

Tiffany: [00:00:04](#) Hello, welcome to the one love fits all conference benefiting Embody Love Movement. My name is Dr Tiffany Denny. I am the executive director of embody love movement. And today I had the joy and privilege to speak to Nike Omomukuyo, who is an incredible young Nigerian American recently graduated from Cornell university, and she is working in the public health sector. And she is a fierce, dedicated advocate for mental health, uh, for communities of color, specifically. Our conversation I found to be so interesting. Nike's story is heartbreaking and hopeful and inspiring. And we talk about perfectionism; we talk about her experience in developing and then going through recovery from an eating disorder, and the ways in which she had to move through institutions and organizations intended for healing as a woman of color. I really felt like our conversation and her story was an important one and I hope that you enjoy listening to Nike as much as I did.

Pura Fe Sings: [00:01:21](#) 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: [00:01:47](#) Nike, welcome. Thank you so much for talking to me today.

Nike: [00:01:52](#) Oh, of course. Tiffany, it's a pleasure to meet you and I cannot be more excited and honored to be contacted by embody love to help you guys with this movement and this work. And, um, I'm excited to be a resource as best as I can.

Tiffany: [00:02:10](#) Yes. I, uh, I found you and I read this blurb that you wrote and I was like, Oh, I have to talk to her, and so I'm just really grateful that you're willing and able to do it because I think that what you have to say is really important and really valuable.

Nike: [00:02:29](#) Yeah, absolutely.

Tiffany: [00:02:32](#) So to start off I want to just let everybody have a little more information about you and your journey, and so I would love to know how your relationship with your body has changed over time? How has that journey been?

Nike: [00:02:53](#) So my relationship with my body, right? Yes, that's a, that's a wonderful question and I think that's an important question to ask when you are, um, beginning to understand anyone's reason and going into body political work. Um, and so for me, um, I think a lot of times our journeys begin when we're young. You know, when we're kids and you don't even realize how

things that we experienced and the factors in our environment influence us until we're older and they manifest into behaviors. And so, um, I started getting a lot of information about my body when I was maybe like nine from what I really remembered. And, um, I was always someone with a very slender, thin frame. However, in Nigerian culture, we really emphasize and value, you know, having meat on your bones and you know, being thick and well-rounded.

Nike: [00:04:08](#) And, um, my mom especially really made sure to emphasize that on to me when I was younger. And so I got a lot of information, pressure, a lot of, um, judgments, you could say from being so small, and I put a lot of pressure on myself to eat and gain weight so I could please the image of being, you know, Nigerian. And, I was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia and I moved from there, before I started high school, to Seattle, Washington. Um, and that was a huge, that was a huge cultural shock for me, and I didn't realize how much of a burden and a weight it eventually pose for me moving forward because I was really excited because, you know, where we were living in Georgia was not, um, it was a very unstable environment and the opportunities there educationally were very scarce.

Nike: [00:05:28](#) And so when we moved, we moved for the purpose of having an open door to these resources. And yeah, we received that. However, starting high school in an environment that is major contrast from where I grew up in the past 15 years. I saw another, you know, representation of what it meant to look, um, thin, beautiful, and active. Every single person, all of my peers were active, working out, playing sports, um, you know, thin, white, in-shape. And that was a contrast from my own ethnic culture of Nigerian where I'm being told to be, you know, thick and eat and you know, look healthy according to their standards. Then also moving from Atlanta, Georgia where, you know, we have bigger bodies. Um, more shaped bodies within the African American community and being thick and curvy is what's in

Nike: [00:06:39](#) So now I'm here, in Seattle, different standard of culture. And again, now I'm in my primal years in my education right before college, lots of stress to do well, perform well academically. Um, and being a first generation, low income student, I was having additional pressures on myself to find financial aid and scholarships and do well on the SAT and get into a great school and you know, um, things that I'm doing on my own because I, I don't have the resources or the support that a lot of my own peers, have the privilege of having because of, you know, their upbringings. So I'm focusing on that. Also dealing with

additional personal family trauma, stress at same time. I'm trying to adjust to this move because I am the only, you know, black person within my classes. I took a lot of AP, high-level classes, always been um, an A student, you know, perfectionist, striving hard, well known student within my communities in Georgia.

Nike: [00:07:58](#) And then I moved here and I stuck out like a sore thumb. And, um, I felt very spotted, very different. The difference was very sharp and that was discouraging for me as I tried to adjust on top of all these factors. And so I think as I tried to do my best to fit in and to cope and manage all these different things that are putting upon me, I turned into trying to control my, my body, you know, and that started with working out, you know, working out just a little bit, cause you know, everyone else, my peers, you know, literally everyone else works out. Something I've never done or experienced prior to moving here. Everyone works out. Okay. Well I'll start working out too. So I'm working out. We had, we had a little gym in the apartment that we just moved to, so I was going there like once a week or so after school. And then it began to be at-home exercises cause I couldn't always go to the gym, and then it turned into like multiple times a week, excessive hours of the day. Then it turned into restriction of meals and food and calories. And I'm thinking, Oh wow. Like I'm getting so healthy, you know. Wow. You know, I'm a health expert. Like really out here killing the game. I'm fitting in, you know, a part of the crowd now.

Tiffany: [00:09:51](#) I'm wondering how that contradiction between being praised for your thinness by your peers, and then your family valuing and indicating the total opposite. I'm wondering what that was like.

