

Tiffany: [00:00:04](#) Hi, welcome to the one love fits all online conference benefiting Embody love movement. I'm Dr. Tiffany Denny, I'm executive director of Embody love movement. And today I got to interview Kat Hawkins based in London and she is a dancer, an artist and a director with a background in journalism and working with the BBC Kat uses her art and her presence and her voice to advocate for social change, especially in the realm of accessibility and inclusivity for disabled people. She is smart and thoughtful, compassionate and passionate. And I can't wait for you to hear what she has to say

Pura Fe Sings: : [00:00:47](#) 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: [00:01:16](#) hi Kat. Welcome. Thanks so much for joining me today.

Kat: [00:01:19](#) Thank you for having me. I love what you're doing and I'm so happy to be a part of it.

Tiffany: [00:01:24](#) Thank you so much. I am so excited to get to talk to you. We almost missed each other and we didn't so we made it happen. Me too. Me too. Cause I have so many questions for you. Awesome. So I would love, I mean I'm, you know, people have heard like your little bio blurb, um, that I give in the introduction, but I, because it sort of lays the groundwork for a lot of what we're going to talk about. I would love for you to tell people a little bit about, um, like your, your illness and your journey with the amputation and all of that just to kind of lay some groundwork for us.

Kat: [00:02:12](#) Yeah. So it's something that just came out of nowhere for me. Um, so I was in my fifth semester at university and so I was 18 and I just got off to university, been there for kind of three months and was absolutely loving it. And then overnight I just got really ill and I got, um, meningitis. And so I, it was very, very ill in the night one night and I saw it beforehand that had been feeling a little bit ill but thought it was just fresh as play. We call it fresh as blue here, you use the same term, but that's an illness that all new students get. And so I thought it was just that. And I put myself to bed and I remember messaging boyfriend at the time and saying, I don't think I'm going to be able to see you tomorrow.

Kat: [00:03:02](#) I just feel really, really rough. And so I went to bed and then in the night I was violently sick. And looking back, I was actually passing in and out of consciousness, but I didn't know at the

time. So I just kind of slept. And then luckily in the morning managed to get up because I'd locked my door, um, but managed to get up and get out of my room and the lights were blinding me. I was stumbling in the corridor, made it to the kitchen. And luckily my flatmates were there and I can remember just saying I feel so ill and then just kind of slumped down on the sofa. And so they called an ambulance and I got taken into hospital and while I was sitting in the accident and emergency, a doctor spotted the start of a rash on my wrist. And so they knew then that it was most likely meningitis.

Kat: [00:03:56](#) And so I got rushed into a side room, given a lumbar puncture, and they determined that it was meningitis. And then I was rushed up to intensive care, put on life support. And I don't really remember much about that time for quite a few days after that, um, apart from like morphine and juice streams where doctors and nurses were attacking me. And then when I came from mound, it was actually the doctors and nurses that were taking care of me that had been in these horrendous, horrendous visions. Um, and so I was in intensive care because meningitis causes multiple organ failure. So at that point, actually the damage to my legs was a secondary and actually making me survives and giving me the treatment that I needed to look after my internal organs was the main priority. And luckily I made it through that really, really trying time.

Kat: [00:04:55](#) Um, I mean I came really close to dying and they, they said to my parents twice that kind of, there was nothing more that they could do and it was just a matter of time. Um, and so after that initial moment, I kind of came around and the damage to my legs was so extensive that I had, I ended up having both of my legs amputated below the knee and to begin with, they thought that it might just be toes in heels. Um, but actually as the time went on, they realized that the damage was so much and they weren't healing in the way that they perhaps expected them to. And so I ended up having my left one amputated. And then when they were doing the operation for that, they had to look at my right one. And that one too was really badly damaged. And so I had the amputation for that one as well, almost a week after, I think. Um, yeah, it was just one of those things that just, and then my life just kind of changed everything that I knew about my body just shifted. So monumentally in that moment.

Tiffany: [00:06:07](#) Yeah, that would be so huge to suddenly have that. I mean, because, I'm physical therapist and so, you know, just even just thinking about how much effort it would take to learn to walk, bilateral amputation. Right? Like,

Kat: [00:06:26](#) Whoa. Yeah. I said, I always say that it must be really strange for my mom because she saw me and walked by in time. The process was incredibly different. But I do remember that is my remote where I kind of like dropped my crutches for the first time and like tentatively took steps on the prosthetics that I had and just being like, well, um, I, yeah, it was, it was a really, really hard time and I think the physio therapy came so, so quickly after the amputations in a way that like, I, I turned my head and I was suddenly like in this world of physio and kind of physio three times a week and really, really intensive and, kind of my, my brain wasn't still aware of what was happening. I was so disorientated and so traumatized. Um, and I think there's a positive in that in the, they all kind of focusing on like productivity and um, possibility and like making you more aware of what technology will be available to you. But also as a part of it, I remember days just crying and just being like, today's not the day. Today's not the day that I learned to walk it, just sitting here today using point blank.

Tiffany: [00:08:03](#) Fair enough. Right. Some days you just, you're like, I just, I showed up today.

Kat: [00:08:08](#) Yeah. And I didn't have a choice in that. There's my parents and so I, I tend to 19 in hospital, so I was in that really interesting space in terms of medicalization where they're like, did we put her on a children's ward? Did we put her on an adult's ward? And they put me on an adult's ward because I was a lot older than a lot of the children on the wards. But also I was very much still a child in a lot of ways. And so moving back in with my parents, them really being caregivers to me. And also just having that first taste of independence and then big back in my home with my parents, they, there was a really like strange, like it felt as though it was a regression at that time back to being a child.

