

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 60

Mindy Scheier - Runway of Dreams/Gamut Entertainment

Inclusive Fashion

Mia Voss 00:04

Hey, welcome to episode 60 of Shit We Don't Talk About powered by Helix Interactive. My guest is Mindy Scheier, founder of www.runwayofdreams.org and Gamut Entertainment. Mindy is helping to change the fashion world so that inclusivity is the norm, not the exception. As always, there is an accessibility transcript that can be found in the show notes at www.shitwedonttalkaboutpodcast.com. Alright, strap in. It gets good. Here we go.

Mia Voss 00:37

Boss. Hi, Mindy.

Mindy Scheier 00:40

Hi, Mia.

Mia Voss 00:42

I'm so excited to talk with you today.

Mindy Scheier 00:45

Same. I'm really looking forward to this conversation.

Mia Voss 00:48

I feel like there's a video on or there's an SNL skit where I can't remember the actor's name. And he's interviewing famous people and going remember that one time when you did this. That was awesome. This interview may be a little bit like... so I did an intro to the podcast, of course, so people know who you are. But give me your elevator talk on how fabulous you are.

Mindy Scheier 01:14

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That's so kind. Thank you. I actually currently have dishes in my sink and unmade bed. So I don't know. So again, my name is Mindy Scheier. I am a fashion designer by trade and also the mom of a now 17 year old son named Oliver who has a rare form of Muscular Dystrophy.

And we learned early on that he was going to struggle with everyday tasks, one of which is the very thing I love more than anything, and that's getting dressed every day. For Oliver, it was a daily reminder of what he could not do, which are buttons and zippers and putting pants over his leg braces, putting on shoes tying shoes. And it became something that we went to the easiest solution which was him wearing sweatpants every day until he was eight years old. And he came home from school and said, Mom, I want to wear jeans, I don't understand why everybody else gets to wear jeans, except for me. And truth be told, and you know, the shit that people don't talk about. It was a pivotal moment in my life that I felt not only as a colossal fail as a mother, but certainly somebody that I had been in the fashion industry for 20 years, I needed my eight year old to remind me of how important clothing is to who you are as a person. And basically what he was sharing with me was that he wasn't feeling as confident as he could or should, because he wasn't wearing what he wanted to. So this was back in 2014, I decided to take my background and have a small goal of changing the fashion industry. And my first iteration, first Embarkment was creating Runway of Dreams Foundation, which its mission really was to open up the eyes of the fashion industry to the one billion people on our planet who have a disability. And be able to shed awareness to be able to raise money to help support those that need wardrobe grants to purchase adaptive clothing to really fund up and coming designers who are in the adaptive space. But it also allowed me to really get involved with some mainstream brands. In 2016, we partnered with Tommy Hilfiger and develop the first ever mainstream adaptive clothing line, which is now Tommy Adaptive. And what that partnership did was really opened the floodgates to the industry and other mainstream brands. So much so that I actually started a second company by the name of government management, right? That is a talent management and consulting company with and for people with disabilities exclusively, that we work with brands to really help them develop products for people with

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disabilities by including people with disabilities at every step of the value chain. So it's been a wild journey, almost 10 years in to really dedicating my life to this change in the space, people with disabilities and I have my son to thank for that.

Mia Voss 04:38

That's so amazing that again, and I love thank you for looping in that you have 20 years' experience in that. But it took this at home realization what an Aha lightbulb moment and I did read that on your site that the number and I want to put a be on that, that it's one billion people with all different types of disabilities. So why in the world is it not mainstream? And kudos to Tommy Hilfiger for taking a chance after that, as well. Tell me about that process of going to them and saying, Hey, this is this is where I live.

Mindy Scheier 05:13

Right? It was, yeah, no, I think when you literally have nothing to lose, because at that point in time, there were zero mainstream brands that had any adaptive options. Again, I came from the industry and never in my career had I even heard the word adaptive product. Never did anybody talk about people with disabilities and designing for them. So it was really almost a year's worth preparation for this moment, in that I did extensive research in understanding the population at large because I couldn't go in there, just with my own personal story with Oliver, when there were so many iterations of different disabilities out there that I really needed to be an authority on understanding that and combining it with my background in design and I was able to really develop modifications that could be implemented into mainstream clothing. So that by the time I was able to get in front of the Tommy Hilfiger team, I was armed with data, I was armed with numbers that you could not ignore, and solutions on how to do it. And I really think that was kind of the perfect storm, as well as the CEO at the time, Gary Sheinbaum is an extraordinary human being. And he really was the first one to acknowledge that this was a tremendous business opportunity, that this was groundbreaking, and really, really felt lucky to be the first ones to embark on this space.