Nike: [00:10:05](#) Exactly. And so they were really like, Oh, you're really losing a lot of weight. You're really going to the gym a lot. You're really cutting out a lot of food. Um, and I always justified that by saying, Oh, like I'm trying to be healthy, you know, trying to live a healthy lifestyle. It's not a diet. It's a lifestyle. You know, classic, classic quote. And they were like, well, you know better than us and that's what everyone else is doing is trying to be healthy and fit, so totally keep on doing it. But of course they were concerned because also ethnically our food is very rich, you know, and we aren't people who eat salads for instance. We are people who eat lots of meat and potatoes veggies combined and it's a lot of nutritional richness.

Nike: [00:11:16](#) But it doesn't have any limits to it. So they were concerned because it was like you're becoming very Americanized. But again, they were like, you're doing well in school, you know

what you're doing, you just got into a great school, you got scholarships, you're good. But I had to check myself prior to going to college because I noticed that it was becoming very excessive. Well, exercise was. So I'm like, okay, let me cut down on exercising. But I continued with the restriction of my, of my meals, and going to an Ivy league institution is a whole other ball game of stress alongside being a first gen person of color, low income... Um, that's a whole other conversation. And there's a lot of pressure on you to be the best amongst your peers.

Nike: [00:12:19](#) So not just academically, but also, you know, there's this like weird competition amongst students of, I didn't sleep last night, I have to study for this exam and prepare for this interview and do this meeting. I'm the president of this. And someone else is like, Oh, I didn't sleep at all. I pulled an all nighter, I have five exams. You know, it was a weird competition to always be doing something, you know, and I am someone who likes to be involved helping out doing things. So I am working a lot cause I'm on a work study and I'm also trying to be up in this game of being in X amount of clubs and doing well in X class and having this meeting and this test and not sleeping, you know, and I'm someone again, I love to interact and engage and be there to help people and this and that.

Nike: [00:13:22](#) So coming into junior year, I'm still trying to uphold this persona of this like perfect, on, engaged, you know, active, involved person and then my eating disorder really, really, really manifested itself. Because as I was doing all these different activities, I was trying to cope with that unconsciously, slash consciously though at the same time, with these behaviors of restriction and not making time to eat cause I'm too busy, I'm studying or I'm helping residents are, you know, doing this and that. Um, I'm mentoring. And that fall of my senior year, really the whole year was an absolute disaster, like disaster. But that fall because it was the start of the disaster, is so vivid in my memory because I fell into a state of depression, you know, that's often a side effect of eating disorders, restrictive episodes, and I've never been, never been depressed before.

Nike: [00:14:43](#) Or diagnosed at least; never been to therapy. What's therapy?

Tiffany: [00:14:58](#) So between your upbringing and culture...

Nike: [00:14:58](#) The cultural stigma, ethnic stigma, you know, around that is...another conversation again.

- Tiffany: [00:15:08](#) Did you experience that as well, a lot of stigma culturally around getting help?
- Nike: [00:15:12](#) Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. And so I was really demising and I was starting to not be able to be on all of the time. I still tried my hardest to be, but I wasn't performing well academically and my grades were going down. I was losing my motivation because again, depression was really coming at me and my friends were really concerned. They noticed what was going on for me and they were really trying to encourage me to go and seek help. And you know, we have a lot of great resources at my university for mental health. Well, they try to. And I went, and that was very surreal for me because I'm like, Nike, what are you doing here?
- Nike: [00:15:59](#) Why are you about to talk to a therapist? Like sis what is this? But that's something that I had to do. And that was a really, that was the most pivotal, one of the most pivotal steps in this journey of recovery. Because that was my first step to get help, though I hated it and I was still still in denial that I was in need of help. But I knew in my mind, I knew that I was going downhill, you know, and that was one of the earlier moments where I, I noticed that, Hey, you know, if you, if you continue this way, all of this hard work that you've done, all this effort that you've put into getting where you are right now is not going to be worth it. It's going to continue to be lost cause you're losing yourself.
- Nike: [00:16:51](#) Um, and my therapist and my supports, um, cause we have, a nutrition program for people who are struggling with, um, eating and weight at my school. And it's not just therapists, it's therapists, nutritionists, psychologists, um, and then a nurse practitioner. It's a team of people who help you, especially when you are dealing with severe disordered eating. And the team of people who were helping me from the beginning were like, Hey, maybe we should consider an IOP kind of program to help you treat this cause it's more complicated than you think it is. You know, you need to take steps to get some intervention. And so I started an IOP program, which was nearby my school, so I could go and then come back during the day. And it was really helpful, but I had to stop because of insurance, um, and money.
- Nike: [00:17:58](#) And you know, my grades went downhill, like worse, the worst I've ever seen in my entire life. I've never, ever been below an A-minus before. And I'm in the D's, you know, because my mental health is so degraded and it's so broken that I can't focus on my education. I can't focus on being emotionally supportive to my mentees or my residents, or, you know, my peers or

anything. I can't do anything. I can't function. And so my advisors were like, hey, your health is now affecting you academically and personally and you are not who you were. You're not yourself. And hearing that was terrifying to hear, but it affirmed to me, cause I already knew that I was like Nike, this is not you, sis, who are you? This is not you right now. So I ended up making the very, very difficult decision to take time off of school.