Tiffany: [00:09:09](#) Yeah. I've seen so many ways it would seem, but also I wonder about that because too, you know, if you're in physio and um, you know, there is that, that proactivity of like, yeah, let's, you know, get going, let's learn that to walk, which is now like a new skill even though it's something you've been doing for years. Totally different. So it's like a brand new skill that you're learning and yet I'm curious about the, the messages and like how that came into your brain because, um, because I could see how it'd be so easy to be like, Oh yeah, you know, let's, let's see how much of you know, who I was, what I could do before I can get back. And like, is that the mindset or is it like a mindset of, okay, what, what can I do? Who am I like, where am I now? I'm curious about like how, how you kind of worked with that?

Kat: [00:10:08](#) Yeah, I think for a long time, like definitely all throughout that physio and then for years actually I was very much in the mindset of how does my body now relate to my body before and how can I actually hide my impairment? How can I like trick myself and trick other people into thinking that this is not a part of me or my body or my experience? Like I think that I had internalized a lot of ableist language, which is that review disability and impairment as weakness, as something to overcome as something that isn't a huge part of identity that should be recognized really. And so for a number of years I was very much about like trapped because I just wanted my old body back. I just wanted to be able to do what I had enabled to do before, but I couldn't. And so I was tricking myself really into thinking that that was the way that I should be thinking and portraying myself.

Kat: [00:11:24](#) And so it's taken a long, long time. But I feel as though the past few years particularly, I've really spent time like sitting with my body and learning to love my body as it is now. And there are aides that I can use my prosthetic legs or my wheelchair that helped me to navigate the world. But also it's been really, really important for me to take my legs off, to like really analyze my stumps, my body, my scars, and to really learn to like love it, love it as it is now. Um, and that took me so long, so, so long to like I would see myself in the mirror and especially with my legs off and like really shudder, like not be able to live with myself, like really bring my eyes up to my eyeline. Like if I looked down, I just, I just didn't recognize it for a long time.

Kat: [00:12:27](#) And then Yeah, I carried on with this like really able list view of my legs equal, disgusting. And so I, I hated my body, my own body for a long time. But then there was a really strange realization that I, it was not the best time that I had hated my body, like actually my entire life and I'd been holding my body to these unrealistic standards and external pressures my entire life and they have shifted and they had just changed. And so like truly beginning to love my body for the first time as an amputee has been like a learning process that I've, I've been like trying to do over the past few years. Definitely.

Tiffany: [00:13:23](#) Hm. That's interesting because you're, you know, to me you're talking about like healing or sort of recognizing, um, like not just a, an ablest viewpoint, but like the larger, the larger cultural influence of, you know, what a body should be, which, so, so with your relationship with your body, what was it like before you got sick?

Kat: [00:13:52](#) It was, it was complicated. It was really complicated, I grew up just kind of like, it's very sensitive yes. And that, um, like hid bits of myself because I think a lot of people do and especially a lot of young girls do. Um, because I really did feel a pressure to look a certain way and be certain things. Um, and so it was complicated. But then like on the other hand, I knew my body incredibly well because I was a dancer. And so I did spend a lot of time like really with the details of what my body could do. And like I knew to become an amputee, I knew my feet and legs so well. Like I would not put them into point shoes, like have processes with my feet, like, well, my second day because I was obsessed with dancing.

Kat: [00:15:03](#) Like it was like cruelly my want and love and this way that I would communicate. And so I would dance as much as possible. And as a consequence that had just been so much time with all different parts of my body and loved the freedom that dance gave me because dance is this, this practice that is so of the body but is actually so removed from the body as well that you can dance and you can feel like all of the pressures and the stigma about the body. Yeah, as well as it being so tied to what your body is doing. Um, and I think that's actually helped a lot with me coming back to dance now because it is, I'm just, I'm using my body to express ideas. And so the same like essence of what I was doing before is that I just had to unlearn, who dances and what dance is and who dance is for in order to begin accessing the parts of dance that kind of afforded opportunity then unfortunately there were not that many opportunities still for disabled dancers. Um, and that just needs, we might say for me because well, what do you use are worthy of respect and all bodies are interesting. And I walk into studios now and I see all different types of bodies and it's all just fascinating and beautiful. It's me now. It's opened up this area of dance, which I feel so, so fortunate to have found. I have just on a massive tangent then.

Tiffany: [00:17:00](#) I love this tangent because I feel like that is, I mean, I feel like that can be a metaphor for so many things, you know? Right. Like there's the, the picture that we have in our minds or I saw we, got a picture in my mind, of what dance is, what a dance is like, even though I know, like I've seen people with so many different bodies dance and like personally I love to dance. I'm not a skilled dancer in any way, but like I can, I can sort of relate. I can relate to what you're saying about how like there's freedom in dancing, whether it's, you know, what I'm

Tiffany: [00:17:49](#) picturing in my head as a dancer or like how dance is supposed to be versus the experience of, you know of me shaking my but

in the car while I drive or something. Like dance could be a lot of things. And, and yet, um, and yet the dance that we're allowed to see, right. Or like that gets publicized or shown that's allowed to be visible seems to be a totally different thing. And I feel like that's true in a lot of ways because I was talking to somebody else about how, you know, so often we don't actually see people with disabilities as often in the world because the world is not built for people with disabilities. Right. And like the same goes for dance. You know, people who have prosthetic legs can dance. People in wheelchairs can dance people like people can dance and yet we don't, they're not shown, they're not platformed and things like that. Yeah. And that just happens everywhere.

