



Conscious Life presents

TRAUMA SUPER CONFERENCE

Liberating from body shame and stigma

Guest: Tiana Dodson

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[00:00:10] Jaia Bristow

Hello and welcome back to this Trauma Super Conference. My name is Jaia Bristow and I'm one of your hosts. And today I am delighted to be welcoming body liberation facilitator, Tiana Dodson. Welcome, Tiana.

Tiana Dodson

Hi, it's great to be here.

Jaia Bristow

It's great to have you on board, and I'm really excited about this conversation we're going to be having around sort of trauma and body shame or body shaming.

And so I noticed that in your bio, which people can read below this video, you describe yourself as a fat, biracial, queer, neurodivergent person. So, maybe we can start by talking a bit about your identities and about fat stigma, because even that word can bring up a lot of reactions for people.

Tiana Dodson

Absolutely. Absolutely, I think that's a perfect place to start. So, I am what I've described as a chronic "not fitter inner". So like I'm a chronic out person. I have always been sort of like because of my biraciality, I'm black and Chamorro, so I'm black and indigenous and have a complicated relationship to both things because of how I was raised and the fact that I was born and raised in America. I just always never really fit in.

And it's really frustrating because when you're a child and you're a teenager, all you want to do is fit in. But then I've got all these other things going on. So it's not just my parentage and my racialized identities that are causing me to not really be enough here or enough there, but also I was queer, which was something that I didn't have language for, or really understanding about, because I grew up in Colorado, which is a really quite conservative place.

And then there's neurodivergence in there, which I'm just sort of recently coming to terms with. It explains a lot of how I do things and why I do things. And then the fatness has always been there.

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And besides the fact of how I look, it's one of the things that's always most apparent about me and it's one of the things that people judge me on most when they first meet me. So I, of course, because of the fact that I was born and raised in America, in the United States, that I have not had a very positive experience of what fatness is, or even being fat.

And so the majority of my life I've spent, maybe not the majority anymore, anyway, but the majority of life I've spent trying to become unfat because it's really painful to be someone who is othered in so many ways. And I can't change my parentage, I can't change my racial identities. The queerness, something that I didn't understand, I couldn't change that either.

But the fatness was something that I was told over and over again, I could change and I had control over. And if only I would do these things better, I would no longer have to be fat and I would no longer have to be treated poorly because of it. And so that was a really big part of my young life, trying to change that part of me.

And it sent me on this journey, which there's a lot to it, but where I'm at today, there's been a lot of work that's gone into it, and there's been a lot of unpicking and unpacking and unlearning of things that were gifted to me. Not all of those gifts were great, but it's been a lot.

And one of the biggest things, one of the very first things, that I had to do was come to terms with the word 'fat'. Because up to that point, fat had been used as a slur. It had been used as a way to harm me, as a way to put me in my place, as a way to keep me down, keep me small, keep me isolated.

And I had to come to terms with the fact that it is literally just an adjective, it is an actual description of the body that I live in and with that, there's nothing wrong with it. But I then had to parse it from all of the baggage that had been given to me because of how society views fatness.

Jaia Bristow

It's so interesting because there's a lot of what you're describing I can relate to. For example, I'm also multiethnic, I have Jamaican, Indian and White British heritage. I'm also recently diagnosed as neurodivergent and coming to terms with all of that. I'm also queer. So there's a lot that I can relate to. But I have what's seen as the sort of like, my body type, my body size is different to yours, right? It's seen as the norm, I'm going to say in heavy quote marks for anyone who can't see me because, yeah, as we'll get into, I don't think it is the norm.

And so, again, this idea of fitting in has been a big theme in my life as well. So I can relate to that. And I think what's really interesting in what you're describing and what you're sharing is like, often there's these two sort of categories of not fitting in, right, or around identity?

There's what's visible and invisible. So, for example, racial identities are very often very visible, gender identities can be very visible as well, often very visible. But then, for example, sexual orientation can be less visible but can also have an impact.