- Nike: [00:19:18](#) And I spent that summer after my junior year, I spent the next four, four or five months in a recovery, program, in Seattle.
- Tiffany: [00:19:34](#) Like a residential program?
- Nike: [00:19:39](#) Right. So I went through residential first because, um, that was the worst, you know, health wise, so I had to start from the most intensive care of residential. I did that for like two, three weeks. It was supposed to be more, but insurance. And then I was demoted to PHP and I did PHP for like a good two months. And then I demoted again to IOP for like three-ish weeks. And then I had to stop because of insurance. Um, and I was
- Tiffany: [00:20:27](#) So residential is like the all day, every day you're there type program. Then PHP you're there all day but go home at night and then IOP is kind of like part time. Right?
- Nike: [00:20:36](#) Exactly. Exactly.
- Tiffany: [00:20:39](#) I saw you post something about your experience in treatment...
- Nike: [00:20:43](#) Yeah, when I was told I had to do residential, um, I knew that it was coming cause I knew that I was in a very, very severe health state. And so I come in and, and the first few days really difficult. I was the only, um, person of color in the space. And it was a very like, intimate space. So maybe about 20, 15, 20 people. Um, and I was the only person of color. But I would put that aside. I'm like it's no big deal. Whatever. However it became a big deal because a lot of the things that I needed as a Nigerian American, black woman, weren't things that I got because of the differences in the culture. And that's a really, really clear problem in treatment services. It's very catered towards,
- Nike: [00:21:48](#) it's very Eurocentric. Um, so I come in and have my hair natural hair or braided or whatever it is. I wear shower caps, you know, every now and then to protect my hair from damage or falling out and dying as cause it's a lot of maintenance for my kind of

hair. But the treatment center, um, doesn't allow like plastic bags because it can be used as an enforcer for some dangerous behaviors. Um, so they took my shower cap away and they gave it to the nurse and they were saying, Oh, you know, you can get it whenever you need it. I'm like, okay, fine. So my first morning at the program I woke up, had to go take a shower and I'm going to the nurse asking for my shower cap and she's like, Oh, I don't know where it is.

Nike: [00:22:52](#) I can't find it. And I'm like, what? What do you mean you can't find it? I was told to give it to you and she starts, you know, giving me an attitude, starts looking around for it, and she can't find it anywhere. Mind you being in residential, you know, they have very, very strict limits and times and schedules and you know, we're always being monitored. So I'm like, Oh, well I have 20 minutes now before breakfast starts and it's my first day, can't be late, like come on, figure this out. So I'm like really, really, really mad because I shouldn't have had to have gone through that. You know what I mean? And the way that I was helped with it was just so passive and like no one cared or understood. Anyway, she finally finds the shower cap and it's like tossed, like on the curb of the trashcan.

Nike: [00:23:50](#) And I was just fuming. I was so mad. Um, so that was just one of the many experiences that I had and I'll touch up on like a few others later on. But that was one of the few, one of the few experiences of like cultural differences and separations that I, you know, had to go through. And then I experienced some other things, like a lot of the meals that are placed and created, meal plans that are created for clients are very Eurocentric, you know, and I think my hardest meal was for dinner we had like an egg sandwich or something or like tuna sandwich or something. And I've never had that in my life. Never had that in my life. And I was really struggling because I've never had this before,

Nike: [00:24:55](#) and I'm also like in this restrictive state of mind. And I just remember breaking down because I couldn't eat an egg salad sandwich or whatever it was called. And you know, um, I really just felt, there are people who tend to have issues with eating during dinner every night. And so far I hadn't been one of those people. And then that moment I had become one of those people because I couldn't eat the damn egg salad sandwich. And I was so, so, so mad. I was crying. But it didn't boil down to just the difference and never having had this before. I just don't want to eat this because my mind and my body is so disconnected that I can't, I can't even do this, you know, but the pressure of this foreign food just literally escalated that.

Something that I think can be improved, um, for more intersectional communities when they are trying to be encouraged to eat their meals and be connected with their body again of foods that aren't exclusive to Western society and Western culture.

Nike: [00:26:26](#) So I also went through an experience of, there was a nurse at residential. And just to further highlight the differences in you culture and how that integrated within treatment intervention. We have groups and one of the groups is about medical health and nutritional health. Just to give us a better biological basis of what happens for us with are disordered behaviors and patterns. So one of the groups was about vitamin D deficiency and how, when you're not, you know, eating foods with supportive calcium which helps, X, Y and Z mechanisms happen. And so the nurse was talking about that and she starts talking about like different groups of people that are very prone, different demographics that are prone to have low vitamin D deficiency. And that's interesting because earlier that day and the morning she mentioned to me as I was seeing my checkup that I had vitamin D deficiency, and I'm like, okay, sure

Nike: [00:27:48](#) And she gave me all the information about my specific, you know, whatever. And I'm like, cool, whatever. I'll take X, Y, Z vitamins to help improve that. Cool. So now fast forward to this group where she's presenting about the different demographics that have that vitamin D deficiency. And she mentioned, you know, the black community, African American populations tend to have vitamin D deficiency for X, Y, and Z physiological reasons. Then she looks at me,

Tiffany: [00:28:26](#) Oh no.

Nike: [00:28:26](#) She looks at me and she goes, yeah, Nike, you know, you're black and you have vitamin D deficiency. Right?

Tiffany: [00:28:46](#) So now not only are you asked to be a representative for all black people but your, your private health information is being shared with everyone.

Nike: [00:28:56](#) Exactly. Exactly. And you know, and then on top of that, I'm already the only black person, you know, person of color really in the room, and she points this out, looks at me, and I didn't say anything cause I was started. I was in shock that she even felt comfortable to point that out. So the group ends and I'm just like reeling. I asked to speak with her in private cause I'm not gonna put her on blast cause you know, whatever. And we go into a private room and I express to her how, what she said

was not only, um, offensive to me as a black female, but also a violation of HIPAA, like medical records and information. And I, again, whenever I'm talking to someone or approaching them about a concern, I'm not someone who's confrontational, I'm very gentle.