Kat: [00:18:56](#) Yeah, exactly. It isn't just dance like that is just about how people view bodies and access and who has access to what. And I think if you ask, most people draw me a body, they're going to draw a normative thin able bodied non-disabled body, two arms, two legs, the torso, head standing and yeah, we need to do and lots of work to ensure that people are given access to the things they need in order to just be in the world and be in the spaces. Because like the world is not accessible it really isn't. It has not been built with disabled people in mind. And so like that isn't just a ramp into a building. That is, where is the access for disabled people to be able to be in these dance settings. And that is just like everywhere. It's where is the access for disabled people able to dance in club settings and to be able to dance in professional dance spaces and to be onstage. It is across the boards that access is just failing disabled people.

Tiffany: [00:20:21](#) Absolutely. And so then as a result of that, what has your experience been like? You know, when, when you do go out, say if you go out and you're, you know, you've got your legs on display, right? Like what is your experience like being in the wild with people just around?

Kat: [00:20:42](#) Yeah. Um, it's so difficult because it's something that just changes so much. Um, like how I perceive it that day, which is really hard because it feels as though a lot of the time my response to things is dependent on how I feel. And so for a lot of years, really, I just put a smile on it. I was very like, I'm here and I'm an inspirational disabled person is really to answer all of your questions. And so people would come up to me and people do like being disabled as a very confronting thing, visibly disabled because people will approach you on the street and ask you very, very personal and traumatic questions about your life for a long time I just answered them because I felt as though I should or I was going to be a very bitter disabled person. So I

just answered all of these questions for so long. That was actually just so damaging. So my mental health, like revisiting it and also it made me think that was the most interesting thing about me, that my body was the thing that I should talk about the most.

Kat: [00:22:08](#) It is if I choose it to be like quite often I choose it to be because actually being disabled is like a political identity for me. So I frame a lot of my conversations around disability justice. So then I see a lot of the world through that framework when I choose to do that. Like I think that's the thing is that you're, you are not entitled to anybody's story and you're not entitled to anybody's experience then. Or do you feel as though I did a lot of it to make non-disabled people feel comfortable around me because I wanted to make them feel it's bold and actually I forgot about my own comfortability. Yeah. Um, and so it can, it can be really, really hard, especially if I am feeling vulnerable or paranoid to have people stare at you a lot and invade your personal space and asking you a lot of question.

Kat: [00:23:15](#) And like really struggle with that. And then sometimes it will be okay and I will, that's it. Maybe even invite that look and play with that look and speak to people about it if they ask me questions in a way that is okay for me. Um, so it is hard and it, it's really strange as well because for a long time I had the kind of phone Silicone liner ex stereotypes, my prosthetics and the realistic looking prosthetics. Very uncanny. And then a few years ago I got rid of that. And so now I kind of have like the black carbon fiber metal bionic look and the types of looks that I get changed when that happens. Really? Yeah. I'm not entirely sure why, but I wonder if there's something about, the choice to just put it out there in like a very, obvious way that maybe makes it easier for people. I have a quick answer cause I feel like a lot of the time people want answers about disabled bodies. He wants to be able to look at you, process

Kat: [00:24:42](#) what's going on with your body, feel comfortable. Again, some stability of not to say what people like and I understand it and we're good.

Kat: [00:24:55](#) That's it. Whereas before there was maybe a bit of a like that is that real like, and then I got

Tiffany: [00:25:07](#) Yeah. It's almost that like tr that attempt to normalize your prosthetics almost make people like less sure about what would just a weird anyway of people having to like put your body in a particular like comprehensive box before being able to like be okay with your presence. Right. Like that's, that's weird in itself.

I, it makes me think when you were, when you were talking too about making people, you know, like not wanting people to feel uncomfortable. I thought, I thought that's also just something that women do. A lot of it, you know, in my experience and like for me, you know, not wanting to make people uncomfortable is like actually a conditioned females sort of characteristic too. And so I also thought, well, I wonder if that plays into it. Partly too. It's just like,

Kat: [00:26:06](#) yeah, I think so. I think definitely like I think

Kat: [00:26:11](#) we're taught to shrink ourselves ourselves smaller. We are taught that we're too much with too loud, too opinionated. Do you mean your face? And so I think that the reaction to that, which is a very like justified reaction if you're being attacked for being who you are is to make yourself smaller and to feel as though you, you, you don't deserve to take up the space. Um, and think that like I was definitely trained to deal with those pressures by just being happy. And I think like we as women like do that a lot as well is I'm going to put up a couple shit because there's not telling no alternative why I'm living in your world rather than like really giving me the access. It's access again, access to be able to talk in the way that I need to talk and be listened to and be respected for who I am.

Kat: [00:27:18](#) Yeah. Not having to put on some sort of front to not be seen. Kind of like you said as like bitter disabled person or all of the terms that people use to describe women when we're not smiling. Right. Or something like that. Yeah. And so that makes me wonder too, when you're, so then how, because you, I mean, you have chosen to be an advocate for people with disabilities, right? And so like you say on your terms, a lot of the times that's, that's what you do. And, um, and I wonder like yet it's still seems like it would, it would be exhausting too, you know, if you choose to go out, um, with your, with a visible disability and you, you know what's coming, right. So like, it's almost like every day it seems like you're having to choose whether you want sort of that like exhausting social situation or like not high aid or do you want to just hide it and fit, fit in as best you can because you can.