And so what you're talking about, the fatness as well, it falls into the visible category. But what's really interesting in what you're sharing is the idea that some of your identities you felt like, well, this is just who I am. I'm born with it, and you deal with the impact.

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But that you talk about the fatness as how that was something that you felt like you should change, you could change, that there was something inherently wrong with the way you looked with your natural shape, your natural morphology and that it was something that you had to fix. Again, heavy quote marks for anyone that can't see me. So I find that fascinating, and I'm wondering if you could say a little bit more about that.

Tiana Dodson

Okay, so this is the big stuff because we live in a culture that is extremely fatphobic and diet-focused. There's a lot of history here, right. So I'm not going to bore everyone with the deep dive into history. And to be perfectly honest, it is not my forte. I know what I need to know, but I cannot cite all the names and the dates and all the things. And I don't think that's necessary.

But throughout time, we've had philosophy and a lot of quote-unquote thinkers who were, let's just say it, generally landed gentry, well-to-do white cisgender men who decided, just decided that a certain type of body was the right kind of body and write heavy quotes around, right.

Because it was essentially just, as we move forward in time, a way to create and further enforce hierarchical ideals of who is the best and the most worthy, and then who is the least worthy and the worst. And it was just the separation and also a justification of why they were allowed to have the things that they had, and why they were also allowed to take things from the other people that they deemed less worthy than them.

And fatness is one of these things that was introduced. Okay, that's not true. What I was going to say is something that's like a party line, like a lot of people say fatness was introduced as a differentiator, but it actually was not. There's a scholar who is doing a lot of deep diving into the history of fatness and fatphobia, and her work has actually shown that, sure, there might have been cultures outside of Western and European centric ideals that did prize larger bodies and people who have more volume and such as an actual and physical embodiment of abundance.

But the fact of the matter is that there's been quite a lot of fatphobia and fear of fatness and shaming of people who are more corpulent in the western and global northern world. So ultimately, what it comes down to is that this anti-fatness that already existed, was then coupled with the rising anti-blackness that brought us to the place where it was okay to go to Africa and steal people and enslave them, and take them to other places against their will and force them into chattel slavery.

And it's really insidious because yeah okay, that was hundreds of years ago. But the fact of the matter is that all of the countries that participated in the slave trade, they all still have rampant anti-blackness and anti-fatness within their cultures. It's difficult.

Jaia Bristow

Yeah. And you know, you were describing this idea of the right body, heavy quote marks, which means that anything that doesn't fall into what's right is automatically wrong or deemed as wrong, perceived as wrong. And it's interesting as well because we see how beauty ideals, especially around size, have shifted over time.

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When you look at the fashion industry or art or any of those kinds of things which depict, especially for women I think, this idea of what beauty is, which is often associated with the sort of feminine body or female body or women, depending on the way you look at it. And this idea that there's an ideal which is right and that everything outside of that ideal is wrong and it's fed capitalism, it's fed the beauty industry. There's so many people striving for this unattainable ideal.

And I talked about women, but it's true as well. I think we see it with men as well, but maybe less intensely. But I know that from what I've heard, not from my own experiences here, but fatphobia is obviously something that can reach across genders.

Tiana Dodson

Absolutely.

Jaia Bristow

And we see it as well in mainstream media all the time, all the fat jokes, whereas a lot of different identities have changed. We know that racist jokes are no longer appropriate in mainstream TV, but even modern TV, film, and modern media will continue having fatphobic jokes.

So I'm wondering just because this is the Trauma Super Conference and there's lots of different directions we could go in, but just, it might seem obvious for people listening, tying in this kind of living in a fat body. And again, I'm using the word fat, probably more than I have recently.

But this idea that it's okay, like you said, it's an adjective, but that people have all these associations with it. That it's used as a slur, that it's used to demean and belittle, to mock. So I'm wondering if you can tie it in with trauma, even though it might seem obvious.

