

Tiffany: [00:03](#) Hi, welcome to the One Love Fits All online conference benefiting Embody Love Movement®. I'm Dr. Tiffany Denny. I am the executive director of Embody Love Movement®. And today I have the pleasure of speaking with Falami Devoe. Falami is a PhD candidate doing work in leadership and change. She's currently working on her dissertation and the lived experiences of African American women in their bodies. Falami is also a holistic health coach and sound healer and she has a podcast called Holistically Speaking. Today Falami and I were speaking about how conversations about body image vary widely depending on people's unique identities or upbringing, their environment, but also about how all of this is influenced by longstanding systems of oppression. We also spoke about individual versus collective healing and about Falami's work, facilitating self care and body liberation. I hope you enjoy [inaudible]

Pura Fe Sings: [01:11](#) 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: [01:37](#) Hi Falami. Welcome. Thanks for being here. Hi.

Falami: [01:40](#) Thank you Tiffany. I am excited to be here.

Tiffany: [01:44](#) Oh, I am so excited to have you and to talk to you. I've had to really get organized in my brain because there are so... you really have a wide array of things that you do and are interested in and talk about. And so it's been a really interesting challenge to try and like, okay, let's figure out where to start. Okay. I'm going to start super broad and kind of let you take it from there. What I'm really curious about is how your own personal relationship with your body has changed over time and sort of what have been the influences for that.

Falami: [02:30](#) Wow. You hit the nail, right? You hit it right on bullseye. Well first of all, I'm excited to just share this story and to share this journey.

Falami: [02:42](#) Currently I am writing my dissertation and my dissertation is about the lived experiences of African American women and their bodies. And it came as a result of my own experience. I have always suffered from body dissatisfaction and you know, I began my dissertation with a story about, you know, having to be girded up in a girl at the age of nine. Oh my gosh. Yeah. And so, the, you know, hold in your stomach, you know, you know, make sure that your, your legs are crossed, but that's a whole

other issue in itself about femininity. But feeling, not satisfied with my body.

Falami: [03:34](#) And so it started at an early age and it just perpetuated throughout life. Even though on the outside people wouldn't have known that they said, Oh, you're confident. Oh, you this, this, this and this. But as you know, Tiffany, that many women struggle in silence and they mask it in different ways, right. And so this, it occurred to me, I mean for years and years that I didn't like my stomach and that's one of my problems. And as we know that many of us have, you know, problems with different areas of our body, from our arms or our stomach or our legs or thighs or whatever that is. And mine was my stomach. And, so it's continued, you know, and it really became apparent to me actually when I decided to become a holistic health coach several years back. And as a health coach, I started having conversations with women about eating and how to meal prep and things like that.

Falami: [04:42](#) That's what I initially set up these conversations to be like, and it didn't happen that way. Well, it happened that way a little bit, but the conversations ended up talking about the women and their bodies and sharing stories. And, you know, in order for me to be authentic, I had to share my story. And I then began to realize that, Hey, am I really over this issue of my body? And so anyway I started dealing with, with that and coming to grips with, okay, what does it mean to be really satisfied with my body? And so did some self-care, some, some work on my body, work on my mind I should say. And it started to go inward and to think about who I am inside and, placing the emphasis on the inside my characteristics of who I am, the functionality of my body and then doing...

Falami: [05:44](#) Then when I got into my doctoral program, started doing research, you know, and finding others that talk about, you know, the functionality of the body is most important. Being compassionate with the body is most important, but more importantly, understanding the roots of these oppressive ideas of body image. And that is where I stand firmly on, it's important for women, understand their roots of their dissatisfaction and then to get to liberation. So, I, my hashtag is from roots to liberation. Love that. Yes. And so it's really about understanding these Eurocentric ideologies that are wrapped up into body image. And for me, working with women of color, it's very important that they understand where this comes from, you know, and how do you break free of, and how do you become liberated from this ideology that does not, is not aligned with who you are. And to focus on the divine feminine

goddess, goddesses that we are. And again, it might sound, you know, esoteric, however it's not, it's very practical and it's very real, for me and other clients that I've worked with. And so, um, it is, for me it is about body liberation.