Kat: [00:28:29](#) Um, you know, I know not everyone can, but like when you're able to, like, you have that, you have that a, so how do you, how do you decide that? Yeah, that's a good question. The reason a huge privilege in being able to height if I want to, if I'm having a good walking day, navigate the world in a way that I necessarily be confronted with people's preconceptions or the Oh yes. Um, if I'm having a good day for time, um, I think learning and

unlearning it, it actually feels as though like that isn't a choice to me to like really use my voice in order to how are the disabled people access what it is that they need to access. Um, and also I think I just like so like passionate that people like to feel as though they can talk like from their experiences truly.

Kat: [00:29:54](#) And it, it's, it is hard because you're confronted all the time, not just by strangers but by your closest friends and family. My ableist language and views all the time. And so the incision about how much am I going to use my energy in order to like, consequently, I am very aware that I am very privileged and so I want to use that privilege to help those whose voices aren't as loud as mine. I'm well educated, I'm white, I'm seeing, I can like, as I said, like a good day, navigate the world relatively easily. That's all right. I want to use that because I do speech people who do not have those privileges. And so if I can do a little bit to make life easier for those people, like I, I will do that. Um, but sometimes I like it is tiring and I do like, there's a thing as well about like I had the trauma of losing my legs.

Kat: [00:31:06](#) Um, but I also had the trauma of coming really, really close, dying and the two traumas together I think made me into somebody who is like very easily able to empathize with other people that have experiences and shock traumas in their lives. And I do think that I haven't yet like realized how to set my boundaries so that I don't take on a lot of other people's traumas. Um, because I do like my natural, my instinct is to just listen and give as much as I can. Um, and especially on social media, like people do message me a lot and I love it and I am so happy that they have somebody that they feel that they can say this too because I know like how important that was the me and I didn't have that when I got ill or have my legs amputated. Um, but it is, it is tiring too to have that so much off of my life and for it not to impact, progress of my life. Oh, that was some time where I just, yeah,

Tiffany: [00:32:27](#) yeah, I can understand that. Yes. That, that sounds like it'd be such a difficult thing. And also, you know, too like, um, I always wonder about because you know, I, I follow you on social media and, okay, well I have a question about that later. I'll wait for it because I, um, because I think about that too and like, okay, when you put yourself out there on social media and are so giving, which, you know, to me that's like a, a really generous act too. Um, to put so much of your, your internal like your heart Oh, for, for the public. And especially for you. Like, you know, to me I can see how, how essential and how helpful that would be for other people that, that can now like share this experience but don't get to see, you know, maybe people like

them represented in media usually. So like, so that to me is, it's so important and so generous because like you don't have to do that. Right. But I wonder if you ever, you know, at times when you're like, I don't want, I want to have a day that's just easier.

Tiffany: [00:33:47](#) I want to, you know, I want to hide. I don't want to talk about this. I want to, you know, um, just almost feel like normal or fit in. Like, do you ever feel those desires and, and then what does that like? Do you get pushback about that? Is it like an internal war?

Kat: [00:34:09](#) Like I wonder how that, thank you for saying that, by the way. I really appreciate that because I am one of those people that it's much harder. Nice. It's too much. It's too much. I'm getting an I, it's too revealing really like worry about how it'd being conceived and I am somebody that struggles with social media and not still, so I really appreciate you saying that. Yeah. I think like I'm not like I've actually realized that like normal does not exist. I'm saying that'd be a work in just constantly reminding people that we all hear these. They're a choice because the choice is either I hide myself away and I don't live the life that I want to live. Oh, I actually just, and I'm going to let the, I'm going to live and do the things I want to no matter the consequences and in doing that. I'm going to try and do it in a way, way that feels authentic to me and actually a struggle with the term authentic because I don't really know what it means, technology changes in every situation I'm in. So I don't know if I'm gonna do it in a way, but like constantly

Kat: [00:35:43](#) fields in some way comfortable for me and for me that is constantly trying to be vulnerable and like truly speak on what it is that I'm feeling in that moment. And if that is revealing, yeah, like I, I really struggle sometimes then that is what it is. And if it is revealing that like I get super, super angry at people's failure to include disabled people, then that is what it is. Or if it's something lighter, then that's what I do that day. And definitely I, I don't spend as much time on social media as I used to or as, as other people because it isn't my full time life. My full time job. Sorry. But aye. Yeah. I, I appreciate what social media like brings to my life as somebody who is disabled, who quite often needs to spend time resting and looking after my body in order to do the things that I want to do though. Oh, physically demanding because I decided to do dance again.

Kat: [00:37:04](#) So I do like, I do, um, just like talking, I don't even know where I'm going with this, but I usually try and step away sometimes, um, to look after my mental health and my energy resources. But also it acts as a dietary for me and as a way to, access

community that is really, really difficult to find in your daily life, I think as a disabled essentially. Um, and they're just a huge privilege for even being able to access the internet and social media. Sure. Do. People who are not able to do that. Um, but for me it has like given me like a real learning process. Um, and just, yeah. Access to people that have just changed my life completely and made me like realize how in denial and ableist wasn't as helpful.

