

# UNCONDITIONALLY WORTHY

*The Podcast*

## **Unconditionally Worthy Podcast EP 58: What Disability Pride Teaches All of Us with Tiffany Yu**

Adia Gooden: (0:00:00) This episode is sponsored by Chris and Tiana taking the guesswork out of launching your podcast.

Welcome to the Unconditionally Worthy Podcast. In this podcast, I will guide you on your journey to connect with the true source of your self-worth. Each week we'll discuss barriers to unconditional self-worth, the connection between self-worth and relationships, self-worth practices you can apply to your life, and how to use self-worth as a foundation for living courageously. I'm your host, Dr. Adia Gooden, a licensed clinical psychologist, dance enthusiast, and a dark chocolate lover who believes deeply that you are worthy unconditionally.

Hello and welcome to another episode of the Unconditionally Worthy Podcast. I'm really excited about today's interview. I think it was a really interesting conversation about disability and pride and self-worth. And I had a guest on, her name is Tiffany Yu and she's a disability pride advocate. And she's done a lot of work in the space. And I really like how we sort of wrestled with this topic of how disability pride is so important for people who are disabled. And it's really about people asserting their worth and their worthiness despite all of the messages about disabilities. And I also think there's so much that those of us who don't have disabilities can learn from that, right? There's so many ways that we can grow and learn to accept and affirm our full selves as worthy even when they're not, you know, needing the standards, that "Mainstream Society" puts on us these ideas or ideals around worthiness, that if we look a certain way or walk a certain way or talk a certain way or think a certain way, or communicate a certain way, then we'll be worthy because we're meeting these sort of these ideals.

And I think what we can learn is that we are worthy already as we are in all of the ways. If you have a disability, you are worthy. If you don't have disabilities, you're worthy. If you have quirks

and challenges and issues, you're worthy, right? And I think we really get into that and how powerful that is. So I'm excited for you all to listen to this episode today. Be sure to listen into the end. Be sure to connect with Tiffany and send us a DM. Let us know what you think. Let us know if you had thoughts or ideas, or if this sparks something for you. Let's get into the show.

I'm very excited to have Tiffany you on the podcast with me today. Tiffany is the CEO and Founder of Diversability and award-winning social enterprise to elevate Disability Pride, the Founder of the Awesome Foundation Disability Chapter, a monthly micro grant that has awarded \$59,500 to 60 disability projects in 10 countries, and a content creator with over 160,000 followers across platforms. She served on the San Francisco Mayor's Disability Council from 2019 to 2022, and was a 2020 co-chair of the World Economic Forum, Sustainable Development Impact Summit. At the age of nine, Tiffany became disabled as a result of a car accident that also took the life of her father. She started her career in investment banking at Goldman Sachs and has also worked at Bloomberg and Sean Diddy Combs', REVOLT Media and TV. She is a three time TEDx speaker and spoke on five sessions in the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos. She has been featured in Marie Claire, the Guardian, and Forbes. And I feel lucky and honored to know Tiffany. I know her through the Global Shapers, which is a community of young adults, young professionals that's affiliated with the World Economic Forum. And I was grateful to meet Tiffany at various sort of events and conferences that the Global Shapers hosted along the years. And so really excited and happy to have you here with me, Tiffany. Welcome.

Tiffany Yu: Yeah, thank you so much. And I also want to highlight, like I actually think that you and I now in our mid 30s coming together is the whole point of what the mission of the Global Shapers was, right? So for us to meet in our early, in our earlier 20s, and then as we progressed in our careers, still stay in each other's ecosystems.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. Yeah, I agree. It was a really great opportunity to connect with other young people who are doing (0:05:00) really interesting things in all different sectors and all different parts of the world. And so it's been great to maintain those relationships, even though I've aged out of the group now. So yeah, very glad to have you here. And I know that there's sort of a wealth of wisdom that you have that will be beneficial for me to hear and for the audience to hear. So I'd love to start our conversation where I start all of my conversations with guests on the podcast, which is by asking you to share a little bit about your own self-worth story.

Tiffany Yu: And I love that you start with this question because I think that my, I didn't even have consciousness around what self-worth was growing up. And so as you mentioned in my intro, I was involved in a car accident very young. I often will say that in addition to this being like a disability story is also a story about grief. So you have loss of childhood innocence. You have, you know, the loss of my father, also the loss in terms of changes in my own body. So in terms of self-worth, I would say I internalized a lot of messages growing up that something was wrong with me, that my body was broken, and that it needed to be fixed. So very low self-worth, very low self-confidence, very low self-esteem. But I didn't really have consciousness about it until, honestly, probably 2018. And when you sent me this question, I was really reflecting on when my own self-worth journey really began.