Tiffany:

[07:21](#)

Oh, I love that you said that because that has been such an interesting thing to tease apart for me, like a couple of pieces of that because, I know in our, in our organization, in our curriculum that we have, we have always really focused in on sort of that looking at, at the internal, going inward and kind of looking at the qualities that we all possess that don't have anything to do with our bodies and all of that. So like there's that component that I think has been really powerful for people and is so important and that you spoke about too. And that doesn't change the fact that we live in a system that values certain bodies over others. That's hard. No matter how much you celebrate whatever your inner beauty is, right, like that does not change the fact that we live in an oppressive society for so many people. And so coming to terms, you know, how do we balance that work where we're not negating the roots as you say, but we're also recognizing that, like, that is an important component of the work,

Falami:

[08:38](#)

Right. It's truly important. It's, it's that, that word called intersectionality, right? Understanding the intersection, especially for women of color, you know, we cannot negate, you know, all of these components that make up who we are and how they are oppressive. Right? And so it's again, it's great to, to talk about your inner characteristics and I do that and we stress that. However, let us be mindful of, you know, what history has said about us, those of us who are women of color, that have said about us and continue to perpetuate those stereotypes and ideologies. So, um, it is a very challenging, um, task for some to break free because you do, you're bombarded from the time you are... When you wake up, you turn on the TV, you're driving down the street, there's billboards, there's everything. However, what I talk about is having a toolkit. So what do you have in your toolkit? And that's what I talk about with my clients that help you when you're faced with that self doubt or that, Oh gosh, you know, I don't feel good about myself. Right. So it is the toolkit. What do you have in your toolkit when those tapes, if anybody uses tapes anymore. I know what you mean. Those cassette tapes or whatever is replayed in your mind, what do you say to yourself? You know, how do you, you know, change the thought? Okay. Or redirect the thought.

- Tiffany: [10:23](#) Okay, yeah. Redirect. I love that. And that also, that word body liberation too. I love that. And that's another thing that I've been thinking about a lot and been talking about with other people a lot and hearing a lot from, from so many different sources is like what, how we use these terms, you know, body positivity, body neutrality, body acceptance, body image, body liberation. There are a lot. And you know, I don't really see it as their right terms and wrong terms and yet I feel like different terms have different meanings, connotations, uses. What has your experience been with that as well? Like how did you come up with that term?
- Falami: [11:13](#) So I started actually using the term body positivity. And then as I sat with it more and felt like, yeah, that's not for me, where I want to take my clients because they're going to be times where I'm not feeling positive about my body. However, what I want you to do is to be liberated from the mindset that has been indoctrinated about your body. And then to focus on that, what I just shared with you, those redirected thoughts, you know, because body positivity is just one layer of it. I take it a little bit further and say, I want you to be liberated from those thoughts. So, it was a lot of reflection. It was after attending a conference and I was like, this is great. This is a good foundation. And for some, and I'm not negating body positive activists or theories or anything like that, we're all doing the work. Right. Which is important. What I want to do is to, for the folks that I work with is to take that liberation because liberation for me is free. It's ahhh, it's yes. And so that's where, how I got there.
- Tiffany: [12:39](#) Thank you. I think that's such a useful definition, right? Cause like for some people, positivity really resonates. And yet there's also this, there's something about positivity sometimes that feels like, you know, you're just repeating affirmations to yourself, but is that really what is going on? Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. And you know, body positivity has been co-opted. Right? Right. And maybe that's part of the response I have to it is like maybe that's it, maybe the, there's that co-opting that's happened by diet culture.
- Falami: [13:18](#) Diet Culture. Exactly. Exactly.
- Tiffany: [13:23](#) Yeah. So that almost makes it now, it's like the waters are muddied around that term.
- Falami: [13:29](#) They really are. They really are. And so, so the question for me is how do activists then surpass that and what is the next wave of what this is going to look like, you know, and what is that

gonna look like because the waters are, you know, murky. And so what's next, you know, so that society has a true understanding of what this means for those of us who live in larger bodies.

Tiffany: [14:02](#)

For sure. And very intersectional beings.