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Mia Voss 07:05

I love that. And I can just see that light bulb moment that he had as well, like, first of all, you can make a business out of this and make that something. And it's something that people don't put together a lot of things too, it just seems either has to be altruistic, right, and not make money or completely capital minded. So I love that that was put together and that he saw that opportunity. Because there's got to be a lot of, there has to be a lot of people that have been like, oh, shit, we haven't been doing this. So I'm going to post some links to it. So go to runwayofdreams.org. Right? Yeah, so in the show notes, we'll have all that. And of course, we will have an adaptive way for you to listen to this as well, that is something on my podcast had been working on is having an audio transcript, as well as something that's easy to read for the actual blog. And I see a lot of people not doing that. So there's so many different ways to make what your content is adaptive but that's what's great to see. Right? Have you caught that too.

Mindy Scheier 08:05

Like absolutely. And one another nugget that we're trying to really share across all platforms is not only transcribing, but also doing an accessibility check in which would really extend to the part of the population that are sight impaired or blind, that I would say I am a white woman with curly red hair. I'm 50 years old, I'm wearing a denim jean jacket with puff sleeves. And I'm so excited to be here so that we get a visual also to the context to be able to make that commonplace because we don't know who's watching or listening or on the other end, and we want to make sure that really we're doing everything to be inclusive.

Mia Voss 08:58

And it just takes a little bit of extra time but the normalizing of that just like you've done in fashion as well to make it normal not just a cutesy little flash in the pan type of thing. And Stewart and I, if you go to go Episode 58 Stewart Tucker Lundy that I spoke with last week,

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we really talked a lot about that of like inspiration porn, yeah and right of how that just becomes like, Oh, I'm gonna feel good for two seconds as opposed to this is someone's life.

Mindy Scheier 09:25

Absolutely. And I let the change happen in our lifetime. This isn't, you know, something that I hope will happen in decades to come and this is something really really, it was a key selling point, I think to the fashion industry is that they notoriously are, you know kind of put in that bucket that but how important is the fashion industry, it doesn't cure cancer or we're not putting people on the moon but actually, we hold a critical key to changing somebody's life in the level of confidence, in self-esteem, and we can do that now, we could do that during our lifetime. And the real interesting, you know, piece that isn't spoken about enough is that the population of people with disabilities is the minority and the largest one on our planet, number one. Number two, it is the only minority that every single one of us will probably be a part of, at some point in our life. Whether that's just getting old. And there is no other minority that you can be a part of, during your lifetime. And it also cuts across all the other minorities. So when you think about it from that perspective, how in the world are we not developing product that every single one of us will need to utilize at some point in our life.

Mia Voss 10:57

I love that, by the way, I had to stop and give that a second. That was a good, it's so true, we are all going to experience that. And we actually have mentioned that to Stewart said, you're going to need, to have somebody help you eventually, as well, unless you just exit out before that all happens.

That's the only way you're gonna get out of this. And this is something that you have on your website. I'm looking at my notes. I love that clothing is a basic human need. I mean, that right there that is a mic drop thing to say that that should sink in with everyone. And

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when he talked about jeans, specifically for Oliver, what a pain in the ass jeans are. Right? I mean, just for everyone across the board. I remember trying on and I happen to be, I must have been in the wrong I think I was in the junior section. And I remember being, I got a lot of junk in the trunk following me. So I was like, you know, you kept the small waist. You know this whole...

Mindy Scheier 11:54

Very in right now. So you're lucky.

Mia Voss 11:57

For once I made the timing, right. But I remember being in the dressing room, and I had tried to pull the pants up. And they hit you know, like, where they just stopped right at the thighs. And I remember saying well, and I couldn't help it. I said, and whose fucking world are these a size eight. And this like cacophony of laughter throughout the dressing room of this, so many women being in there and feeling big and I came out and they said who said that? That was me. And it's so true. So that's just from a like day to day perspective, let alone that. So I'm so glad to hear that starting with jeans with pants. And one of the girls that was in one of your videos, too, had talked about going home and not being able to get out of her dress. And sleeping in her dress. I think there was a Sex in the City where that had also happened to Samantha where she Yeah, was stuck in that. So I think having these conversations of normalizing the need is so important.

Mindy Scheier 13:00

Absolutely, absolutely. And actually, that talent, her name is Christina, and she had a boating accident and lost one of her limbs. So she's a perfect example that her disability happened during her lifetime. She wasn't born with it. So she was very used to dressing herself wearing what she wanted up until the accident happened. And then suddenly, everything changed. And she had to figure out how to independently dress herself. And really, that was a really shocking story that for the first time because her husband wasn't

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home, she wasn't able to undress. She had nobody to help her get the zipper down on the back of her dress. Where even if it's a zipper in the back, it's challenging, but having two hands you can do it.