And it started in 2018, because I think up until that point, I determined so much of my worth based on what other people thought of me. And I was dating a shaper, a global shaper from 2017 to 2018. And after we broke up at the end of 2018, I just noticed that I didn't feel worthy, and I told myself that I wanted to dedicate the next period of time not dating, investing in building up my own confidence, building up, just falling in love with myself. So I actually, I can remember that date and that period of time very clearly, because it's when I realized that I had attributed so much of how I felt about myself based on other people's opinions of me. And then it was that conscious decision to want to spend intentional time investing in reminding myself that I like myself.

Adia Gooden: Yeah, I mean, I think that's so powerful, and I think it's something that, you know, it's something that I can relate to and it's something that so many people can relate to, is sort of like realizing at some point that what we thought was going to make us feel worthy didn't work, right? Whether that's sort of academic or professional achievement or romantic relationships. And I think it's really great that you took that opportunity, that recognition that, okay, I actually have to focus on myself, right? And that's really going to, what's going to get me to a place of feeling worthy or feeling loved is loving myself and liking myself, because I think, you know, what often happens is that people numb themselves out or they just chase after the next thing. And what we really do need to do is exactly what you did, which is shift to focusing on ourselves and our relationship with ourselves, and building that up and healing that, because that's kind of where we create this foundation of self-worth, so that all the other things that spring from that will then be more fulfilling. You know, they'll bring us more joy, contentment, all of those things.

Tiffany Yu: Yeah. And I think on that point too, you know, we mentioned that we both met through this community called the Global Shapers. We are chasing achievement after achievement. And that fueled me for a period of time until I kind of, I don't, I don't, I made this up, it just came to right now, but like achievement burnout in a way, it's like, it's like I did the TED Talk, I went to Davos, I, you know, it's like, how many things do you need to stack before you realize that? Or at least for me, before I realized that I was operating from an empty cup.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. It's very similar, very similar in my own journey, like maybe that next achievement will do it, and eventually it's like, okay, let's be honest. None of this, none of this is making me feel worthy. And I wonder if there's any connection for you between sort of focusing on loving yourself and, you know, liking yourself, as you said, and your work around disability pride. Like, was there sort of, did that influence the sort of advocacy and activism you've done in that space?

Tiffany Yu: Yeah, you know, in the early days, so Diversability started as a student club in 2009. And at the time and I'm only starting to realize that this is what I did, but I didn't tell anyone about the car accident from ages nine until 21, or I didn't tell anyone publicly. What would end up happening was someone would stare or they'd say, oh, what happened to your hand? And I would just start falling and, so come (0:10:00), you know, ages 21 onward at age 21, I had started the beginnings of Diversability. And I was like, I want to start this movement around disability pride. I don't know what that looks like yet, and I don't have a community yet, but I think it's something that I just so desperately need because I spent so long hiding my arm, feeling a lot of pain and grief toward the story, and then also diminishing it and invalidating it in many ways.

So in the beginning days, and I don't recommend this, usually I say, you know, in order to serve other people, you have to make sure you, you know, take care of yourself first that the oxygen mask metaphor, like put on your own oxygen mask before putting on, before attending to others. But when I started Diversability in 2009, I think it was just out of desperation. I had a very empty cup at the time. I didn't know how to talk about my disability. I felt a lot of shame around it. And I think that internalized shame contributed to my lack of feeling, any feeling worthy. And so in those beginning years, the growth of Diversability really mirrored my own growth. And so in a way, because up until that point, I didn't actually start going to mental health therapy until the first time I went to a therapist 2017, which is 20 years after the car accident.

So also keep in mind, I didn't, in my, in my family, and I'm the daughter of Asian immigrants, mental health support wasn't a thing. And I had also internalized that I shouldn't tell anyone about anything traumatic, because I don't, I don't want to, I don't want to share my burden onto other people or bear or have other people bear that burden. So secret, you know, no support, then come this kind of watershed moment in a way of realizing, like I'm curious if there are other disabled people out there who don't want to feel embarrassed or ashamed of parts of their bodies or the ways that their mind works. And if we can meet each other, then we realize we're not alone, and then we actually end up showing up as a collective and more powerful to other people. But I love that question because I want to say around 2015 or 2016, I noticed that the growth of Diversability and Tiffany's growth had kind of plateaued.

And in a way I was like, oh, I'm not like healing the same way, the same way I used to. And I realized that my relationship with Diversability up until that point was that was kind of my burst of therapy. That was what I needed. That's, that's what I needed to heal. And so now, you know, in the second phase from 2016 onward, it's really been okay, I've seen the transformative impact that creating something like Diversability had on me. Now, if I'm not, you know, taking as much out of it as I, as I want to, that's what I impart onto our community members, right, to carry forward. And then in a way, it's kind of like how you think about a startup and how it kind of matures, it goes through this, you know, rapid period of growth, but then ends up becoming, becomes steady.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I love that you're sharing that because I think we often give to the world what we need. And it sounds like that's a lot of what you were doing with Diversability, right? Like you needed, you know, to be seen fully, you needed connection and community and to move beyond feeling ashamed, right? And so you gave, then you sort of created that, even if you weren't fully acknowledging that you needed that for yourself or didn't totally understand that you needed it for yourself, you created it and created that space for other people, and were supported through that process as well. Because I think that often if you look at, you know, we also, we often say sort of in the world of like doing a, like if you're doing a dissertation, if you're getting your PhD, that people do like a, like NeedSesearch it's called, right? Like the research topics that people choose are really sort of about themselves and what they experience because it's a way of processing and understanding what they've gone through, even if it's at an intellectual level at first. And then you sort of move into the more grounded, okay, like I need healing around this, or I need this level.