Tiana Dodson

Absolutely. And that's the thing, it might seem obvious, but it's not in some ways. Because in a society that is obsessed with thinness and beauty and perfection. The idea that this obsession is causing the fallout, causing trauma, causing people to be harmed is completely not part of the discussion, or it's given lip service and then nothing more.

But the thing is, that I'm going to kind of take this in a little bit of a different direction because a lot of people will hear me talk and they will say, but what about health? This is always the question when you're talking about fatness and you're saying that fatness is a normal variation of the human body. There is nothing inherently wrong with a fat body. Everybody raises their hand and goes, but what about health?

And the long and the short of it, is the fact that if you're going to ask about health, my knee-jerk reaction to that is, what do you mean by health? Because if we're actually talking about health, like the real wellness and wellbeing of a person, of a human being, we have to think about more than just how their blood pressure looks, what their cholesterol is, how are they eating, how are they moving their body around? These things matter.

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But also we can't focus exclusively on that because there is so much research and anecdotal evidence, and research that proves that you cannot have the borderline definition of health if you are constantly being othered and traumatized due to your social conditions.

So, your living conditions matter, your racial identities matter, your education, your finances, your feeling of safety in your everyday life, your gender, your sexuality, all of these things matter and impact your ability to achieve the borderline definition of health. So if you're someone who is living in a body that is routinely lambasted for being unhealthy, unattractive, unworthy, completely erased and dehumanized, this is, number one, not really a situation that's going to increase your ability to be a healthy person, whatever that definition is. But also, it is increasingly and continuously creating negative experiences that are not healthy and good for your wellbeing, your mental capacity, your mental stability, your psychological and just all of it.

Everything about you is being chipped away and demeaned and dehumanized, because you do not fit into what is quote-unquote idealized. And something like fatness, where I can't hide my fatness. It doesn't matter what color I'm wearing, what direction the stripes on my shirt are, how much Spanx, girdle, corseting, whatever.

I am still going to be fat, regardless of how much you hold me down and strap me in. And people treat me differently when they see me because I have the body that I have. And that affects me every single day. Every single day. Especially in a world that is not designed and actively designed to exclude me.

Jaia Bristow

Yeah.

Tiana Dodson

This is something that bears on you. Like, you can't just wake up in the morning and just go, 'oh, I'm just going to go about my day'. There is so much preparation and forethought and emotional and mental and physical labor that you have to do, before you even step out of your door to go do just the quote-unquote normal things of living a life. And that pressure chips away at your ability to do anything else, and it adds up.

Jaia Bristow

Thank you for sharing and I'm really grateful you brought in the health piece, right? I was going to ask about tying that together. And I think we know that there's a huge amount of discrimination in the healthcare system. And in the same way that we talked about the beauty ideal, there is also this ideal person, which is the perfect, healthy person, right?

Which has their blood pressure at a certain level. And is it the IBM?

Tiana Dodson

Yeah, the BMI.

[00:18:48] Jaia Bristow

BMI. I live in France. It's the other way around.

Tiana Dodson

Yeah, that's right.

Jaia Bristow

BMI is a certain thing. I haven't done those calculations in a while, but there's the ideal BMI, and there's the ideal, again, there's an ideal. And we see that there's this racial discrimination, there's gender discrimination. There's clearly body size discrimination in the health care system because these perfect ideals don't actually equal health, right? Because health is so much more holistic than your BMI and your exact height and your exact blood pressure or anything else.

And so, for example, I'm someone who looks to everyone, like I am perfectly healthy. I am the perfect picture of health. And I have 18 diagnosed chronic health conditions, which leave me totally disabled and unable to function on a day-to-day basis. So if someone saw you and me next to each other and you ask, who's the healthier of the two of us? Then I'm sure that people would vote, probably me. And that's just not true, right?

