:35](#) I don't know. I love, I mean, you should see my shoe closet, you'd die. It's embarrassing. It's actually embarrassing. It's just, I don't know. I think, and I think a lot of curvy women will understand what I'm saying because we have such a lack of fashion options, really our only option is shoes, shoes and handbags.

Tiffany: [00:50:58](#) Interesting.

Chelsea: [00:50:59](#) Yeah. So, and makeup, so yeah, so most people I know that a curvy or over size, you know, size 14 have a ridiculous closet full of shoes. That's where we get our color from and you know, big bright lips and you know, things like that. That's, that's sort of where we get our, you know, our joy, our little, you know, our color palette has to come from our accessories, you know. It does make sense. Yeah. I didn't think about that before, but that does make sense. Yeah. So my, yeah, my shoe closet is really embarrassing but I don't have kids so I'm allowed, it's okay. I'm not taking food out of anyone's mouth.

Tiffany: [00:51:49](#) My shoe closet's embarrassing on the other side of thing.

Chelsea: [00:51:49](#) I don't know, you know, like, well what you enjoy, just do it. Just go do it. Just what are you waiting for? Don't wait for anybody to tell you it's on trend or on in fashion. You know what I mean?

Tiffany: [00:52:08](#) I would love for it to be about that?

Chelsea: [00:52:09](#) Yeah. Like you know, big boobs aren't in this year, apparently according to Vogue just so you know, but you know, last year they were in, next year... And what are we gonna do about it? You know? So I mean, it's crazy. So I just wear what makes you feel happy, you know, it's when you get up in the morning just thinking, what color do I feel like today? You know? Yeah. And get dressed.

Tiffany: [00:52:36](#) I like that. Yeah. Okay. I want to, I want you to get to tell people about your most recent adventure.

Chelsea: [00:52:45](#) Ah, yes.

Tiffany: [00:52:46](#) You were in Melbourne fashion week and, and it was, an experience it sounds like.

Chelsea: [00:52:53](#) Yeah. It was, it was incredible. It was a collaboration with Melbourne fashion week. So, I came, I went to them, well, I went to a few retailers first with this idea I had about doing a runway that was truly inclusive and diverse, you know, not the tokenism, just completely diverse, every height, every color, every size, every age, every, everyone we could possibly fit into a runway event. And, I couldn't get a sponsor. I couldn't, couldn't just couldn't get anyone, even though I was providing all of the models and all of the, travel and the accommodation and all of those things that are really, really expensive, you know, parts of the show. We just couldn't get anybody to jump on board with us.

Tiffany: [00:53:41](#) Were they not interested in an inclusive runway show or were there other reasons that they gave you.

Chelsea: [00:53:48](#) They were interested in it, but they couldn't figure out how to, because we've, we've never done it before. It's never been done, so they couldn't, certainly not in Australia. So they couldn't figure out what benefit it was, what was the benefit. So if we give you this money, what will we get in return? How much social media reach, how much, you know, mainstream media reach, how, how basically how will asking me, money convert into money for us. That's, that's always what's in negotiation always. So, you know, businesses don't do things for altruistic reasons, although I think they should. They don't. so I spoke to the organizers of Melbourne fashion week, which is one of the most recognized fashion weeks in the world and said, you know, really, really, really want to do this.

- Chelsea: [00:54:43](#) Really, you know, it just is time. It's just time. You know, it's, so not only is it offensive now to just case showing the same type of person over and over again, but it's also really boring. It's just so boring, you know, and people are sick of it. People are waking up, and you know, once you, once you see the industry and the mechanisms and how it works, once you are aware of what you're seeing everywhere, then you can't unsee it. It's, it's everywhere. And so more and more people, this is happening too, which is why we're getting a really great groundswell now of support, and I said, I just want, I want to have a, cause you know, me, I'm always going to the biggest picture. So I'm like, I want a festival of diversity right through the middle of Melbourne, you know, I want dances, I want to party, I want to, I want this and that.
- Chelsea: [00:55:43](#) And, anyway, that was a little bit right, just so because I had to fund it myself along with Melbourne fashion week providing the space and some ground support and stuff. They were amazing. I, you know, I didn't have the money to do what I wanted to do ideally. But we did pull together a really incredible runway show and one of my top models, Robin Lawley, who's based in America flew home for it and to help give it as much maybe or as she possibly could. She's one of the best human beings in the world, that girl. And it was just absolutely mind blowing. I think I'm still, I'm still sort of, I can't believe we did it, you know, I just can't, I still haven't really, like I was there, I saw the photos, I watched the video.
- Chelsea: [00:56:40](#) I organized it. I've talked about it a hundred times, but I still can't quite, get like we actually did it the first time it's ever been done in a fashion like anywhere in the whole world. And you know, I'm just hoping now that we have the data, that next year we can do the whole show. You know, the, the one that I have in my head, the ultimate one. Yeah.
- Tiffany: [00:57:11](#) And so did that prove out, did you, did you get a lot of media attention and - social media and all of that.
- Chelsea: [00:57:18](#) We did I mean, it was huge. It was, it was as big as I thought it would be. You know, I just knew that people were hungry for this. They are hungry for change, they're hungry for inclusion, they hungry for diversity, they want it so badly. And I think that amount of attention we got, just absolutely proved my point.
- Chelsea: [00:57:40](#) So, and if I can't find an Australian designer for next year to come aboard, I'm just going to ring Tommy Hilfiger and maybe he'll come over and do a show with me and that would be, you know, yeah. And we can do it, do it, you know, on a grand scale,

which is what we all deserve as human beings to be seen on a grand scale.

- Tiffany: [00:58:00](#) Absolutely. Which I think is probably why people were so enthralled and excited by it. Cause yeah, we all love to see ourselves but also the people that we know and love, you know represented.
- Chelsea: [00:58:14](#) Yep. Yeah. Absolutely. Yes. Yeah. We, I mean, we did the best we could with the amount of talent that we could, we were allowed to have in the show for the budget that I had. So we had 20 models all out.
- Chelsea: [00:58:32](#) And our eldest model was I think 71 and our tallest model, I think who is 193 centimeters for female. And our shortest model was about 150 centimeters tall. And just everything you can imagine in between. So that video, I'm excited to see that.
- Tiffany: [00:59:00](#) Awesome. That is incredible. Well, can you tell everybody where to find you, where to connect with you, where to look for you next?
- Chelsea: [00:59:11](#) Yes, so, um, well on the Instagram I've just @ChelseaBonner, um, on the web you can either go to Bella management, which is the company, or you can go to Body Image Warrior, which is the name of my book, and yep. And it's got links to worldwide shipping sites and um, free shipping and all of that sort of stuff. The books also on Amazon for people who like, I think you buy hard copy on Amazon, but also those ebooks you can download on Kindle. And I think there, it's about probably about \$4 in the U S for an ebook. So just Google Chelsea Bonner and I'll pop some where.
- Tiffany: [00:59:59](#) I bet you pop up a lot.
- Chelsea: [01:00:00](#) Look for the blonde girl.
- Tiffany: [01:00:04](#) I love it. Chelsea, thank you so much for your time.