And I think the other thing I love hearing about related to Diversability is just the community aspect. Because I think often, I think these days, especially, right, there's this really wonderful thing, which is that so many people are embracing the fact that therapy is so helpful, right? And that therapy should be accessible and that it's okay to go to therapy and right, like people are really embracing that. And I think the challenge is that people may start to think, all I need is therapy to be mentally well. And yes, therapy is such an important, can be such an important component of mental wellness (0:15:00) and healing and that sort of thing. And community is really important, right? Like being in community with people, whether that's a group or, you know, whatever, have seeing other people fully and having them see you fully and joining together is also so important. And I don't want people to lose that as they also go into therapy. I don't want people to think, well mental health issues or challenges are dealt with behind closed doors with a therapist by myself. And that's it. Because in some ways, sometimes that can support people in continuing with some of the shame around, like I can't tell anybody but a therapist what I've struggled with or what I'm going through. And you want to talk to it about, talk with a therapist about it. And I also imagine you can tell me that it was really powerful and healing once you started sharing your story and your experience with other people. What would you say about that?

Tiffany Yu: Yeah, I also wanted to highlight, and I shared this in a talk recently, the definition of community is we're a group of people come together to nurture your own growth and each other's growth. And I think just having a shared definition, and that's the definition I use, I mean, I think you can go online, find other definitions, but it's centered on growth, and so you gain things out of it and other people, and you're there to support other people as well. And I think to your point, you know, you were talking a lot about, like I talk a lot about how it's called a support system or a web of support, because it isn't, a system isn't just one person aka, you know, a therapist behind closed doors. And so you, in addition to mental health therapy, if that's what you're pursuing, you also have friends, you also have community, you also have support groups, etcetera, etcetera, but I actually forgot what your original question was.

Adia Gooden: I think, yeah, I was asking about, yeah, the value of community that how the community, how community helped and how sharing your story with other people versus just hiding it, which you had done for so long. How that shifted things for you?

Tiffany Yu: Yes. Yes. I start, sorry, I remember. But yes, I will say that a lot of people will come to me and say, Tiffany, you're so brave for sharing this story or for being so open about your disabilities. And I actually wrote a LinkedIn post about this, and I was like, you know, I don't feel brave, but I feel free and I feel liberated. And I actually think what sharing that story of the car accident did for me is it was an emotional release, but it also made me start to explore. It enabled me to grow out of that original story, which was, which I felt was, you know, stuck in my body, oftentimes will hear some people talk about how trauma gets stored in your body. So start to explore other things. So interestingly enough, I met someone. So once I started Diversability, I started to meet a lot of other, a lot of other leaders in the space who were, you know, working on mental health or adaptive sports, etcetera.

And I met with someone and I shared the story of the car accident with her, this is around 2015, 2016, and she ran a mental health nonprofit, her name's Sarah. Sarah ran a mental health profit

called Stigma Fighters. And I shared the story of the car, car accident. She goes, Tiffany, that's trauma. And interestingly enough, I had never used the word trauma. It was not part of my vocabulary up until that point. And again, it had been almost 20 years since the car accident, and I always just called the car accident car accident, because in my mind, trauma was something that you got mental health support for, but that had never been offered to me as, as part of my support system as I was growing up. So I just assumed the car accident was the car accident, not anything more.

So I think that was part of what creating this community actually did for me, was give me the vernacular and the right and have someone else see and objectively name that something was trauma. And she was the one who actually mentioned, she was actually the one who encouraged me after I met her. I was like, you know, I think I'm going to go to a therapist. And again, I had never thought that that was something that I had wanted to do. So, yeah, very grateful. I'm very grateful for Diversability because it not only helped my own healing journey, but also introduced me to so many other people who made me realize that I could expand my support system in so many different ways.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. And I love that you say, so look, one, talking about it helped, help other people to share insight and helped you to gain insight on what you experience and then how you're saying that it freed you. Because I think often people can believe, okay, if I keep it, keep it secret and hidden, then it won't affect me and it'll just be, you know, I'll like be holding the closet clothes, right? But the reality is that (0:20:00) all of the energy that you spend sort of feeling ashamed, trying to hide it, right, like that actually keeps you stuck. And as you said, it sort of gets stuck in your body. And speaking the truth of what you experience, it doesn't mean that that's what defines you and who you are. It actually releases you to acknowledge that this is part of your story, this is part of what you've experienced, and you are free to explore other aspects and other parts of yourself and your identity and your story, and sort of hold all of that together. But it's in the sort of avoiding it and the trying to suppress or ignore and hide it, that you actually end up feeling more stuck with it and more trapped by it.