Nike: [00:30:10](#) And so I express myself as I should have. And then I'm also like trying to not, you know, be aggressive or whatever with her and she is just like, Oh, well I didn't think it was a problem. And that was her response to it. And I was again, hurt to hear that it was just so dismissed. She didn't care about it or have any regard for it. So I just left and left the room and in my mind I was like, you know, Nike, just be grateful. Be proud of yourself that you took the time to advocate for yourself, even if she wasn't receptive to it. And I put it aside. But, um, two days later I was eating and she pulls me aside and she goes, Hey, I wanted to follow up with you about our conversation earlier.

Nike: [00:31:13](#) And, I wanted to apologize because I realize after thinking more about it that how I went about, first of all, uh, my response to you was terrible, and that shouldn't have happened in the first place. And then I had to have like a little conversation with her about different things and was like, wow, this should be in a training. But, um, but she realized that that was something that shouldn't have happened, you know. So I leave residential and I go to PHP, um, which is like you talked about earlier, you're there for most of your day and you eat breakfast and lunch there and then you go home and you eat dinner or actually I'm lying to you, you have all of your meals there. And I think PHP for me, I'd probably say was the core of my recovery process.

Nike: [00:32:24](#) And I won't go into the specifics of everything, but again, I come into this space with new people again. And here I am again the only person of color. Hey, what's up? And, we have like snack times intervals during the day in between meals. Cause you know, part of the process of getting you to eat is practicing with behaviors and stuff on a schedule. So it's during snack time and sometimes the nutritionist pick snacks for us that we all have to eat to kind of help be collective, like a dorm experience. And so the assigned meal for that snack for that day was um, string cheese and milk. But I'm lactose intolerant. Um, and a lot of people who are of African descent are lactose intolerant because our, you know, our genes.

Nike: [00:33:38](#) We don't have a heavy calcium rich diet, you know, so we tend to be lactose sensitive or lactose intolerant. Um, and so I'm someone who unfortunately happens to have that gene very strongly. And so I am seeing this snack choice and I'm telling the

therapist, the person who's facilitating snack, I'm telling her, Hey, I'm sorry, can I have another alternate option? Like I can't eat string cheese cause everything that I just said, and she's like, no, you have to have it. And I'm like, no, I can't have it because this and that is going to happen. And she's like, well if you don't eat that, you have to eat cottage cheese. I'm like, that's still dairy. Like you are not comprehending what I'm telling you, you must not know what the lactose intolerance means,

Nike: [00:34:38](#) cause I literally just told you...What are you saying right now? So the that ends up being this back and forth scuffle, and mind you, the other clients, other girls are in this kitchen looking and hearing this. And so I grabbed the string cheese and I grabbed my milk and I sit down. I'm heated, I'm so heated and embarrassed. Um, and it was my first day of PHP. Again, only person of color and I don't know anybody yet. And I kind of felt like everyone was staring at me, felt like I was like on the spot because I literally just had a whole argument with this lady. I probably looked like some angry black woman, you know what I mean? And I just felt very isolated, very isolated. And I was overwhelmed, so overwhelmed emotionally, and I was like, Nike, what do you want to do right now?

Nike: [00:35:40](#) Do you want to get up and leave? Do you want to leave this room? I'm like, yeah, I need to leave this room. So I get up and I walk out of the kitchen and I go lobby area. The therapist that had been assigned to me personally come out of the office and sees what's happening and she like saves me and she's like, let's just defuse this. So she takes me in her office, lets me cry and vent and she apologizes for that because that should not have happened at all. And then I ended up having to have a conversation, not just with her but with the rest of the girls in the group about how difficult it is being a person of color in these treatment spaces and why for me that's that pain, that difficulty is heightened because of the past experiences that I've had moving from Georgia to Seattle. And here I am again like, you know, so that was just something that shouldn't have happened but it just further reaffirms the need to address these issues within treatment and these spaces.

Tiffany: [00:36:56](#) Well it's supposed to be a place of healing and yet like it almost seems like you are not only harmed while trying to be healed, but now you also have to educate other people on how to be a decent human being toward a person of color, which seems also inappropriate. Well that makes me wonder though, like knowing that you went through that, that whole experience being basically the only person of color in the whole place. Like, I mean

Tiffany: [00:37:35](#) that is almost worrying in itself because, I feel like that almost speaks to an even deeper issue of like, surely there are a lot more people of color that have eating disorders that are actually not being diagnosed, because I would think, you know, if, if there were more people of color coming through those programs, surely they would have more experience and be more sensitive to it and yet, that doesn't happen. So obviously we're seeing also, not nearly enough people getting the appropriate diagnosis.

Nike: [00:38:15](#) absolutely everything you said is so true and so important.

Tiffany: [00:38:19](#) Have you, have you since met other people or had experiences where you, where you've like seen that occur?

Nike: [00:38:27](#) Yes. That's so important that you say all of that. And, you know, seeing the discrepancies that were present and the lack of representation, um, that probably was the second most painful part of the recovery process in these spaces, you know, because, knowing what it was that I was going through within my own body, within my own mental state and seeing how much work that I needed to do, really hurt because I knew that there were other people like me who are also hurting and feeling this and need to do this work, but they can't because of stigma, you know, um, lack of understanding and ability to access care, insurance - Like that's a whole other conversation, you know, and just being discouraged, you know, as someone who's gone through recovery and gone through treatment and been fortunate to get those things, the amount of work and focus you need to put into that time is a lot, you know, and so there shouldn't be any additional worries or stressors that should be placed upon me.