There was not a chance that she could do that with one limb. And it really is I hope that holy cow moment for anybody listening of thinking about your daily life if you cannot, literally cannot undress or dress. And for those that have to be, need support in being dressed, which is a big part of the population that they don't have the capacity to independently dress. In my research process I met with quite a few people that fell into that category. And in one case, it took almost two and a half hours to dress this amazing gentleman and it was so jaw dropping that roughly five hours of his day were spent dressing and undressing. And that was because the product was not made for anybody else to be able to wear except for able bodied person. And just making modifications to the product, allowed his caregiver to be able to dress him more quickly, which gave him the greatest gift of all, and that's time back in his life.

Mia Voss 15:17

Absolutely, I was thinking of three different things. One is autonomy, sovereignty, and then the phrase self-esteem are the most important. And you just said that with the timepiece, too, we don't think about that at all, we just can just hurriedly get ready. But the autonomous piece and for the model that you were just talking about as well, that's an interesting point that this happened, I believe, is 2017. So she's had about five years of this, but as a grown adult, for her to have to modify. So I think that's a piece to bring up as, I think people can just say, Oh, they've always been this way. That's always been their lifestyle, but you said, as an adult that she was there she had that. So adapting to that, and letting people know, there is something that we can help you with.

Mindy Scheier 16:07

Yes, absolutely. And when you know, think about it from that capacity. And this is something that I, you know, talk openly with my son about, you know, is one way more

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difficult than the other via being born with your disability or having it happened during your lifetime. And the reality is there is not one better than the other. The struggles are different, I will never know what it's like to run, he will never know what it's like to, you know, be really involved in something that is a typical team sport or anything, and I know there's adaptive sports out there, but even the adaptive sports are not possible for him.

Mia Voss 16:55

And as a reminder, Oliver has MS. Correct? MD, muscular dystrophy? Thank you.

Mindy Scheier 16:59

Yes, Muscular Dystrophy, whereas somebody who has had that capacity their whole life and suddenly in a minute is taken away. That's a, you know, they both have their extreme challenges. But that's a piece that it's important for everybody to know that again, this can happen to any one of us at any stage of our life. And the truth be told disability doesn't care your economic background, they don't care what skin color is, it doesn't care where you live, your poverty level, none of it, it can happen to any of us at any time of our life.

Mia Voss 17:38

That is shit we don't talk about

Mindy Scheier 17:41

I agree, we don't.

Mia Voss 17:43

And that's really why I was so excited to have you come on to is have you delve into these little pockets of things that again, the general public either doesn't think about, and the reminder one, at some point, it's going to happen as to no one is immune. Yes, no one is immune from those things to happen to. How is so Oliver's almost, you know, the poster

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child one way can you talk about his experience of these last well, since 2014, what that's been like for him to have this mom champion him so much.

Mindy Scheier 18:14

I mean, you know, if you have a minute or post it for your viewers, we were lucky enough to just be on the view. And they did. Yeah, they did an extensive segment on us and it was really beautiful. But Oliver was on the stage with me and he just said it so beautifully. And so eloquently about what the experience has been, but I would say first and foremost, it allowed him and continues to allow him to feel less alone. I mean thankfully he goes to a typical school. But that leads to him having no friends with disabilities, I mean, every friend that he has is able bodied. So it is really difficult to understand what or have you know, his friends are amazing and really true friends, but to have somebody that truly understands what your daily struggles are. I can even say that I can do that. I can empathize and as a mother, it is gut wrenching to see what he goes through on a daily basis. But what Runaway of Dreams and Gamut have really provided him is a community and a support and being surrounded by people that have lived experiences, very similar to his, some worse, some better, etc. But it has really given him a grounding and then to also see how the world is responding to it. To see the Tommy Hilfiger' sand Target and Kohl's and Stripe, right, and Zappos who have all kind of, you know, joined the mission to see our mainstream world start understanding that people disabilities are people first and they're consumers. And I never felt more sure that Oliver's gonna grow up in a world that views him very differently than they may have 10 years ago.

Mia Voss 20:28

Oh, what a change what a difference and the word representation cannot be emphasized enough. And then also understanding the lived experience and having somebody had that. I can't imagine how that also feels like, oh, that too, because it's so isolating.