Tiffany: [00:38:17](#) Yeah. And, you know, and how can we not be, but also, and like how can we not be? And it's still not okay, right? we talked so much, uh, like I just think about, we had all these conversations, um, within Embody love movement and just at large about the, the idea of like intention versus impact, right? How, like your intention can be whatever it is, but, but the impact has to be acknowledged. So like, of course it makes sense because of the way that our world is that, that there's abelist mentality in most everyone, right? And it's still not okay. So then, so there's work to be done. Um, but I think I wonder about like a note awareness, you know, cause I think that because, you know, there, there's more awareness around, um, around certain identities there are for others.

Tiffany: [00:39:21](#) So for me, like I, I feel like, like it could be really easy to, totally cause harm and speak in an ableist way and say, um, and I've, I've done it before, right. And then realized it, you know, and, and so I wonder if, um, uh, the, I'm putting you on the spot here so you can say like, I don't have this on the spot, but I'm wondering if you have some of the like more common sneaky ableism I guess that people might not realize is, is ableist whether it's thing that people say or ask or um, just to like places, spaces, things like that that are um, really frustratingly ablest that maybe we don't even realize. Yeah,

Kat: [00:40:18](#) there are a lot. I think so like in terms of spaces, well seeing that like is just unacceptable for me is if you're organizing events, you have to ensure that there are disabled toilets and if it's upstairs that has to be a lift. They, they, for me I'll just like fundamentals and there are accessibility issues that you can then right deal with on top of that. But those two are just like absolute ground bottom fundamentals for me. And then on top of that, I, I think there should be safe spaces. All video content should be subtitled. Is there a hearing loop? Oh, you thinking about people's sensory needs? Um, in terms of language, yes. The, there are a lot. And actually when you say that they're like, you've used harmful language in the past. I don't think people necessarily realize what is, what is harmful language before we even get into the subtiles. I hear people use truly harmful

abliest language all the time. Like retard for some reason seems to be like growing in popularity again. And it just like, I don't understand how people don't realize that that word is wholly offensive in terms of microaggression language. Well, I think the really I get a lot is people like compliment my partner on being a really nice person for being with me. As if they're like doing charity work, just like it's great person for that.

Kat: [00:42:16](#) And people, the inspiration call in one like really, really gets to me as well because so people often use this and they think that they are like being a nice person by doing it. But it kind of, you're so inspiring just for being just being. I am a number of the things that I do could perhaps like truly be inspiring, like progressing like access in the dance world and that's like amazing. But when I am just outside hung over on the way to work, there's, there was nothing inspiring about that situation. I am just living my life and like by saying you're inspiring that situation, I think what you're actually saying is, I don't know how you live in your body. I can't imagine having your body and being outside in the world. And that's really hurtful actually. Um,

Tiffany: [00:43:26](#) wow. Come on. There's a ceremony. Yes. That's an important one that you just brought up though. I think because I honestly, I think it's sometimes just an N a discomfort. It's like a discomfort reaction. Like people don't actually know what to say because we're so physically oriented, but we're so visually oriented that it's, Honestly, we're really trained to like say something about how a person looks before anything else. You know, like, Oh, I love your hair, I love your shirt. I will, you know, like to say something about. So I, it's almost like there's that moment where people are, that's the thing that they noticed so much and like can't figure out, you know, and want to be nice and then can't figure out what to say. But you're exactly right saying that is really just like saying, Oh, you've got a lot to deal with because of your existence. So good job. You know, like good job being brave enough to like come out here and, and exist like, Oh,

Kat: [00:44:31](#) I really just feel like that a lot of the time that it's, its just lazy its just lazy. Okay. Like I'm not an inspirational and don't want to be. And like I, yeah, I really feel as well for disabled people that don't fit into the categories of what people like even think of as inspiration or we call it. It's like, because it, it's huge. But again, there's like a, like a whole privilege of even being seen in people's eyes of being inspirational and like what, what is making you think that I'm inspirational compared to somebody else? We have like this real juxtaposition. It seems as though

there's two ways of viewing disabled people there. Right. The super inspirational to non disabled people or their benefits scroungers that's like a big one in the UK that people who take from the state and very lazy people and it's like both of those are not true anyway. But there is a whole like nuance that you're just completely missing. You're missing the people. Like you are just talking about saving people in these categories and like yes, that's very lazy.

Tiffany: [00:45:55](#) Yes. Very, very much stereotyping based on like based on literally no evidence. Like nothing really. Nothing real there. Yeah.

Kat: [00:46:07](#) It's in the UK as well. There is a big narrative about this benefits ground. Yeah. Yeah. And that actually, when you look into it, the, the um, the numbers of people that, so we have the personal independence payment here, which is a welfare system set up to help disabled people. And when you look into it, it's actually the welfare system that is the least likely to be. I'm sorry, my phone's going off. Okay. The least likely for people to take your fancy job,

Kat: [00:46:46](#) like the media has perpetuated this message.

Tiffany: [00:46:50](#) yes, very much so. Very much so. It's almost like that mentality of like, um, you know, Oh, you can overcome anything if you work hard enough and Oh, that's just so not true in so many different ways.

Kat: [00:47:09](#) Yeah. So that is another one that we see a lot of in the media is that you should be overcoming your disability [inaudible] and say it again, it's like I'm not trying to overcome that name Pam. And like I live with it. It's not going to go away if I have success in a certain part of my life. I have never ever comments. Um, and that is really harmful because it is putting, again the emphasis on a normative body and a normative experience and saying, you should be working really hard to achieve this and if you don't achieve this, then you're failing.