So, again, this idea of what healthy means is skewed. And you've already talked a bit about how anti-fatness and anti-blackness go hand in hand, and about other identities around queerness and being neurodivergent. And this idea that, yes, living in a world that not just isn't designed for you, but is actively excluding you, of course, chips away at who you are, of course, creates trauma, and it creates layers and layers.

And this is, of course, also where intersectionality comes into play, right? If people with different marginalized and oppressed identities or multiple ones, will have extra layers of being demeaned and treated differently and looked down upon. And also the other thing around, what you were saying around, fitness and health and fatness. Like, you know, Lizzo is okay, maybe an obvious person to refer to, but for those who aren't familiar, Lizzo is a very famous pop artist who's a big, black fat woman and who is an incredible dancer.

She is extremely fit, to this idea that fit and fat are opposing terms and can't go hand in hand. She has so much more stamina than me. She is so much healthier. And I say me because, again, I'm someone I can easily compare to. And again, who looks like I have the healthy or the right body shape, but in reality, my body does not work properly.

Tiana Dodson

Yeah, and this is the thing too. When we're saying that fitness and fatness don't go together, we are inherently saying that thinness and fitness go together.

Yet, I think there are extremely, ridiculously rare disorders that happen to the body, that exclusively happen to fat people. But all of the things that happen to fat people that I have been threatened with my entire life, type two diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, cardiovascular disease, degenerative, osteoarthritis in my knees and things like this. Every single one of these things

happens every day to people who are considered healthy, because of how they look and where they land on the BMI scale.

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So body mass index is literally a mathematical formula that compares your height to your mass. And this is a terrible, terrible, terrible marker to try to say that this is how we're going to measure if you are a healthy person or a not healthy person. Because the fact of the matter is that, number one, it was developed by a mathematician. Number two, it was developed to measure populations, not individual persons.

So BMI is a great tool to say, is this population trending toward, like, maybe there's something going on where we can see a trend in the BMI is going up or going down. But to look at an individual and say, okay, your BMI is 26 so you are healthy, but your BMI is 46 and that is unhealthy.

When in fact, the difference might be someone of the 26 BMI, because they on the outside look like what our ideal of health is, that they themselves believe. Number one, I don't have to do anything. I can sit on this couch all day. I can eat nothing but chips, and I never have to pay any attention. I never drink a drop of water. I smoke. I do drugs. I drink all night long. I never sleep.

But the person with a 46 BMI is getting in their steps every day. They're actually, probably over exercising because everybody's always pressuring them about losing weight, losing weight, losing weight for quote-unquote their health. And they probably are really focused on how they're eating, possibly to the point of creating an eating disorder, or at very least a disordered eating pattern and experience. And they are always thinking about their body and how their body is impacting the other people around them, how they're going to be treated by them.

And just like that emotional load really is limiting. It's not that there's something wrong with me because a lot of the time, there's the correlation equals causation conversation where it's like, because you're fat and you have type two diabetes, clearly that must mean that you have type two diabetes because you're fat. When in fact, correlation does not equal causation.

So just because two things happen at the same time, doesn't mean that one caused the other. This is not necessarily true. And there's research that's coming out that is sort of pointing in the direction of type two diabetes being something more akin to a chronic illness that is autoimmune. If we go to Bessel van der Kolk's work, "The Body Keeps the Score", however problematic and kind of limited it is, the body keeps the score. And Bessel van der Kolk, in this work, was one of the first people to forward the idea that when you have a traumatic life experience, specifically in childhood, your body, over time, is going to metabolize that trauma, probably into something like an autoimmune chronic illness.

And if type two diabetes is such a thing, then that makes complete and total sense. And on top of it, lots of thin people get type two diabetes. So it's not just because you overate sugar, it's not just because you don't eat vegetables. It's really got a lot more to do with your genetic heritage and a lot of that, let's talk about intergenerational trauma there, you know, that's probably got more to do with anything. But when you're constantly carrying the emotional load of people hate me and I'm going to be treated badly, like that expectation, that hurts so much.