Tiffany Yu: There's a Ted Talk from Brene Brown that I reference a lot, where she talks about how shame festers in secrecy, silence and judgment. And I often reflect back on different parts of my story and see how much power shame had over me, and still has in some ways. You know, I think we all have different insecurities in one way or another. Just, I don't know, I got tired. I got tired of letting shame win all the time.

Adia Gooden: It's exhausting. I'm wondering if we can sort of also connect this back with, you know, disability pride and people having disabilities, right? Because part of, I imagine that for a lot of people with disabilities, especially people with disabilities that are not visible, not, you know, readily visible, that there can be a sort of a desire to hide or be secretive or minimize, right? Even if it is, you know, a disability that you can, somebody could see from the outside. And I'm wondering if you could share about sort of the power of disability pride and why that's so important for people and why it might be liberating as well.

Tiffany Yu: Yeah. So the term disability pride, or the first, in my own research, the first time I ever heard that phrase disability pride mentioned was 1990, which is the same year that the

Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. And my definition of disability pride, or actually I think it's the National Council on Independent Living, the definition they use is disability pride is how we, how a person with a disability asserts their worth in enables society, right? And this concept of disability pride, I think why it's so important to me and important in the work that we do is that, yes, I think our society has upheld many harmful beliefs and messages that disability is shameful; that disability makes us less worthy. There are policies in place that dehumanize the disability community, whether it's, you know, not being able to get married to keep your disability benefits, disabled people are still legally able to get paid below minimum wage. You know, and so oftentimes what I think about oppression, oppression is a sys, a like ableism is a system of oppression, right? So we talk about support systems earlier, and so when we talk about systems of oppression, it's not just one thing. So there are so many things starting all the way up from policy to media messages, to headlines that you read, that we internalize, that make us think that we are not worthy. And disability pride as a concept in itself is a way to combat that.

I will say that, and I'm actually really proud of myself. In 2009, I applied for a grant, and again, at this time, Diversability was just a student club, and I applied for a grant and I said, I'm looking to start a movement around disability pride. And I remember meeting with the grant committee, and they asked me, they said, how can someone be proud to be disabled? And I'm seeing your facial reaction. Now, I don't know if a video version of this will be saved. But in 2009, it was still and probably even now, probably not as much in the US but probably in other parts of the world, it is still a foreign concept to be proud, to be disabled. Because, you know, if I bring in my Asian upbringing, and even when I studied abroad in China, I didn't see any people who had visible disabilities unless you were on the street. And so the way that I grew up was, please don't hide that, or sorry, please don't show that or don't share that. And if you have a nonvisible disability, don't tell anyone about it, because why would you want to contribute to a narrative that potentially makes you seem less worthy, right? So now we're seeing so much, so many, like disabled influencers, and then things like that come up who are proud, right? Because we're trying to combat decades, maybe even centuries of so many harmful narratives (0:25:00) that we are not worthy.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. Yeah

Tiffany Yu: And that's why, and interestingly enough, you know, we started this conversation asking about what my own self-worth journey was. If I look at my list of accolades, and you read a lot of them in my intro, I think any parent would be very proud, right? But the thing that I'm the most proud of is that I like myself and I want to say I love myself, but I'm still working toward that I love myself part. But to get to this point where I, you know, and that's why I also wanted to share that. Like I spent over a decade sitting in that place of shame and feeling that lack of worthiness because I kind of just feel awe about this whole journey, the fact that I am here now, and that I am so loud and proud, but I wasn't always, and that I can help empower other people within my community to potentially to be on that same birth journey.

(0:26:00)

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Adia Gooden: I love the definition of disability pride, right? Asserting your worth, because I think, you know, you're right. Like it makes me even almost teary, right? Like this how much society sends messages that if you are not, you know, completely, I don't know, I guess maybe say able bodied able mind, right? Like if you don't have any disability, like you have to be completely with no disabilities in order to be worthy, right? And then how that comes through in, you know, the way our cities are planned and the way our buildings are structured and the way our education system is structured and the standards of beauty, right? Like there's so many levels and layers that say, you need to look like this. You need to be like this. You need to communicate like this in order to be worthy. And how powerful and radical it is to say, I don't, you know, I have a disability and I'm worthy, right? And not in spite of, not like I'm ignoring that part of me, but I, this is who I am and I'm worthy. And it's such an important and powerful sort of message and thing for people to claim.