Nike: [00:40:01](#) by society, you know, but we have the realities of race and you know, sexuality or whatever it might be, you know, that are oppressive, you know, qualities that affect us in society and they affect us in treatment spaces as well cause they make it more dynamic. They make our experiences dynamic. However, if you are in a space where they recognize those traits already, and they are working towards making sure that it's inclusive and representative, diverse, multicultural, intersectional, then those stressors and those additional terms and factors shouldn't be interfering with your time to heal. You know, and that's the biggest reason why I'm doing this work, you know? And so I experienced that within my recovery. And then, you know, thankfully I did a lot of work to feel more comfortable to return back to school for 2018 to finish my senior year.

Nike: [00:41:27](#) And so I ended up discovering The Body Positive through Be Body-positive Cornell.

Tiffany: [00:41:40](#) Wait, can you say more about be body positive cornell? I'm very curious about what this is.

Nike: [00:41:42](#) Yes. So be body positive Cornell was established as a kind of a group that fell from the body positive. Um, and they do similar work, the same work, you know, of encouraging and enforcing holistic mental health, wellness, um, body positive, health at every size framework to encourage healing and security within the body. So I discovered them my, my first semester returning back senior year. And then I, um, I started doing the facilitator training and doing the actual work with them my fall semester, which was in 2018. So I had, we had training with Elizabeth Scott, the founder of the body positive, in August, 2018, and prior to starting the training I had my concerns about, you know, being a part of it because, you know, my biggest reason, like I had said earlier, in wanting to continue with this work or get involved in the work at the time was having seen the problems within my own treatment journey.

Nike: [00:43:06](#) And once again, Hey, only person of color. And I'm like, Whoa, Whoa. Oh, okay. Um, that's interesting. I wasn't expecting that, but I should have known better because from having gone through treatment, you know, so far this is becoming a trend. So I guess it only makes sense that this is a trend that I'm seeing within the facilitator makeup. Like, Oh Lord, I'm concerned. I'm so concerned because, you know, I'm, I'm doing this to help better the representation of people who don't have, who aren't included in this and who don't have the ability to get the education and the awareness and the resources that they need. Is this group going to be doing the same thing? Because the doesn't seem as though that they have been because the makeup within the facilitators, I'm sure it's similar to the makeup of the people who are involved in groups, you know, so how are they doing outreach?

Nike: [00:44:16](#) Who are they reaching out to and what groups are they focusing on? Am I going to have to be that black girl that is speaking about diversity all the time at these meetings? You know, I don't want to be the angry, problematic, person of color who's playing the "race card," you know what I mean? So now we're at the training with Elizabeth Scott, love her! She did an amazing job with the training cause she highlighted the importance of the multicultural and intersectional pieces of who we are as people and how that all affects our body and our mental health and how we feel in our bodies. And that was so

critical because that's essential, and understanding that it's a multifaceted experience and that you recognize it shouldn't just be white, cis females who were speaking about all these things.

Nike: [00:45:26](#) And so she talked about it so wonderfully. She spent a lot of great time, and we had a lot of good activities to help us understand that a little bit. But I think that, I think that the people who were at the training, because they were so separated, I think from the experiences of these demographics, you know, I'm probably sure they've never had many interactions with people that we're emphasizing should be included, you know, in this work. I think there wasn't a lot of interest, um, on their part. And so I noticed that a lot of people were on their phone, like, not really asking questions or being engaged. I'm someone who's very engaged, involved and I'm like loving this training. So I'm super involved but I look around my peers who I'm supposed to be facilitating groups with in the upcoming weeks,

Nike: [00:46:36](#) and they just seem disinterested. Um, so I was concerned about that. So Elizabeth leaves and now it's Be Body Positive Cornell, you know, prepping for the school year and how we're going to recruitment and do outreach. And the first meeting that we had was about how we're going to do outreach. And they were talking about two groups mainly. Can you guess which one they were? Athletes and people who are involved in Greek life. And I understood how those populations, you know, tend to have a lot of people who are at risk or struggle with body insecurity and whatnot. However if you look at the, the makeup of those two categories, it's still very white and very privileged and very cis, you know? And that frightened me because it's like, wow, like we are really, really, really focusing on just athletes and people who are in Greek life.

Nike: [00:47:54](#) But there are so many other communities at Cornell, especially at Cornell, that can be reached out to and should not be excluded from this conversation, especially after we just had this great training on intersectionality and multiculturalism. So what are we doing here? And I said, you know, I am curious about the past demographics of the people who have been involved in groups, and I'm wondering if there is a disproportion, you know, if there's been a skewing of involvement towards a certain group of people and it's missing out on other groups, other demographics, and communities that are also going through, like the same thing, just in a different way, you know. And it's not fair to be exclusive. We should be including them cause this is a very diverse and

multifaceted experience. And the director, um, she looks at me and she's like, yeah, you know, you're totally right.

Nike: [00:49:14](#) I was thinking, I was thinking about reaching out to, um, we have like a center on campus that has a lot of different intersectional groups and organizations underlying it. So we have like, um, LGBTQ+, women's studies, Asian American, Indigenous, you know, all these different groups of people, different communities orgs that are underneath that center. And so if we contact them, they will reach out to those different organizations. And so she was like, yeah, you know, I was thinking about reaching out to them, but I just didn't have the time or something, to do so. So then she goes, Oh well, since you seem really interested and you know, you really seem to know a lot about this, how about you go ahead and contact them yourself? And I was like, um, well I think that all of us should be involved in this cause we are all trying to do this together so we should all play a part in this outreach.