[00:26:47] Jaia Bristow

And it's interesting as well, as you're talking about causality and correlation. You talked about, for example, how so many people who are fat will develop eating disorders. And whereas people often have the idea, and then it shows statistically, oh, fat person, eating disorder. You know, rather than the idea that the very fact that we're all born with different bodies and that if that was accepted, you know, but it's not. And that it's the fact that that's not accepted then creates extra stress for the person who is fat, creates extra pressure, extra trauma, creates all this discrimination which will add extra pressure and trauma.

All these messages from the media, from advertising, from doctors, from friends, from family saying you're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong, there's something wrong about you. Change, do better. And this idea, like you were expressing at the beginning, that you feel like it's something that's fixable.

Tiana Dodson

Right.

Jaia Bristow

So of course it makes sense then that there is a higher rate of people who are fat with eating disorders. Not because the eating disorders are what's making them fat, but just having that kind of pressure constantly will develop into having that trauma.

It's a trauma-coping mechanism, right? And then again, like you were saying with the health stuff, I wonder how much diabetes is also linked to stress, for example. You know, so again this idea that maybe we stop focusing so much on the size of the person as the cause of all their problems and just accept that we have different sizes.

Naturally, there is a huge amount of diversity in the population in all different ways, and that can be seen as something beautiful, you know, and a richness to it. And instead it's seen as no, what that means is there are certain people who are correct, which is impossible to be, right, any of the ideals, whatever they are, are impossible and some people who are wrong.

And it's so interesting what you were talking about as well, about how the BMI was designed to take a sort of overall overview look at populations, not for individuals, and somehow that's been twisted to decide which individuals are healthy or not healthy. Also taken out of context a lot of the time, off the whole population, right?

Because if we're taking it into population, you need to look at, for example, the family members and the racial makeup of the person and all kinds of other factors like where they live or where they grew up and the food that's available there. I know there's tons of research where you can, after someone's died, you can find out exactly which parts of the world they've been in based on, yeah. So I think it's really interesting, everything you're sharing and the way that this lens of right and wrong, of good and bad, impacts so many people.

Again, we've talked already about racial discrimination, about queer discrimination, about body discrimination. We're focusing especially on the fat experience because that's your experience. And one of my best friends is considered underweight and she goes through a lot of the same

thing of there's something wrong with you. Eat more, do exercise in this way, don't do this, don't do that. And that same kind of pressure of being seen as wrong and needing to fix it, rather than just this is the difference in bodies.

[00:30:24] Tiana Dodson

Yeah. And that's the thing. The whole binary, the whole definition of what is an ideal and what we should all be reaching for and what we're trying literally to run away from, is just this reinforcement of our whole system of supremacy and dominance. We have to continue to give people these messages so that they will continue to be, what's the word I'm looking for? Dissatisfied. So they will continue to be dissatisfied with the body that they just have.

And that keeps them preoccupied with how do I get closer to the ideal? Like it keeps them spending money on things that are purported to get them closer to the ideal. And it just really keeps us very tractable as a population. Because if I'm comfortable in myself, and this is one of the things that's really inflammatory about the work that I do, is that if I can be comfortable, if I can be satisfied, if I can be in partnership with my very, very multiply marginalized, chronically-ill, neurodivergent, just big old fat body and just live my life.

This is so threatening to anyone who feels that they are putting in the time and the energy and the effort and the money to reach the ideal. I'm dangerous to them and I'm an affront to everything that they've been trying to do. And it's really a shame because all of that time and energy and effort and cash, you're never going to get that back. You're never going to get your youth back. You're never going to get the ability to have those experiences again. And we are losing so much on the pursuits of things that just don't matter. They just don't matter.

I have a background in mechanical engineering, so I understand that it is not that difficult to have a universal design to be able to make a chair that actually can accommodate someone of a very large stature and a very high weight. Because if we can put that effort into the design of a world that can accommodate someone who is disabled and really fat, then everybody else will also be accommodated. We have the ability to do it. We have the knowledge to do it. We have the resources to do it, but we don't have the impetus to do it because it breaks down the whole system of dominance.