And I think, you know, most of us don't meet society standards of what is ideal, even if you don't have a disability. Most of us kind of like aren't quite needing it. And then, you know, you still have to kind of wrestle with like, how do I claim and affirm my worthiness even if I'm not sort of fitting into these society norms and standards about what is ideal? And I also think about then how does that affect how you treat yourself, right? And I think when you say, I like myself and I'm growing to love myself, right? That's that piece is how do I talk to myself? How do I treat myself? I think about the example, the story that Sonya Renee Taylor tells in her book *The Body Is Not an Apology*, just like of, so she talks about her friend who had a physical disability and was in a situation where she had gotten pregnant and she didn't want to, and part of the reason that came about is because she, you know, had sex with a man and didn't feel like she could ask for him to wear a condom because she had a physical disability. And Sonya Renee Taylor said, your body, like your body is not an apology, right? Like you don't have to apologize for your body (0:30:00). But it sort of just highlights how it's so easy for us to internalize these messages and then feel like I need to apologize for who I am, or I can't assert that I'm worth the respect or I'm worth this boundary, or I'm worth whatever it is so that I can take care of myself so that other people can care for me, all of those things. And so I'm rambling a little bit, but you know, I just think it's so, you know, powerful and important.



Tiffany Yu: Yeah. And this continues along your tangent, but someone actually mentioned the body is not an apology. And that's specific anecdote to me recently because I was doing some research around gender based violence against women and girls with disabilities. And, you know, I think there's a stat out there that says women and girls with disabilities are 7 to 10 times more likely to be the victim. And I think that that goes into, in internalized sense of work, right? In our dis, because what I have is also a physical disability it. And there's no one way that disability looks and they all look very different. But I do believe that I internalized so many harmful messages about what I deserved.

And I will say, I know I mentioned this 2017 to 2018 timeframe where I dated this person and the ending of that relationship marked the beginning of my own self-worth journey. And something in that relationship was my partner believed I was beautiful, my whole body in, in everything. And I had never, I had never been with a partner before who saw that. And I always felt like my physical disability was a burden or shameful in my attractiveness and to meet someone who just saw the whole me and fully accepted all of that made me realize that I could be capable of that too. And so it's like this weird thing of like, what kick start in my self-worth journey is someone else saw my worth and then I decided I needed to find that for myself.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. That's such a useful story I think, because I think often, you know, there's often always conversation about like, can you love or receive love if you don't love yourself? And I think it's sort of a complicated answer. And I think the relationships we have along the way can really be corrective and healing and teach us something. And I also think we sort of live in a society where it's like, if you don't get married to the person and that relationship didn't matter, and that's just not the truth, right? Like we all, you know, have relationships that can be so meaningful, can be healing in some ways and challenging in others and right, like and that we can take from them this beautiful thing, right? Like you took from that relationship like, oh wow. Like I can be seen by this person so fully and so purely and beautifully and I, that can give me a window into how I can see myself and I can be grateful for that. And I also don't have to stay in this relationship forever. Because I think that's the other kind of way that some of these things of self-worth can come out is like, well, if this person thinks I'm beautiful or wonderful, even if these things aren't great about the relationship, I better stay with them because what's the likelihood that I would find somebody up, right? And so I love that you took from that. Okay, I'm going to give this to myself. It's possible and so I'm going to figure out how to give this to myself.

Tiffany Yu: And I remember, you know, dating and interpersonal relationships are nuanced, right? Because you know how you feel, but you can't control how someone else feels. And I

remember going back out into the dating pool after that and every single time before I would have a date, I would actually give myself some self-talk and I'd be like, okay, Tiffany, keep things fun and light. Because I would consider myself a little bit of an intense personality. And I was holding on and I was working on unlearning a lot of anxious attachment, which would try to like force a lot of things. So I was say, fun and light. And then also I would just remind myself of everything that I liked about myself because I felt like if I didn't remind myself of that I would forget and go in, go back into that pattern that I'd gotten so used to of depending on someone else to define my work.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. I mean, that's such a great lesson. I hope you all are taking notes, especially for those of you who are dating, like the fun and light piece and the like what you like about yourself. I think for me, I struggled with that a lot. I had the anxious attachment thing going on too. And I would get into like, not like I'm choosing them, not like I would forget that I am making a choice about whether I want to continue to date this person. It would be (0:35:00), are they going to choose me? Are they going to choose me? How can I get them to choose me, right? And that sort of, so I think that the reminder, fun and light, like the first date does not mean like make or break about whether or not you're going to get married like, you know, keep it light. And then also like you like you, they are deciding whether they want to continue date you and you also get a choice. Do you like them? Do you like how you feel with them? Do you want to continue to spend time with them? So I think that's really helpful.

And, you know, I think one of the things that's coming through is, you know, how this, this piece around, you know, disability pride really benefits, helps all of us, right? And I think that's true for so many sort of movements for people who have been marginalized, right? Is that usually what helps those of us who have been marginalized or experienced oppression really opens and freeze everyone, right? Like, you know, you hear it talked about as well with gender, right? Like with people who are trans or gender nonconforming, right? Like they're freeing all of us to think about gender differently and not be sort of boxed in, right? And so they're, you know, with black people, with right, like so many pieces. And I think that this is true also with the disability pride movement, right? That as disabled people are, you know, asserting their pride and their worthiness that also frees up the rest of us to feel pride and worth without perfection, right, without that striving for perfection and to accept all of ourselves. Because we all have stuff that the mainstream society would say is not great or is not perfect. What do you think about that in terms of the movement of disability pride, sort of obviously benefiting people who are disabled, but also pulling the rest of us along?