Tiffany: [00:47:53](#) Yeah. And if you can't ever achieve it, then you're always fail. I mean, gosh, the, the mind games with that, right? Like, if you can't achieve some, even that, the image of, you know, a normative sort of body than your or normative experience, then not failure. And that in itself seems really, really harmful. Um, we've been, you know, we've been using the term disability disabled. I'm, I'm curious and I think a lot of people are curious about, cause I know I've asked in the past and you know, like how do we, what do we, what term do we use, uh, when we're

talking about somebody with a disability or somebody that's disabled because of course people have different and everyone has different opinions and experiences with that. But I'm wondering what yours is and like how it feels to hear and use various terms.

Kat: [00:48:53](#) Yeah. And it is, um, it's, it's changed like during my experience, the terms that I have used and it is an individual experience. So like this very much the term that I choose to use is being a disabled person with an internet. And that is because, um, I choose to follow the social model of disability. It says that we are disabled by society. So we are not inherently disabled by our bodies. We're only as disabled as the society with, with within which we live. So we've got our stairs. If there's a lift in a building with stairs, um, and I can't access the stairs, then I am being disabled by the environment around me. If there's a left, then I can access the building as easily as other people. Um, and so yeah, that is the social model then. It's been really, um, great for me actually too. Like really take ownership of the world where disabled and use it politically and as a part of my identity. Um, but I do like, if people want to use people with disabilities, I feel as though like the language war is not where I choose to like like really put my emphasis because I do, I feel as though there's a lot more that we need to actually, um, in terms of just having those acumen, right.

Tiffany: [00:50:25](#) In terms of making the world, like helping people not feel so disabled because of the system. But I think that's a really helpful definition though of disabled because, um, because I haven't] I've often heard it described in that way of like, I am, I am disabled not by, not because that is something that I am, but because that's what, that's my access to society. Like I really like that distinction. I feel like that's really, um, useful and takes like the, there's like not this blame self-blame of like, Oh, I'm just disabled. I'm not good enough. I'm a totally different thing.

Kat: [00:51:08](#) Exactly. If society were truly built with disabled people in mind, then people would be able to access everything. Nothing. And so like when you break it down to that, people not only is disabled as the way in which societies, yes. And that plays into all impairments as well.

Kat: [00:51:28](#) So if you want and you more diverse and people have really taken the time to in bed different communication styles and patterns and that is played out in education in the way it plays in people's interactions with you, you will, you will, they'd be able to exist in an equal way with people for that. People having prejudice against you.

Tiffany: [00:51:53](#) Mm. So true. And then, and theoretically then like there would actually be more representation. And I think with, with disability, it's not, it's not even only representation in media, which there's not enough of right. And that's a lot of different identities as well. But like there's actually not enough representation of disability in the world at large because it seems so difficult to access. And, and, and to me, I just think, um, there's this, this element of, and it must be an issue of like fear of fear, like people's, okay.

Tiffany: [00:52:34](#) People, I don't know if it's like a, you see somebody with a disability and like it kicks in some sort of fear response and people and I, I don't think that people are like afraid of the person, but like afraid of, Oh gosh, you know, I can't imagine. Yeah. Like, like there is the, and so I think probably that's another reason why that people act so weird around people. I think you're right. Like it is the, the one minority that anybody can join at any time probably plays into people's like feelings about their own body. Maybe, um, right that I think that that only occurs if think of

Kat: [00:53:26](#) being disabled as negative. And the, the issue is, is that we have that throughout even the medical field. So there is like a, an emphasis like even from the medical world than doctors about how a person should be. And so like from being born onwards, they're trying to make your body as close to this image that they have in mind of what a body should be. So if your baby is for example, born disabled, that will then be communicated to the parent as this is horrendous. This is your child is going to have this horrendous life, which they may do because of the stigma and prejudice around [inaudible]. But like it is not inherently bad to be disabled because disabled people as we see are they fantastic people that have the offer to the world and should be in all of the spaces they deserve to be like seen and heard everywhere. And so if we focus on that rather than focusing on like straight away, your life is awful. So important.

Tiffany: [00:54:47](#) So important. I feel like that is, and how would we change that mindset? You know, I don't know except doing work like your doing and speaking about it and trying to um, change language and try and create access so that, um, so that it's not so much work to just exist in the world because if it's, if it takes all of your energy to get out to exist to be, then how do you have any energy left to, to live your life and do the work that you're meant to do and that you want to do and love to do. And that's just such a,

Kat: [00:55:31](#) this is part of the reason why disability rights has really not being given the focus that it deserves. Is that like, like you say, a lot of the time disabled people just cannot be there because we are struggling with our bodies and just showing up. So a lot of protests, we can't be there and we can't be represented, which is why we do rely so heavily on allies. I used to just don't seem to like really exist that merge for disabled people like it is, it's a real shame, but like I, I call it like the 24 and I'm sure I didn't play in this, but like the 24 hour drop off period where you will have a conversation with somebody about access and you will see them like the shocked face. It's like, Oh, shocking to you hearing this for the first time. You'll see the shock and then you will like no 24 hours later that they are not carrying on that conversation with other people.