And we need that dominance in order to uphold capitalism, in order for this magical 1% of the world's population to have all the resources. We need to maintain this. And so because of that, fat jokes are still okay because you can control that. That's the message. You're fat because you choose to be fat. And if you're thin, it's because you're doing the work. You're doing a great job. And it's not because I'm fat because, hey, I just happen to have this kind of body. And you're thin because you happen to have that kind of body.

Or even on the flip side, maybe I'm also this fat because I have spent so much time and energy and effort trying to become a thin person, that my body doesn't work the way it's supposed to. So it continues to hold on to this fat. And that is not to say that there's something wrong with me that needs to be fixed. It is not me who is wrong. It is our system of belief that fatness is bad and needs to be fixed.

We should not be focused on trying to fix fat people because there are so many other things that need to be fixed. The size of my butt is not it. So if you can fix, for example, my access to preventative health care in the body that I have now, if you can actually serve my needs before

they become emergencies, then maybe I would be more well, full and capable of living my fullest life.

[00:35:33] Jaia Bristow

I love that. I love that. And I think it's so important to, like you say, move away from this fat equals bad, equals your fault, equals ugly and thin equals well done, you've succeeded. Good, pretty, beautiful when it's so twisted.

Tiana Dodson

So twisted.

Jaia Bristow

Yeah. And so I think this is a really great time to start talking a bit about the body positivity movement, the body neutrality movement and the fat liberation movement. So maybe you can introduce those three and how they tie together and how they're different?

Tiana Dodson

Okay, this is a great question. So body positivity is the one that probably most people are familiar with because it's really commercial and very widespread. Also, it sounds wonderful.

Jaia Bristow

Did you say widespread or white-spread?

Tiana Dodson

Oh, a bit of both. This is a fundamental, foundational issue with all of these sorts of movements: number one, they tend to be led by white people. And number two, they tend to center also around white people. There's a lot there. But body positivity is the idea that you just have to love yourself. You just have to be positive about your body. Hashtag positivity, hashtag good vibes, sort of situation.

And there's a lot of merit there because I think positivity like, oh, my God, the world. Can we have a little bit of light? Can we have some joy? I'm here for that. But at the same time, body positivity is a movement that actually came from fat acceptance and fat liberation work. It was also born out of the eating disorder field, eating disorder recovery.

Because as someone who has an eating disorder, this is a valid response to trauma. And I understand how it can come about because we need to feel like we have some control in a life that we have so little control over. And things get warped and we create these behaviors that make sense to us in that moment, trying to create some kind of safety.

And the long and the short of it is that eating disorders, there's a huge proportion of them that cause people to feel negatively about the body or the eating disorder has come from feeling negative about the body. And so, let's try to rewire that, reframe that. Let's try to feel positively about the body so that we can then feed our body, in a way that actually works better for us.

[00:38:34]

So these are kind of the two places that this is coming from, body positivity. Yet the body positivity that you're seeing on Instagram and in the media and from the corporations is not that body positivity. It is a sort of love and light version, like a diet version of body neutrality or even acceptance movements.

And this is the problem, because we're seeing people who are either idealized already or are close to the body ideals, who are just, like, hunched over in a photo in their underwear. Hunched over to pinch at the tiny little roll of skin that appears because they're in that position. Or they're like, I don't have a six pack and I love myself. And it's like, okay, well, yeah, it's easy for you to love yourself even though you don't have a six pack, because you can walk into any store and you have just so much choice of how you clothe yourself, how you adorn yourself and how you can express yourself.

You can get on a plane and nobody's going, 'I don't want to sit next to that fat ass'. Like, these things aren't happening. You're not having to prepare yourself physically or how your body is going to be physically judged by every person you encounter. And so it's easy to feel positively about a body that is still within sort of these very narrow confines of acceptability.

Jaia Bristow

It's easy to feel positive about a body that's viewed positively by society.