Tiffany Yu: Yeah, no, I think you hit the nail on the head, if we're still able to use that. I mean, I think you're completely right and two things are coming up for me. One is I spent some time thinking about what my personal mission statement is, and my personal mission statement is, how can I lead by example that you can also be unapologetically yourself and that the greatest gift you can give the world is by being yourself. But you hear the way that I phrase it is that I'm leading by example. Like, how can I be on my own journey and do the work and share some of that publicly with other people so that they know if they need it, that you have the permission to be yourself too? The other thing that's coming up for me is I recently got featured in a piece with women's health on disabled TikTokers, like the rise of disabled TikTokers.

And one of the things I took away from the piece, which I think I had been talking about, but they did a really great job of articulating it is that by all of these disabled Tiktokers or whatever intersection or identity intersections are meaningful to you, it not only helps the next generation find their own voice, but it also helped accelerate their own self advocacy because they were seeing people be unapologetically themselves on video, right? I think part of the criticism that Instagram had gotten was that it was so over filtered and you had filters that can change your body size. And there's actually a filter out there that I realized it can, there's a filter out there that can change your teeth color, I mean, there's those filters...

Adia Gooden: Oh a nose, nose, like as a, you know, a black woman with a widest nose, like one filter I was like, huh, like my nose is significantly thinner when I, I'm not going to use that.

Tiffany Yu: But when you're on short video, and I think this is why we've actually seen kind of the explosion of short video, what wins is authenticity. So I, you know, to come back to your question, I think we are not only enabling the next generation of disabled advocates to find their voice, but advocates in whatever intersection or identity they, someone just sees themselves mirrored and they say, wow, they're being so themselves, I can be myself too.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. And I love that because too often we're, oh, they're amazing, I need to be like them, right? But I love your mission statement, which is like, I'm going to be fully authentically myself and you know what I mean, believe in my worthiness, all of that so that I give other people permission to be fully themselves. And I think that's what the freedom, where the freedom comes from. And, you know, I also love this because you know too often, I think certainly in the past, and I, you know, you will know more than I do and I'm sure it still happens. There's sort of this dynamic of, well, how can we help people who, you know, have disabilities or how can we help people who have this or that disadvantage, right? Like, we've got a

(0:40:00), you know, accom, you know, all this stuff, right? And accommodations are great, right? But there's sort of a narrative like, okay, we'll help you, you need our help.

And I really love drawing out how people with disabilities or people from other marginalized groups are really helping us, right? Who are maybe not in that group, right? That it's not that anybody needs saving, right? Or to be rescued because they, you know, don't have power themselves. But it's actually being able to witness the agency and the power of people with disabilities that free us that demonstrates to us what's possible, how we could live, how we could be free. And so I like sort of thinking about it that way and framing and challenging some of the prevailing narratives that sort of come from this charity mindset that I think is, you know, problematic.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. I think that, you know, there are different models with, there are different models within how people talk about disability and charity/tragedy mindset is one of them. And I recently saw, I think there's and actually a shaper works there, there's an organization called Detroit Disability Power. And they had some wording somewhere that says, you know, we're not a support or services organization because we're focused on building social justice and power within our community. And I thought that that phrasing was very eye opening frame because I think what I'm trying to do is also build power, but I think about disability justice ideals and the difference between, you know, disability rights or this transition to disability justice is really thinking through that idea of collective liberation, right? So it's not just my own liberation, which I think, you know, so much of this conversation was, how did Tiffany find her own liberation, right? And then what does that look like at scale? And so I do think about how, yeah, I mean, I do think about what this might look like at scale, you know, what does, what does unconditional self-worth look like at scale?

Tiffany Yu: Yeah. I mean that's what I'm, that's my drive, right, is to, is to get it because I think, you know, I think we'd be all living with a lot less shame and I think that we'd be able to just navigate this thing called life as sort of better humans, right? Like I think we're struggling right now, frankly. You know, if you look at the political sphere, certainly I think even if you look at the social sphere, even if you look at, you know, how we are dealing with Covid, right? Even, you know, sort of this like, okay, Covid is not a thing. And I know, like my understanding is that for a lot of people, I think in particular people with disabilities or people with chronic illness, like it's really difficult and harmful that there aren't, you know, there is not a collective understanding of how do we protect all of us and how do we, you know, affirm that everybody is worthy of safety and health and not every person for themselves, but, you know, we're all in this together.