Nike: [00:50:36](#) And she was like, yeah, yeah, for sure. So there this lady, the other lady involved that is in charge of staffing and leadership. She's like, well I think cause we're running out of time with recruitment this year, this semester, I think we should just put it on hold and next year, next semester, we'll focus on doing more outreach to those communities. And I can't even tell you how cold I felt in that moment, because again, it's really just me, this black woman, and these two directors having a conversation about how we can be more intersectional. No one else is involved and no one is saying anything. It's just us talking. And they literally just said, Oh, we'll think about it later. And the way that my heart was so broken, I immediately put up a guard around it.

Nike: [00:51:46](#) Like, you just told me you don't care. It's what you just said to put it in plain terms. And my first reaction, my first thought was like Nike, you have to protect your communities because you cannot be trying to force these people to include your families, you know, within their space, and they don't care. Because if you're trying to do that and they end up becoming involved in it, they're not going to be taken care of the way that they deserve to be. You know, their experiences, their dynamic backgrounds, like all that stuff, they don't know how to interact with you and they don't have an interest in doing so. So don't force your people to join these people because they're not going to be taken care of. And that's bad. That is not fair. So I was just so hurt by that cause I wasn't expecting, I wasn't expecting to hear that, very clear dismissal, you know?

Nike: [00:53:03](#) And I have to say this because I think as I've been doing these interviews and blogs, I don't want to offend anybody at any institution, especially not my own. However, I have to be honest about, you know, the work that needs to be done. And I think that in, in those moments, I don't think that any behavior, action or word was ever intentional, like intentionally meant to harm or hurt, but the impact is, is that harm. So I think it's important that I'm speaking about it, but again, just a quick disclaimer. Um, so they dismissed it and I just left feeling like, I don't think that can be involved in this.

Tiffany: [00:53:55](#) Right. Well, and what you said about not wanting to like expose your community to that makes total sense. But it also makes me think about too, like I wonder, I don't know if you feel this parallel, as you were talking, I was like, wow, that feels like such a parallel between all of the things that we put off but need to be addressing in society right now right now, because lives are at stake. And we have systems that are like, Oh, that is important, you're right. We'll get around to it, but later. And so it almost feels to me like, wow, more of the same, right? Like that expression of we're not harmed by this. These aren't people that we know and, and feel connected to. And so we can just wait. They can wait.

Nike: [00:54:57](#) Right, right. It's not our reality and it's not our problem. We don't, we don't have to go through this so we can put it off. But that's such a selfish state of thinking. And so, before I actually made the decision to leave Be Body positive Cornell, at this point now I was like, Nike, you can't just leave, again, you have to be honest. And I really push to be so honest with people. And so after that meeting I reached out to the two directors, um, who I was talking to during the meeting really, to speak in private about my next steps moving forward with the organization. And so I met with them and they were, they were like really sweet and they were like, Hey, you know, what's going on? And I explained myself to them, you know, I explained my concern with the organization and how that was really affecting me in a way that wasn't conducive to my mental and emotional health because it was like wow, I'm about to put a lot of pressure on myself to force you guys to do something that you don't seem like you want to do.

Nike: [00:56:15](#) So they apologize. And they were asking me, would you be interested in helping us to address our lack of diversity, you know, would you want to be on board with our community outreach and doing this work to make it more intersectional? And I knew they would ask me that question. I knew it was going to come. Because I think that whenever people, whenever

communities are put on blast, I guess, about their lack of diversity, they get really scared. And I think they try to run to the people who they think are most diverse, you know, to help them do the work for them, but they're not really learning or working themselves to understand why it was a problem and the depths of the situation and the work. And so I said I cannot, because I know that here at an institution like Cornell university, there are so many resources, so many resources, and so many communities and organizations and people who are equipped with this knowledge and with these experiences, you know, and it's so easy to reach out to them and include them, you know, and ask them to be involved in what you're doing.

Nike: [00:58:11](#) So I'm going to make you guys work because it's not just, I don't want this to be a situation of, I'm going to put this work on you and you'll fix it because you fall in that category. No, it has to be a holistic, full body work. It's, it's a movement. Like, you know, you have to do this together. Um, so that was my reasoning in um, deciding to leave, so they can do that work. Cause like when you're doing it yourself, you're learning, you're learning so much. Um, and that's, that's just so essential to me in this, in what we're doing.

Tiffany: [00:59:06](#) Oh that's such an interesting, and I think really important perspective on it, and take on it. I mean, not only is there that element of like, oh you mentioned reaching out to

Tiffany: [00:59:22](#) these communities, so now please, let's let you do all this free labor and make that happen. But I think what you said even more important of like, you get to learn through the messiness of trying to actually build relationships and be uncomfortable about it a little bit. And not be sure if you are going to say the right thing and not be sure if it's even okay to ask things. And that I think that that's a really, I'm so glad that you said that Cause I think that that's something that doesn't actually get set a lot. And, and is, is so true.

Nike: [01:00:01](#) Yes. Thank you for affirming that. Um, I think something that a lot of institutions tend to do nowadays is make like diversity and inclusion, you know, very trendy and hip and it can come across as very forced, you know, um, and very artificial because it's like you're rushing, you know, for, for paper, just to have these diverse people a part of your institution. I think like with brochures from campus, you know what I mean? There's just so much to it, there's like underlying facets to it because I think it's wrong. I think it's so wrong to be trying to bring in these people, bring in people from intersectional backgrounds and demographics, but then you ignore the realities that they have

to endure in these new spaces. And you don't have any resources present or any ways to help them work through the realities within these spaces because it's just like, Oh, let me just have you come into this place, but what have you done in this place to like prepare for me, if that makes sense?