Tiana Dodson

Exactly. Absolutely. It's a completely different thing. When you are actively villainized and violated and being attacked, physically and otherwise, it's so much harder to feel positively about this body.

We'll go to the other side, which is fat liberation. And fat liberation is really a movement about access. It's not just about like, so fat acceptance is more like, I'm a fat body, but you need to accept me. I exist. Stop pretending I don't exist. And I think there's so much valor in that and so much merit in that idea. But fat liberation goes further, because fat liberation is like, not only do I exist, but I have needs, and my needs are not being met, and it is unfair and dehumanizing. So please take care of me as well, because I do deserve care.

And so fat liberation is not just about can you feel good about your body? Can you have joy and pleasure? Can you be a full human being? But it's also that political side and that access to care and all of the things that you should be having as a human being.

But then there's sort of this center place where I like to say, so this has been a little bit of a journey in my work as well, where I was very much like more body positivity toward the beginning, fat acceptance, because that was what we wanted, like the pendulum swing. I wanted to go from the place where I was hating my body to a place where I could love my body.

And so I went from one extreme to the next, which is fine, but there's no politic there. It's just like, how do you feel? And that's great. Let's feel good also. But it completely glosses over so much of the human experience, which is not feeling good. It's feeling kind of blah. It's just, I'm here or

maybe I'm not having a good time. There's so much more range of emotion that is not being held in positivity movements or acceptance movements.

[00:43:02]

And this is also where I think a lot of the trauma-informed stuff comes in, is the body neutrality. Can you be in partnership with your body, regardless of what kind of body you have? What is your body experience? Can you find a way to have your needs met and be able to meet your own needs, to listen to what your body needs and what your body is expressing and respected enough to respond in kind?

And I think that this part is really difficult for a lot of people because like I said, when I started the work, I went from one extreme to the next. And I think the extremes are like, they're the hot places, they're sexy, there's a lot of energy there. But that middle place is the hard, uncomfortable place because it's like, what do you mean you don't love your body? You don't want to love your body. You don't think you can love your body. What do you mean? And it's uncomfortable.

Jaia Bristow

Yeah.

Tiana Dodson

But there's so much of our experience that happens in that space. And I think that's really where we need to be focusing. Absolutely, let's work on the politics. Absolutely, let's go for liberation. I am a body liberation facilitator. That's what I do. I'm trying to help you find your way to freedom with the body that you have and in the body that you have. That's like the basis of my work, but also with that liberation has to come the acknowledgment and the space for us to also be kind of like meh some days.

So that's what neutrality is really about. Can we deal with the fact that you have a body and it's kind of gross and it's getting old. It makes weird noises and it smells bad sometimes, but you can still serve your body even if you wake up and go, oh, no, not again. Can you still do the things that you need to do, and get done the things that need to get done? Can you take care of yourself? Can you accept the care? Can you ask for the care? And can that care be provided? And I think this is really the thing that's most important, because we're always so focused on, like, how do you heal, how do you heal, how do you get past, how do you get over, how do you break it down?

And again, this is just the repetition of the dominance. Like, I dominate my fear. I dominate my negative experience. Let's not dominate. Let's just be like, it is also information. It is also part of the whole situation. It's part of the whole experience. And if we erase it, like, it's just this giant hole, the neutrality, the 'meh' of our experience, is the dark matter of our body experience.

And the fact of the matter is that dark matter is something like 97% of the universe. You cannot erase 97% of your lived experience. It doesn't make sense. So we have to hold space for that too, because in that, we can hold space for the people who might not get as far as we all want them to, but who got as far as they could. And that is good.

[00:46:49] Jaia Bristow

Yeah. I love everything you've just shared, and I think it's so important for everyone, regardless of your body, whether you're someone like me who has a body that looks like it works but actually is not functioning in the ways I would like. So I have a hugely difficult relationship with my body, because my body doesn't function the way that I or others expect it to. Whether you're considered overweight or underweight, whether you're fat or thin, whether you're tall or short, whether you're disabled or not, whether all these things, whether you have the perfect ideal body type but feel like there's something wrong. Whoever you are, learning to accept your bodies as they are, I think is hugely healing for everyone.