And so I think if we owned that we are worthy and owned that everybody else is worthy as well, and didn't feel like somebody else's worthiness was a threat to ours, didn't feel like we were in competition. I didn't feel like, yeah, like our worth was, it feels like people are feeling very threatened and then responding from that space. I think the world would be a lot better. So that's my game is how do we get this to more people? Because I think life feels better on the individual level. And then I think it will also feel better in terms of community if people were coming from a place of worthiness and not, I have to prove it and I have to prove that you're not worthy and I am and whatever, but we're all worthy. So then how do we work together to build a world that reflects that?

Tiffany Yu: Yeah. I will share that in my own, you know, when I started Diversability in 2009, I was its only member, and I remember going around campus hang around flyers saying, please join, You know, we're creating a club around disability pride, membership of one. And I remember starting to build my, my group of allies, and most of them were administrators and professors. But then I started getting some emails of people who had seen the flyers and who were interested. You know, and today in 2022, I look at our whole digital ecosystem and it's over 70,000. And we host virtual events every month, and I think our last couple of virtual events have had like 300 registered attendees. And so people are, I guess, I wanted to share that because, you know, I asked you this question of (0:45:00) how do we do this at scale? And I have to remember that scale is really just a collection of people one by one. And if you believe so fundamentally in what you're building, which you do for your mission, and I do for mine, I think we'll attract that energy.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. And I love that too, because it helps to prevent overwhelm. Because if you're, if you just started, okay, well, let me just, can I have one more person, right, join me? Can I have a couple more people join me? It makes it feel, yeah, it just makes it feel more possible. And I also think that, you know, there's also this piece of sort of moving out of the framework of like, go, go, go, go faster, go faster, work harder, work harder, burn, right, like achievement, burnout, as you mentioned before, which I think both of us were sort of socialized, grew up in and are like releasing that it can be easy to sort of try to pull that back in. And then again, that sort of is ableist, right? Like you can keep working all the time nonstop, right? Like and it's not healthy, it's not sustainable. And so if you make it more about community, if you make it more about connecting, if you make it more about empowering versus like fixing, right? Neither of us are out to fix anybody, then it's more sustainable. Then people draw on their own power. And you bring that together. And I think that's really where magic starts to happen.

Tiffany Yu: Yeah. And I do want to highlight that many of us who do have disabilities overcompensated for our disabilities by achieving or trying to produce quicker and almost, you know, doing, like I recently posted something on this short form video series that I'm creating around the phrase, don't let your disabilities stop you. And in it, I said, you know, here are a couple reasons why this phrase is harmful. And one of them was, there are some things that with our disabilities, we can't and shouldn't do because it'll exacerbate our disabilities where it'll just make things worse. And so I did want to highlight that, that I think that with all of, you know, I call it internalized shame, you can call it internalized ableism. Many of us are working to unlearn that just because our bodies work a little bit differently, right? I type with one hand, I think that I type quickly, but you know, I'm missing five fingers that someone else might have to type and that's okay, right? And how can I forgive and not even forgive? How can I just have compassion that my body works differently and the email will still get sent out to the person that it needs to go to, you know, before the timeframe.

So and I will also say that I think both you and I were on that trajectory, and we almost had to do that in order to see the other side. And in my work, I often talk about how many things exist on a band. And in order for me, and actually this will relate back in order for me to understand how worthy I am, I did have to be way on the other side and not feel that way about myself to understand that like, we all exist on this band, and our goal is can we stretch it as far as possible? But if we love ourselves, right? We also have the capacity to not like ourselves a lot, right? So you can't just stretch the band on one side and be like, here's all the love, here's all the worthiness. And I guess I'm grateful for my life experiences and expanding. I just learned this phrase like window of tolerance, like expanding my own band and window of tolerance to say, man, there were, there was a period of time where I really did not like myself, because now I can be on the other extreme of that.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. I think being grateful for the journey, being grateful for all parts of it, and offering ourselves, our younger selves compassion for trying to figure it out the best we could, right, when we were in that space, I think is really important because it's not helpful to beat up your younger self or shame your younger self as you're moving out of shame. But to understand that, you know, there was, you were in process, right? And you were growing and, you know, thank goodness that you realized that you didn't have to keep achieving to prove your worth and that sort of thing. So yeah, I mean, I think, oh go ahead.

Tiffany Yu: I was just going to say, but the fascinating thing that happened was once I started focusing inward, I actually saw even more things on the achievement ladder come. And that made it even more rewarding because I wasn't dependent on that achievement thing because I was just focusing on myself. And I think that's just like, I'm not a super spiritual person, but I believe in the universe. I think that's just how the universe (0:50:00) ends up manifesting things for you is they say, I know you are focusing on yourself and you're doing all and you're on this love, this self-love journey, or the self-worth journey, and so we're going to send you some positive feedback that you're moving in the right direction.

Adia Gooden: Yeah, no, I love that you said that because I think people often fear, if I believe I'm worthy, then won't I just like sit on the couch and do nothing, right? Like, won't I just sort of like stop contributing to the world? And I think sitting on the couch and doing nothing can be great, right? Like, do that every once in a while. Wonderful, right? Like, if that's, if that's part of your self-care. And I think that when we know we're worthy, we actually move from a different place. And it actually, as you're saying, sort of brings, allows us to bring more into the world with more ease, right? That it actually, instead of the, like exhaustion, overworking, like that's where I used to be never able to relax. Like now I'm in a space where I have more impact, I work less, I make more, I'm happier, right? Like ease, and I'm doing the work, but I'm not overworking.