Falami: [14:07](#)

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Tiffany: [14:09](#)

Yeah. It's like putting it into context almost, right? Like, we can put our own feelings about our body into the greater context of the society that we live in. And also the history that has developed the way that our culture is in this moment in time. But like you can't just work from one angle only. It's like we have to kind of hold and look at it all at the same time. Right. Yeah, it's hard. I mean it's, it's a challenge. It is. It is. But super important work. So I'm really glad that you're doing it and writing a dissertation about it.

Falami: [14:52](#)

Yes. Thank you. Yeah.

Tiffany: [14:56](#)

I Can't wait to read that.

Falami: [14:57](#)

Oh wow. Yeah. I'm, I'm very excited about this work. It obviously meaningful work to me and that, you know, I'm pouring myself. This is not about looking at someone else. This is me and others. And so those women, and whomever those participants will be, we'll share. And so I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm excited about it. I really am. Well, and so you work with groups, you call them sister circles. Oh. And so is this part of your dissertation? No, it's not. No, it's not. No, it's, the sister circles, is a gathering of sisters who are ready to take hold and to be strengthened and supported and lifted up and empowered by other sisters in this walk, this self-care journey walk.

Falami: [16:01](#)

And so I talk about self-care and how to bring the magic back and it is about magic, and whatever that is. Because I believe that being liberated, body liberation is self-care. And so within the conversations that I talk about self care, we do talk about the body, your body and how do you feel about that? So these sister circles are held virtually. So anybody out of this, the last sister circle that I had had us at a sister in Michigan, one in California, Ohio, Georgia. It was great. And so we talked and we were allowed. And this is sacred space. It's a space where women can gather and share their triumphs and their challenges if it's with their body, if it's with them trying to figure

out how to do self-care because many of us who are accustomed to doing everything for everybody but ourselves.

Falami: [17:06](#) Right? And so how do you get to a place where you realize that now it's time for me to take care of myself? However, I do need to have some support somewhere where I can just bounce things off of another sister. So we would gather together virtually, on a zoom, and talk and I offered sound healing virtually. I am a sound healer. And so this was the time to do sound healing and meditation and to gather our thoughts. And then I also provided, um, articles just for us to discuss and read as a group. So it was, you know, as someone who's reading a lot I needed to have somebody else to read with me. So that's right. So yes. So the circles are meant to serve as a, a sacred, safe and brave space for women to strengthen their journey through wellbeing.

Tiffany: [18:09](#) Hmm. I love that. What did those come out of? Because you work with people one on one as well. Right. So like was there something about working with people one on one that was missing that you notice gets fulfilled when you put people in groups, in a community? What do you notice about that?

Falami: [18:28](#) Well, you know, it came out of a couple different experiences. One of the experiences is that I participated in a run group. It is a nationally known run group years back. And I recalled the feeling that I got when being in community with women who are sharing about their journey, their running journey, their walking journey, their wellness journey. And it was just the recalling the feeling of that. And thinking about how this is, you know, and one of the taglines, or one of the, I don't want to say taglines, but what this group would say is that there's no woman left behind. So no matter how far we were running, there was always going to be one or more people waiting for you at the end. It sounds like, you know, this is, this is what I want for women to feel that they can be in community and to be transparent and to share, you know, virtually about their experiences.

Falami: [19:33](#) So that was, that was made me thinking about how I felt because it felt good, you know, to know that you can talk to someone about a shared experience. So that was it. And then I read an article, and I don't know the author name, but she talked about sister circles as a culturally relevant framework for working with African American women and their health. And I was like, Oh, see I'm on a path, you know. So it was very much, indeed inspired by those two experiences, me reading that article and then of course, thinking about my journey. And then

also just knowing that women of color, black women, we are communal people. And so we like to gather together if it's at the kitchen table, if it's, you know, in a kitchen, just to share recipes, share stories, we gathered together. So all of that, just knowing who we are and what helps us to thrive. And so this is about thriving. And so, that's how I came with it.