And you already spoke earlier of the very fact that you can exist and accept and love yourself for who you are, as almost like a political act. I think healing trauma can really start by learning to love, not in the overpraise and body positivity way, but just accept. Maybe love is too strong a word. And learning to just accept our bodies and if we start there so much is possible, right?

That's been a huge shift for me is just accepting this is the body I have, and also accepting that our bodies, more than any other part of our identity, changes. We grow older, we get ill, we put on weight, we lose weight, we have wrinkles, we have diseases, we have so many things. We have accidents, we have scars. Our bodies are constantly changing.

And I'm touching my hair as I say this. My hair will look different every day, or every minute of every day, especially with my hair, and can impact how I feel about myself when I look in the mirror, how other people perceive me because it's an extension of my body and all these things. So really, for me, the big takeaway of this conversation is just learning that we have a huge range of different bodies, that those bodies change on a daily basis and over time and all of that. And to learn to just accept is a huge part of healing.

Tiana Dodson

Absolutely. And the thing is that if you're feeling negatively about your body, a lot of the time what that comes from is the fact that we have a hierarchy and a stigmatization. We have a definition for what a body is supposed to look like. And if you fall out of that, that is a negative thing. If we could reach a place where we could be liberated about our bodies, we could be accepting and I hate to say tolerant, because tolerant isn't the right word because tolerance still means like, yeah, you're there, but I hate you, but it's all right. No, no, we don't want that. We don't want tolerance. We want acceptance.

This body is just another type and kind of human body. And if we can get to that place where it is perfectly fine how your body shows up, then we have no necessity for a bad body day. We have no necessity for oh, I hate this. And now your mood is completely in the trash. And the fact is as long as we have a hierarchy of bodies, as long as we have these systems of dominance and supremacy of what is right in gigantic quote marks and what is wrong in gigantic quote marks, we all suffer.

Not just fat people, not just disabled people, not just chronically ill people or anyone else who has been othered from the ideal. But even people who are close to that ideal are being harmed by the system, because they are constantly afraid of possibly losing their position. And this causes and reinforces the whole system of supremacy. It causes harm, it causes us to be the worst versions of ourselves and it causes this never-ending, horrible cycle of abuse and harm and trauma that is unnecessary. Completely unnecessary.

[00:51:21] Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. I'm mindful of time. Before we go, there were just a couple of things that you said that I really wanted to highlight. One was around we're talking about acceptance, accepting one's body. But that also means that there are days where we accept the fact that we're not, like you were saying, we're not in love with our body, that maybe our bodies are aging or changing or not working in the ways we like. And that, again, we don't have to beat ourselves up for not loving our bodies, but we can accept not just our bodies every day, but how we feel about them.

Tiana Dodson

Absolutely.

Jaia Bristow

And the other thing is that I recently heard, which ties in very nicely with this, is I heard someone describe the body as the physical manifestation of the soul rather than like a meat sack that holds the soul. So if we treat our bodies like physical manifestations of our soul, hopefully that can help shift that relationship to our bodies and create more love and compassion and care.

Tiana, thank you so much for your time today. It's been an incredible conversation. How can people find out more about you and your work?

Tiana Dodson

I love it. So if you are interested in checking me out and learning more about me and continuing this conversation, you can head on over to my website, which is TianaDodson.com. You can also find me on social media. Most often, I'm on Instagram, [@iamtianadodson](https://www.instagram.com/iamtianadodson). And you can also find me under that same handle on [TikTok](https://www.tiktok.com/@iamtianadodson) where I like to play. So, yeah, these are some places you can find me and I look forward to talking more.

Jaia Bristow

Thank you so much.

Tiana Dodson

It's been great.