Nike:

[01:01:38](#)

Because our experiences and our life backgrounds and upbringings, all we have to go through daily is very different from what those who are white and privileged and cis and hetero-normative, you know, don't have to go through daily. And so for it to be made within institutions, whether it happens at colleges, it happened at Cornell, um, it happens at job spaces, it happens within the body positive movement, you know, and it's such a problem. So that's why as I move forward, I really do advocate for everybody to be doing this work of inclusion because yes, I'm all for all for marginalized and oppressed communities being in charge of our narratives because for so long, historically we haven't been able to do so, you know, so having that voice to own our narrative is empowering and it centers reclaiming our spaces, and, with that, it also means that those who may not have, who don't have those same experiences and those histories and they're trying to work with us, you know, to better the future of this society for themselves, for us, for our children, they should also be working to educate themselves and learning and doing the messy work, you know, and it should be an all hands on board thing, you know, and I yes, give space to hearing the voices of marginalized communities and also take the time to listen, you know, make room to listen,

Nike:

[01:03:50](#)

make room to question, make room to learn for yourself. Because for communities that have been oppressed, and continue to endure different discriminated actions and behaviors, you know, in this reality we have to pick and choose daily what we invest our time and energy into. And that's draining. We're also people you know, who are trying to get by and thrive and live our best lives and to have to make room for an instance of racism or instance of homophobia or an instance of gender inequality, it's taxing. But because we are invested and we're determined to advocate for ourselves and for our future and our present, all this stuff, you know, we make the time, but that can't continue to be the trend. Like everyone has to be on board, you know. I believe we're all in this together. We're all working towards this together. Like there's so much community and solidarity, and we have this like army, you know, of people who are working towards that change. And I just have this image of like, just being a unit, you know, a unit in solidarity, and support is so important. So.

- Tiffany: [01:05:46](#) Mmm. Thank you for that. It makes me wonder too, and the answer to this might be no, I don't know. But it makes me wonder if you have seen any or experienced organizations that are doing that, like that are doing it right.
- Nike: [01:06:05](#) Yeah, I think that's a great question. And I think, I think the word "right" can be an issue because there's no right way, you know to do this. And I think what matters to me is the effort, you know, a constant effort. It can't just be like, Oh, we did it. Check, check box. This is a constant work because we're constantly changing people and we're constantly developing people. So I think what I, what I've seen so far in institutions that means a lot to me is a persistence of effort in social justice oriented movements, or rather, being aware that social justice is a part of all movements in a way, because we are people that are so complex, so dynamic and beautiful and, you know, it shouldn't just be, this is us and you know, it's already there. You just have to be aware of it and work with that, you know, work in that. And I have seen, I have seen institutions who are persistently putting in the effort towards that change in this work.
- Tiffany: [01:07:50](#) Okay I love how you put that - persistently moving in the direction, I feel like that's hopeful, hopeful for everyone trying. Like it's not going to be right. That's a very, I feel like that's a very like Western, Eurocentric mentality too to always want to be right. We want to be right, we want to do right. So I liked that. Persistently doing the work. I think that's so helpful. And I'm thinking, I want to ask a question about the body positive movement in general. Um, because I don't know if, I learned about, Dr Sabrina strings wrote a book recently called um, Fearing the Black Body: The Racist Origins of Fatphobia, and like, whoa, I can't tell you how many times I've been like, we can't talk about body positivity without talking about racism. Like we can't talk about body acceptance, body liberation, whatever we want to call it without talking about racism, and I saw the book and was like,
- Tiffany: [01:09:06](#) oh we really can't, because those are the roots of all that stuff, but I also wonder, it makes me wonder like with your experience with spaces that are trying to create and cultivate a community and movements of body acceptance, body positivity, body liberation, uh, however you see it, right, can that even happen in isolation from, from healing from racism, since that's how this issue really came up in the first place. And so without healing racism, how can, how can we heal these problems? And yet we have so many body positive movements and spaces that are totally devoid of people of color, which is,

which doesn't make sense when you look at it that way. And your experience I think really speaks to that where like, wow, people just have no idea how to like include and invite those very people.

Nike: [01:10:27](#) engage, engage. Yeah.

Nike: [01:10:30](#) Absolutely. That's a really powerful question. And I think that question is, crucial to be asked when we're doing this work because, you know, it's, it's, it's difficult to separate, um, healing from, you know, racism that has been so institutionalized. It's not even thought of, you know, to healing from our own body insecurities and shame and, disordered mentalities. I think that's your question, right? Like how do we separate it? How can it, can it happen exclusive from each other?

Tiffany: [01:11:35](#) Yeah. Or you know, like surely not. I feel like there's no way it can.

Nike: [01:11:41](#) And I think, um, something you just said was that there is a lot of movements, you know, so many movements nowadays and I think we have to be careful because we have to remember that society, the society they live in is very capitalistic and often, often times nowadays is doing things for profit.

Nike: [01:12:11](#) The pharmaceutical industry, health and wellness industry, fitness industry, diet culture, you know, it's a whole system. And I think something that I've been like really appreciative to learn and like my eyes are just like being more open to is a lot of this, all of this, all of this stuff, It all goes back to like one thing and it's baffling. And it's also really sad because the fact that the impact of Imperial colonialistic mindsets has led to such an impact of these rooted now deeply rooted systems in our lives that we have to battle with through images and media and judgments and all this stuff every single day. So no, I, I do not believe that they can happen exclusively, exclusively of each other. And I think we have to caution ourselves when we are trying to become a part of something or a movement or an institution that claims to be doing body positive, body political work.