Tiffany: [20:49](#) Oh, I love that. I love that you found that article that was talking about it as like a culturally relevant thing because that makes me wonder too, with our, you know, there's like the, the whole culture around therapy, you know, or like one-on-one, one on one. And so now you've got me. I'm just talking off the cuff because now you've got me thinking, I'm like, Oh my gosh, is that another like very Eurocentric way of approaching, you know, healing and health care and all of that. And I'm like, that might be a real thing. I'd have to read more about that or something. Yes, yes, absolutely. Cause it never occurred to me, of course.

Tiffany: [21:33](#) That's interesting, that that's the roots of your sister circles concept. And you talked about, um, you were talking about working with people on, on self care. And I feel like that's a really interesting topic too because I know for a long time self care. It was, it's been, you know, sort of, again, I guess that's been co-opted too by the wellness industry, right? Where where self-care looks like, you know, going to the spa. That's the main one that I think, you know, it requires leisure, it requires money, it requires all of these things. And so I would love for you to say more when you talk about self-care, about what you mean and what that experience is like.

Falami: [22:23](#) Yes. Well I love to talk about self-care just as well as I love to talk about body liberation. Self-care, for me, and it has been co-opted in our society and it's been the buzz word. And so I've, I've, I talk about it's more than just going to get your hair done or your nails done or going to a massage. It is focusing on what nourishes your spirit and your soul. And so I talk about what, you know, when I sit down with clients and I talk about what is nourishment, what is nurturing, of your soul and your spirit and, and you know, it might be a walk in nature, right? It might be saying no, setting boundaries. You know, it might be, for me, scrapbooking. That's my self-care. You know, so it is not any, and I talk about, because oftentimes we get stuck in, well, I got to spend money.

Falami: [23:37](#) Not necessarily, you know, I think what has been a challenge for some is that they have not identified what truly, really nurtures and nourishes their spirit. So last week I posted on my

Instagram page, this was my self-care FaceTiming my granddaughter and my daughter. Right. So you don't think about that. Some people might not think about that, but that is, that nourishes my spirit. So trying to move away, my goal is to try to get, not move away, but to get women to see beyond, I have to spend money. Right. And so looking at how to nourish your spirit, setting boundaries, saying no, making sure that you have an appointment, even if it starts with making an appointment in your calendar with yourself, start somewhere. Right? And it might be even cooking, you know, if you enjoy cooking and cooking for others, that's your self care. So when I sit down, I create self-care plans for women and to help them. And then I coach them along the way. And just as we need a coach for or you know, a trainer for physical needs, you also need them for your emotional needs. Right? Your spiritual needs. So that's what I do as well.

- Tiffany: [25:16](#) I love that. That's really beautiful and thank you for that, that clarity. Cause I feel like sometimes that's a big piece of it is like people just need a broader look at what, what self-care can look like. I love that you said, you know, it could be cooking for other people. It doesn't have to mean like, because I think that sometimes people look at that and think, Oh, selfish. It's something that has to be all about me.
- Falami: [25:44](#) And I let me quote my shero, poet, lesbian, activist, Audre Lorde who said self-care is not selfish. Okay. And that's something that we've been taught unfortunately. So it's again, that retraining, you know, because some of us, many of us have grown up in the ideology that we have to stay busy. Right. And because, and I don't mind is uh, and some of you can probably finish all right and therefore we then do not have time or make time for our self-care. Yes. So now it is time to embrace what that self-care looks like, you know, even if it's taking little bits of chunks of time for yourself, it's not selfish
- Tiffany: [26:44](#) Definitely. And I think the component of identifying what it could look like too, is really useful because it could be that there's something that you sort of already do that that is nourishing for you and it might just be that that's not what you're recognizing it as. Right? Like there's not an awareness of that. So I think it is almost like when you're talking about needing some guidance or coaching in that realm can that even just be like helping identify, um, and helping build awareness of what is nourishing, what is self-care to an individual person.
- Falami: [27:25](#) Right, right. Absolutely.

Tiffany: [27:28](#) Or maybe even like community-wise, like the sister circles. Right. That all seems like that's, you know, like community care.

Falami: [27:37](#) Yeah. Yes, yes. Absolutely. I love that community care. Yes.