Kat: [00:56:31](#) And I think a lot of that is because it takes a lot of noticing firstly, which I don't think people are necessarily like trained to do. Noticing when something is inaccessible and then calling it out. And I think that people just don't want to do that. They don't have the impetus to do that. And that's where I think that the, the work that a lot of people online and disability rights activists do is in trying to make people realize that you are excluding human beings here. That we are human beings that exist in the world and really do like, just need to be heard and listened to and helped.

Tiffany: [00:57:18](#) Yeah, absolutely. I, um, and so do you feel like that is one of the best ways that people can be allies for disabled people is by, is by actually using the, the privilege and the voice and the presence that we have in and say like, Hey, have you thought about this situation or somebody that is coming in with this disability? Like is that, is that the most helpful way? What are some of the best ways?

Kat: [00:57:48](#) Yeah, I think that that's really helpful. I think ensuring that events are accessible and actually refusing to go with their not is really helpful and saying like, is this accessible? Because if it's not, then we need to be setting a precedent that we need to be making this successful, cool. And disabled people expect the bare minimum, they expect situation be an acceptable to them. So if you release a flyer and you say like, please let me know any accessibility requirements, we'd have an accessible toilet or it's on a ground floor, but it's accessible, wheelchair accessible. If you say that, and then you actually say below that would not have been able to sort out accessibility here. At least you're putting the information out there. So disabled people, no pen up and it's not accessible because a lot of the times, well I, I

speaking to say people who I don't go to stuff because they just expect it to not read.

Kat: [00:58:52](#) Um, so I think just voicing that and beginning to notice when things aren't accessible is really helpful. Um, and also just asking everybody what their access needs are. I feel like that's a really good place to start is that everybody mm deserves the right to be asked what their access needs are. Um, that's that. I think that changes communication styles just generally. Um, which is really helpful. And then beginning to kind of critique some of the conversations that had around impairments and beginning to speak up for disabled people. Um, because it is really tiring to just go over the same stuff all the time. Yeah. And so like the inspiration porn thing, like maybe like learn to you're like, why are we seeing this person as inspiration? Do you want to be seen as inspirational? How'd you feel about that term? I know a lot of disabled people don't like it.

Kat: [00:59:54](#) Opening up those conversations, there's non-disabled people all these like really helpful I think. Um, what other ways is it good to be an ally? Um, I felt a lot like when I worked it full time I felt a lot like, um, I was a token who was being used, like to speak on behalf of all disabled people. That's like a, a realization of that is like important as well. Um, that you don't have, like you are not entitled to somebody whose experience and just recognizing that and just allowing people to speak well themselves. That at the pace in which they want to include you in that is, um, is an important one as well.

Tiffany: [01:00:48](#) This information has been super helpful. I feel like, I feel like I'm honestly, there's a big like, awareness hurdle even to, to come across. And of course, you know, everybody wants to know like, well, what can I, you know, what can I do? What can I start to become more aware of? Because otherwise I think it can feel so insurmountable. And I actually, I actually think that when things feel too big and too insurmountable, the privilege takes over and it's like, Oh, I don't actually have to worry about this, so I'm going to let it go so I don't have to feel overwhelmed by it. And so to me, even having this just super helpful, um, but like small things that we can start with and I know that, that even, you know, for me like something like, um, I am, I've caught onto this too, like putting the descriptions on social media or like captions on videos or things like that. Just little things they, and they do take extra effort, right? But, um, but at the same time are so the more people do them, the more people will see them and recognize like this is something I can do to actually include people.

Kat: [01:02:09](#) Exactly. Yeah, that's really important. Um, and like positively, I see a lot more people doing that now, which is really great. Um, like people with big followings as well that have spoken out about this, which again is really good. Um, I think like it is just, it does take more time, but it's like, just like we have to, we have to all do it so that it, that we're not excluding people because otherwise you're just, you're making a choice there. You don't care if a blind person knows what's in your photo and that's like really, they're just horrible. Yeah. Um, yeah, it like you're, you're reflecting, you're saying that you don't care about those people, like kind of cared about their experiences and what they, you can see in the world and what they can access in the world. It's just, yeah, it's, it's not, it's not fair.

Tiffany: [01:03:13](#) It's not,

Kat: [01:03:15](#) we all have to do those things. And actually it really helps when businesses like Instagram make it easier for people. And so we have to like begin to talk about it openly as well and put pressure on businesses or huge organizations and people because they're not going anywhere to make changes, to really listen to the experiences of marginalized people and also begin to include them top down because that's the way that you see change happen. Like it's not enough to actually, like I was saying about feeling like, okay, it's not enough to have somebody that often taking a lot of the wait and having to do a lot of the talking. It has to be top-down. Who are you employing? Who is on your organizing committee? In what ways are you reflecting the experiences of people?

Tiffany: [01:04:12](#) Yes. And that feels that was really important too, so that, um, so that you don't have a person that has to carry the accessibility, um, impetus for the whole organization that's not supported by, by the bigger picture.

Kat: [01:04:37](#) And also like it's not my job like that. It's out there who get paid to do that. This is like bringing in bottles and just like making marginalized people take on two roles. Why they do their actual job and one way they talk about diversity, get somebody in and then she paid them for periods that gave a accrued in finding the ways to teach people about that rather than just like tagging it on to a conversation that we're having about work related stuff. And then, Oh, how'd you feel about this huge thing?

Tiffany: [01:05:11](#) Yeah, good point. I wonder what the statistics are on how often that happens in the workplace. not much at all. And I do feel a lot of the time is though it is marginalized people that have to, they fight constantly.