And I think that that's such an important message for people to hear, like you claiming you're worth, right? You having pride in who you are and all of who you are is actually going to lead you to a space where eventually you'll be able to kind of do what you want and attract all these wonderful things with more ease without the exhaustion and the overwork. And yet there may be a period of confusion or things falling away, right? Like, because often when we're claiming these things for ourselves, we cannot stay in the same relationships or at the same job or, you know, in the same space. Because if we're not surrounded by people who don't also believe that to be true of us, we may have to move on. So there could be a period of loss, and eventually it will get you to a period, a place where life feels much better and is running more smoothly, and you're attracting and sort of manifesting the things that you want with more ease.

Tiffany Yu: Yeah. I'm going to say two things that contradict themselves, but I did want to share both of these messages for your listeners is that, you know, I have heard that if in our multi, in our multiply marginalized identities, we do have to work harder, and it doesn't have to be so hard, right? And so I want to be able to sit in both of those spaces, because I remember, you know, during AAPI Heritage month, I was listening to a speaker and he was like, he was like, I got the advice and he's like, I want to share this with you, that in the AAPI community, like we just,

we have to work hard. We're working so much harder to reach this baseline. And it doesn't have to be so hard.

And that's what's been so fascinating for me is I think that there has been a lot of struggle, and at the same time, I feel very comfortable where I am now, but I will never forget those, I mean, I was on and off unemployment, you know, entrepreneurship life, it was like on and off unemployment for periods of time when the pandemic hit. I had no idea. I had no idea how to pivot. And this, I mean, this is also a benefit of being multi marginalized and disabled. It's like we figure it out, right? And I think I figured it out, like you mentioned in a way where I work less. I love the days where I just hang out in my bed and, and I'm just, you know, watching Netflix, but it's all about balance, right? And so you'll have periods of time where you work really hard, but then there will also be those periods of time where it doesn't have to be so hard.

Adia Gooden: Yeah. Yeah. I love that message, right, there's acknowledging the truth that there are realities to systems of oppression that we navigate that sort of require expect more of people with marginalized identities, and that we can move through those spaces without believing that there's something wrong with us. That means that we have to work harder. And with kind of thinking as sort of the benefit of sometimes being an outsider, seeing the chaos, but not being in the chaos, not being swept up in it and thinking about how can we bring ease into those spaces, or if we are sort of "working hard", how can I feel good, right? Versus feeling like it's wearing you down. And so, yes.

Tiffany Yu: Yes. And you just highlighted a very important thing, which is we are not the problem, the system of oppression is. So Stephanie Thomas, who's another disability advocate I admire, says, disability is not the problem, ableism is, right? So yes, we are working harder, but it's not because there's something unworthy about us, it's because we're working in a system of oppression that is continuing to work against us in some ways or another. So thank you for naming that. I didn't want, I didn't want folks to leave (0:55:00) being like, man, like I don't want people to leave with the wrong message.

Adia Gooden: I felt you were clear. So yes, and thank you for highlighting that. And I think it's a good sort of message for us to end on, right? Is that, you know, part of our power, part of what, where we get our power is having pride in who we are, whether that's being pride about, proud about your disability, whether that's being, you know, affirming and claiming your, your self-worth, your unconditional self-worth, right? That is a source of power because you're not waiting to be affirmed by this society that has these problems, right? You're saying, I'm not



waiting for you, I'm claiming this for myself, and then I'm proceeding from that. And so I think that's such a great sort of note for us to end on because I think it's a sort of a through line of what we've been talking about. I've really enjoyed this conversation. It's just been a joy to talk to you and hear your wisdom and sort of wrestle with these topics. I'm sure that people are going to want to join, you're more than 170,000 followers across platforms, so let people know where they can find you, where they can follow you, all of that good stuff.

Tiffany Yu: Sure. Well, I have a website, its [tiffanyyu.com](http://tiffanyyu.com), just my first and last name, but you can follow me across social media @imtiffanyyu that's letter I, the letter M, followed by my first and last name.

Adia Gooden: Awesome. Well, thank you so much Tiffany for sharing your time and your wisdom and your energy with us.

Tiffany Yu: Thank you.

Adia Gooden: Thanks for joining me this week on the Unconditionally Worthy Podcast. Make sure to visit my website, [dradiagooden.com](http://dradiagooden.com) and subscribe to the show on iTunes so you'll never miss an episode. You can also follow me on social media @dradiagooden. If you love the show, please leave a review on iTunes so we can continue to bring you amazing episodes. Lastly, if you found this episode helpful and know someone who might benefit from hearing it, please share it. Thanks for listening and see you next episode.

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