Tiffany: [27:41](#) Yeah. Yeah. Because like, does self-care have to happen alone either? You know, I'm just thinking about that too. Right? Like, does healing have to happen alone? Oh, probably not.

Falami: [27:53](#) No.

Tiffany: [27:55](#) It's just almost that individualistic, that mentality that I think we're, so many of us are swimming in. Right, absolutely. Do it yourself. Be self sufficient.

Falami: [28:09](#) Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. And why, why, you know, what does that... for what reason? You know, get the support you need. It's okay. It's okay.

Tiffany: [28:24](#) Oh, so beautiful. So you also, so I've been listening. You have a podcast.

Falami: [28:32](#) Yes. Yeah.

Tiffany: [28:34](#) And how long have you been doing it?

Falami: [28:36](#) Well I started again in January of this year and took a hiatus for the summer, for the birth of my beautiful granddaughter and back on it in the next week or so. But holistically speaking, it's meant to talk all things holistically, wellness, wellbeing for women. And so, you know, I might talk about, weight, we might talk about food, but it's holistic, nurturing yourself, nourishing yourself. So I've had, you know, conversations with mental health practitioner, a counselor I've had a personal trainer on. So it's very diverse and, um, and the guests that I have on it, what I tend to do is to have them to share about their wellbeing journey, their self-care journey. And many of these that I've interviewed, these interviewees have talked about their evolution to where they are now. How did they get to becoming a personal trainer?

Falami: [29:47](#) So they talk about what I talk about, you know, my self-care, my wellness journey. And so I try to stay within those confines because that is what I want to zoom in on. So that my listeners can understand how self care looks from different lenses, right? So not just my lens, so how does it look from my mental health counselor or a personal trainer or, or someone, something like

that. So, so that they have a different perspective on self-care and even possibly if I talk about it on body image as well. So it just, I try to guide that conversation in that way and then then let them open up and share their journey.

- Tiffany: [30:37](#) Do you find that people's conversations and perspectives on body image are fairly similar or really different depending on their various identities?
- Falami: [30:55](#) Yes, it is. It is, that's a very good question. It really is dependent upon the person's identity. How did you know? Because there are some that are very much believing that it's just on the physical aspect of one's body image. And in terms of talking about this size and the shape of a person, right. But then there are some that understand that their body image is made up of their hair texture, the type of hair that they have and how that impacts the way in which they feel about themselves and also their skin complexion. So there's some, depending on their identity, understand that it is just not whether I'm, you know, thin or, or fat or whatever that is, whatever term that is, that they choose to use, they understand that it's more. So, yeah, that's a good question.
- Tiffany: [31:52](#) Yeah. I'm grateful for that answer because I think that that's one thing, you know, coming from like one particular lens, it's so easy to look and say like, Oh, well this is what body image is, right? It's all about like, and I would also wonder too, you know, because if you're coming at body image like in a thin or relatively thin white body, that, that work with like body image and I've seen this too, like within our programs and within our work as an organization, right? If, when the group has a really similar sort of body that they're coming from or social location that they're coming from the conversations tend to be very similar. It's all about body and it's like, you know, Oh no, I'm, my boobs aren't big enough, or my stomach's too big or my arms are too flabby or something like that and yet going in and if, if the group is different, if the person's identity is different than the way that their experience of the world and their experience of their own body and the way that it's treated and valued, is going to be a totally different thing.
- Falami: [33:21](#) Absolutely.
- Falami: [33:22](#) Absolutely. And that's why Tiffany, in my opinion, it's so important to have these, these types of conversations from those of us who live in an intersectional body. Right? And because in order for, my belief, in order for society to make some systemic changes, those who live in one lens, that is not

the minority. So let's say the majority needs to understand what it's like. And that's, that's why it's so important, my work that I do, um, as this body liberation coach and as this PhD scholar to share the lived experiences of African American women in their bodies. Because then if you are understanding, if you know, and let's say for instance if you are aware of a different experience and you are working at a PR firm and you're working on a big account, it has to do with showing experiences of women or whatever that is. Maybe you would recall if you were maybe in a session that you've, you know, facilitated, Tiffany or maybe I've facilitated and you can say, well, I think we should include this about this particular group of people to make sure that we are inclusive. Right. There we go. Another one of our buzzwords. Yeah. That we're inclusive of all bodies. Right. And that again means those who are, who are different abled. Right. So it's not just, so being inclusive means of all bodies.