Tiffany: [01:05:30](#) I think that that's true. And I, and I have heard that, um, I've heard that a lot actually that and I, and I recognize that it's hard cause like if you, you know, you feel like, Oh I have a relationship with this person. They work here where they're a part of the organization, I trust them. And Oh like they're so smart. And I think that sometimes it comes from this place of like, Oh yeah, I, I'm showing how much I care about them and trust them and, and I, and I can understand where that comes from, but I think it's really important to hear how it feels as like you're asking me to do extra unpaid labor and to speak for every person that sort of shares an identity with me. Like that's, um, and that's actually not okay. Like I could see where it comes from and it's not, okay, so let's, let's change that. Like you say, there are consultants that do this professionally, like pay them.

Kat: [01:06:24](#) Yes, exactly.

Tiffany: [01:06:29](#) I love that. And I'm okay. I could, I really could talk to you a really long time. This has been so useful and enlightening conversation, but I don't want to take up any more of your time. I do however want to hear, because I know, you know, the purpose of this conference is really to talk about like bodies and all of that. So we talked about a lot of that. But you do a lot. You're in a lot of places. You have projects and it's really awesome. So I would love for you to tell people where they can find you, what you're up to and where they can sort of keep in touch.

Kat: [01:07:07](#) Yes. I just, I just can't believe that I'm actually like dancing. It's my job to dance again, honestly. It's just like, oof. Yeah. Amazing. Um, so I, you can find me. I'm at amputee underscore Kat on Instagram. I really want to change my name but not today. And then we'll do with that later. You can help me. New names. Yeah. I um, Kat underscore B underscore Hawkins on Twitter and then anything. And so I'm working mostly on dance projects at the moment and really, um, looking a bunch of stuff. But the body and what we think of when you think of the body and how we can actually moved to like, like elongate the body. I'm working a lot with like adding things onto my body. I'm confronting the audience a lot.

Kat: [01:08:18](#) Comfort levels are in terms of the body and what they see. And the ways in which that is presented. Um, yeah, those are like really fun body stuff. Um, which is this, yeah, it's really like helpful for me as well. It's really helpful to think of the body in very different forms. Um, there's something interesting as well like using prosthetics. So ways in which my body of is Oh, floral bodies if you didn't like in the ways in which factors that if I

have my Perceptyx on, if I have them off, that's going to change how people view it from my own different percentage. Cause if I'm moving like all of these things really change how people see the body. Um, and then also like a bunch of unlearning. So like actually the body is the least interesting. Anything about me. And that's a huge thing for me. Our bodies are the least interesting things about us and so I'm doing those with dance stuff and then I'm working on a few short films as well. Um, and a little bit about some of the stuff that we've spoken about in terms of like the, the view, like how, how confronting that can be to be stared at all the time. That's the short girl night working on the movie, which is really fun. Do bit janitors in scale as well. Like what's called on journalists and granted still do. So that's great. Intervention friends and stuff.

- Tiffany: [01:09:53](#) Random stuff. So random random things that we need to go find and share widely.
- Kat: [01:09:59](#) Yeah. Yeah. Get in, get in touch if you uh, interested in yeah, the disabled activist as well. There are people on Instagram who were doing really important work. @the_feeding_of_the_fox . @rubyallegra is amazing. There are some like truly phenomenal people like giving a lot of their time and energy do this. So for sure.
- Tiffany: [01:10:31](#) Yes, I know I, it's great to follow because I've learned so much, which I feel grateful for because
- Kat: [01:10:41](#) no, that's like we have the power to curates Our social media feeds, we learn and we see what we want to see like I is, they, we don't have to follow their accounts that just like appear on a discovery channel. Like that is like a really, really strong rich layer. Oh, truly amazing activists. You, yeah. In like radical ways.
- Tiffany: [01:11:11](#) Yes. And choosing to share and choosing to educate, people like,
- Tiffany: [01:11:17](#) which is, it's huge. Like that's such, like I said, it's just generous, right? Like that, that choice to, to educate people well that might not know and they're doing it through social media and like me have the ability to follow and then learn and change our view. And that to me, that's the positive aspect of social media. Like that's, to me, that's the purpose of being on there. It's like, Oh, what can I, what can I learn and then apply. I know.
- Kat: [01:11:49](#) Very lucky that it has the amount of talent and experience, generosity, like you say, helpful for real. Say that again. They used to give us nipples. We're giving you a lot too.

New Speaker: [01:12:13](#) Yeah, a lot. Or at least

Tiffany: [01:12:15](#) like you say, make some things easier for, um, access. Right. Like make some, make some changes to make it work

Kat: [01:12:22](#) more overall accessible. Like I hadn't thought about that, but that's a really good point. They could do that. Yeah. And they brought in the old tags so you can like describe, but they should be like working really hard to like make it accessible across the board.] captions can be included in a way that like what for deaf people to be able to read as they, as somebody. So again did at time small and like there's a bunch of um, like color issues on there as well, which can make text really hard to read and you kind of like out there as well and kind of changed some of the color combinations that they commonly have. Super interesting. So again, is this something that like I'll put them in my social media, they're all some websites that are really handy tools for making Instagram as accessible as possible. 9

Tiffany: [01:13:27](#) Oh really? Okay. I might have emailed those to me and then I can share. Be great. Yeah, that is awesome. Kat. Thank you. No, thank you.