Nike: [01:13:50](#) But how about we take a step deeper and ask them, so what are you doing, how are you intersectional about your work? How are you being in it? How are you being intersectional about your way and why you doing it? Because I think the, how and the why are so important, to see their own processing and understanding of the significance of all these factors and how they're intricately combined. You know, they're not mutually

exclusive. And I think a lot of the, a lot of those institutions, whether it's body positive or you know, something outside of that, that claim to be diverse, are you actually inclusive? I think inclusivity is the best term to use because that shows that you aren't just bringing people to your space, but you are actively working, persistently working,

Nike: [01:15:11](#) Making an effort to include them, you know, in ways that are engaging, fulfilling of their needs, wholesome and, not, not biased, not isolative. You know. I think that's something that we have to caution ourselves on as you continue to move forward in the society that is so, so capitalistic. And it's, it's also just really disgusting to see how a lot of communities are trying to, because like you mentioned, this goes back to racism and it also goes back to fat liberation movements. And like, it's, it's interesting to see how movements that have made body positivity so like, Oh, love your body, you know. Exactly. Just love your body. Like it can sound very fluffy and very, um, like airy. You know, I'm sorry to say very white.

Tiffany: [01:16:35](#) What came to mind, like at the very beginning of this was, like, it just sounds like you're saying whitewashed -- my perception of what you were saying.

Nike: [01:16:46](#) Yeah. It sounds very white, very whitewashed and just fluffy. And that grosses me out because that's not real. It's not real and it's not fair. It's not representative of the true depths of this, and someone who was of color, you know, first gen, low income, you know, Nigerian-American um, all this stuff, you know, someone from that background, looking at that framework of body positivity from a distance, It sounds very like privileged and something that I can do. It sounds like something that I can't connect with, so I'm not gonna be interested in that, you know? Something that I'm really grateful that Be Body Positive really emphasizes is that this is social justice work like, we are revolutionizing our spaces.

Tiffany: [01:17:56](#) You're right. You know, cause if we're talking about really the roots of it, like we're talking about systemic and institutional racism and we're talking about the oppression of people and we're talking about groups of people that have been marginalized for a long time. And so that's what I'm hearing is that like that's what body positivity looks like for white people. So we need to expand that a little bit so that other people can also have access to it I guess.

Nike: [01:18:25](#) Absolutely. Yes, absolutely. And with that it's like how can it, how can body positivity be applied to me in my time and my

reality and you know, in what I have to go through as this intersectional being, you know, I mean we're all intersectional beings and for the communities of people who are further marginalized and oppressed, how can I include this body positivity framework in my own life? You know? Because it's something that I need, you know, but I don't really understand how I can access it cause it sounds so easy, you know, it sounds very white, very privileged. I think moving forward, you know, it all comes down to making this anti racist, having an anti racist approach and framework in this work and how we can do that. And, you know, I think that something that's so great about intersectionality is, even with making it more inclusive of different identities there comes conversations about how within communities like within, you know, um, black communities, there's a difference in what is considered, you know, attractive, you know, with like, like fads, you know, like being thick, snatched waist, and you know, all that stuff and then, then we can have a conversation about hypersexualization of black women in our society, how it's becoming a fad, and how everybody wants big lips and this and that.

Nike:

[01:20:25](#)

And that also sets up boxes and unfair standards for people within the community, black woman within the community who aren't, you know, snatched. And then for people outside of that that need to the problem and wanting to look like people from a certain demographic that have historically always had the genes to look a certain way. You know what I mean? And that even within cultures, like the Nigerian culture being thick and plump means you're healthy and well off, um, there's so much to it, there's so much to it. And I think that's why I love that we as people should be having these conversations because it helps us in understanding more of ourselves, you know, outside of just our physical being. So.

Tiffany:

[01:21:41](#)

Thank you. So I love talking to, I could talk to you for like 20 hours straight, and so I want to at least stop this conversation for now, but I would love to know, well, first of all, congrats on graduation! I'd love for you to share with everybody what you're doing now where they can connect with you if they would like to.

Nike:

[01:22:20](#)

Absolutely, yes, of course. Of course. After graduation I took some time to think more about what it is I wanted to do in this world. You know, you grow when you're in undergrad. And I am someone, unfortunately who came in with the idea of wanting to be, you know, premed, doctor, all that stuff. And then I went through a lot of different experiences aside from academic and professional, but also personal. And I think I became more

aware of who I am as a person and my talents and how that aligns with the needs of my communities that I seek especially with within mental health. Mental health, public health. And so I am currently working on getting involved in some research down at UCLA working with, um, different minority identities that experience discrimination and stress based off of their status within society and how that affects their mental health and mental health outcomes.

- Nike: [01:24:00](#) And I ultimately, that's just a stepping stone. Ultimately my hope is to continue to make more spaces for, um, anti racist health treatment and interventions, especially for communities of color. Um, especially for communities of color, all marginalized communities really, but communities of color specifically, just because something that's very, very close to home for me, it's been something that I continue to see a major, major problem in. And I am unsure yet if I want to do something, focus solely on research or more clinical. But I'm just taking steps little by little and I hope to start an organization, you know, um, focused on all those things in some capacity. And I love to connect more with everybody who wants to work with, with me and with, with all of us you know, in this movement, or who just wants to talk. I love meeting people. I love meeting people. I love talking to people. I love community. So hit me up on Instagram. Probably no one uses Facebook, but you can be friends on Facebook, um, or LinkedIn or Instagram. And I think my information will be posted. So hit me up everywhere. Um, even if you like, wanted to talk about anything that was, that I talked about.
- Nike: [01:26:03](#) Agree, disagree, whatever. I love talking. So, yes.
- Tiffany: [01:26:11](#) That's awesome. Thank you so much for this conversation. You are amazing.
- Pura Fe Sings: [01:26:16](#) 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