Tiffany: [35:06](#) Yes. I think that's key. Like the, what you're talking about, about the lived experience, which I of course I'm sure is why you start your dissertation with your own lived experience, your story, because being able to

Tiffany: [35:22](#) then hear that lived experience and that, you know, allows you to put yourself in someone else's shoes really in someone else's...like look through someone else's lens. So to me that's been of the most powerful things in actually starting to question what I know, you know, what I think I know, which there are tons of things that I don't know, you know, like no one knows everyone's lived experience. That's right. Where we can actually hear and talk about them and widen our own understanding of what it's like to live in the world. That I hope that that's what's going to lead us into more actual, real inclusivity, not like manufactured. Right. Absolutely. Which I think manufactured, what I'm thinking of is like manufactured inclusivity, I think actually doesn't take into account people's lived experiences. It only takes into account the optics. Optics. Yes, yes. That's what that feels like to me. Yes, yes, yes. And so it's like, how do we ask ourselves, okay, am I operating based on optics or do I actually have some sort of comprehension or understanding of someone else's lived experience?

Falami: [36:44](#) Right, right. That's why it's so important to, you know, to know people like myself and others that are doing this work and then to bring some, bring them to the table, you know, how do you bring me to your table? You know? And that's what I challenge because it's easy for people to stay within this realm and pull when they need to. The information, however, not truly

invested into garnering and being, you know, committed to understanding the experiences.

- Tiffany: [37:20](#) Absolutely. And how do we, bring diverse voices and diverse bodies and diverse ideas into all the different systems that we have without just tokenizing, without using, without creating unpaid labor for people without... Right? You know, I feel like that's a tricky thing and also is really dependent on a person's lived experience.
- Falami: [37:55](#) That's true. That's true.
- New Speaker: [37:58](#) Like does it, does it feel, you know,
- Tiffany: [38:02](#) I think, I guess we just have to ask people, you know, how does it feel?
- Tiffany: [38:05](#) Like how would it feel to do this thing? Would that feel equitable? Would that feel appropriate?
- Falami: [38:11](#) Absolutely, and that's the question is the question is to ask how, how would you feel if you were, you know, invited to the table for this? You know, don't assume, because not everyone will feel that it is about tokenism, but also how do you develop and maintain the relationship with, you know, you establish a relationship, you know, then you, how do you, you know, maintain that relationship with that person and so that it becomes a genuine relationship, built on a particular mission. You know, whatever that is that you're intending to do.
- Tiffany: [38:48](#) Mm. Yes, absolutely. Relationship development needs to be there as well. So where else can we find you and how else can we connect with you?
- Falami: [39:00](#) Okay, well, I, you can find me.
- Falami: [39:03](#) I have Holistic Alchemy. That's my Instagram. I'm on Instagram and then Holistic Alchemy 8. And you can find me on my website, holisticalchemy8.com and I'm also on Facebook as well. So Facebook, Instagram, uh, yes. And my website. You can find me there. And I'm Falami by the way. And you're Falami and you now when you go to your podcast. Yes, yes. I feel like it's different. The podcast is Holistically Speaking. Holistically Speaking is the podcast. Okay. And it's on PodOmatic and it's on YouTube. And if you see on YouTube, there are two different as of today, two different Holistically Speaking, but you will see mine that says Falami. It's my signature Falami and there's a

picture of me there. So you'll see me. Fantastic. Wonderful. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me today. So excited. I am so appreciative of this opportunity and, and those who are participating in this conference that you receive everything that you need from each speaker and that it resonates where it is supposed to be. So I am so appreciative. Thank you.

Pura Fe Sings:

[40:30](#)

True freedom unleashes the power of unity. Enables us to feel our empathy and compassion with a true sense of identity. Who are we? Powerful beyond measure. Who are we? Power of the creator...