Mindy Scheier 20:44

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Yes. It's extremely. And you know, certainly putting it out there to all the listeners. It extends so far past Oliver, it affected every member of my family. You know, it's very hard to be the sibling, these are things shit people don't talk about. This is the crux right here beside all you know, and anybody that's listening and is in this space, I'm sure it's like, yes, because it is really difficult to be the sibling of a brother or sister that has a disability innately much of my attention, good and bad had to go Oliver and still does go to Oliver. So I have two other children, I have a daughter who's about to be 20 and a 12 year old son. And this is a part of their life, this is what they've had to accept that, you know, sometimes they have to take the backseat. And as the mother of that I'm constantly trying to make sure that the other two know that they're equally as important. And that you know that it sucks and Oliver would do anything to trade places with them, and that he would love to not have this attention. But it's a rocky road and it's difficult. And it's difficult on marriages, more shit people don't talk about. Having a child with a disability, I believe is either number one or number two reasons for divorce. I think it's even above, the loss of a child because it's a daily.

Mia Voss 22:26

It's ongoing, and it's messy.

Mindy Scheier 22:29

And messy. Yeah, we both react very differently to certain situations, we can sometimes really butt heads on what we think is the right thing for Oliver. And it's difficult. It's tough. It is way beyond the one person with a disability, it affects everyone.

Mia Voss 22:48

Oh, that is such a great shit we don't talk about because there's shame in it. There's guilt in it. I do remember years ago, a friend of mine, it's the first time I had heard of Crohn's disease that her sister had Crohn's disease. And so I had a very front row seat to this friend

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who had because she was, you know, kind of not the squeaky wheel. Right? And so you tend to be Oh, she's good. Yeah. Good. All right. And so..,

Mindy Scheier 23:16

They're not, they tend to not be, but they don't have a choice. They're not. I've worked really hard with my daughter, the oldest because this really has been her entire life. And really going through all the iterations of Oliver from diagnosis to where he is today. And there definitely is a tremendous amount of guilt and regret. And, why didn't I think of that, or, you know, all of these things.

Mia Voss 23:51

Thank you for sharing that though and being honest about that, because again, even being able to say that and admit it, and then that takes that perfectionism out for all of us. Perfectionism is one of, it's a weapon of colonialism and patriarchy, I'll say that if I'm going to dive into my typical rant that I get into. And so for us to be able to say like, that's not perfect, we're doing our best and it's okay for you to talk about it as well. For you and resentment is also a piece to it. So sneaky. Let me talk about what I bring into a little bit of a current event type of thing, because now we're obviously still in COVID. And we're running up on unfortunately, I feel like some more waves of it. I mean, that had to be another piece to for folks with disabilities who this last two and a half years. I mean, if we felt isolated before, and I've been thinking about this a lot that I'm seeing people getting out of the ability to give, to be adaptive in meetings, get togethers, even you know, city council meetings, things like that. And I know a lot of People had said, This is shit we've been asking for for years now all of a sudden, it's super easy for you to say, you know.

Mindy Scheier 25:07

Exactly, exactly.

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Mia Voss 25:08

In this world too, it's a huge piece.

Mindy Scheier 25:11

You know, it's such an interesting topic because, and I'm going to speak through the lens of the disability population, that there have been so many silver linings to the pandemic, and COVID equally matched with overwhelming challenges. I mean, from the challenges perspective, obviously, a big part of the population is in the compromised pool. So, you know, talk about isolation, as you said, of really being completely fearful literally for their life. In that getting, it could have been a death sentence, I certainly was like a lunatic in terms of protecting Oliver, which means protecting all my other family members. And...[cross talk]

Mia Voss 26:05

That was a whole new full time job.

Mindy Scheier 26:08

1,000%. As well as and this is a piece that, you know, we experience really firsthand is the quarantine. And I live right outside of New York City. So our kids were out of school for almost a year and a half. And for kids with physical and really cognitive disabilities also, physical first, not having that, getting up getting dressed, walking the halls of school, other activities that is critical to their necessity of keeping up with the stamina that they have. So in that year and a half, Oliver lost a tremendous amount of capacity, because he went from his bed, to his desk, from his desk to his bed. And when you have neuromuscular disease, your muscles can atrophied very fast. And there was no PT, I couldn't take him anywhere. We tried desperately do what we could in the house, but it wasn't enough, you couldn't possibly replace being out, and, you know, in the world and just walking places. And that's something, he'll never get back again. That's it, he's lost it, it's gone. And I've heard for many people in the population that it was very similar in the cognitive arena, that being

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social or the therapies that were mis speech, OT all of these things were so detrimental in in the process of what is required for this population to maintain skills or muscle strength or whatnot. So that part was really tough. On the silver lining side to your point, you know, certainly from you know, working and different ways that we can communicate with people without having to leave our home is extraordinary for people with disabilities and what we can do to as you said, make this the most accessible with you know, accessibility check ins, with closed caption with, you know, one of the big pieces and this is another staggering statistic is that 80% of people with disabilities are unemployed. So there's a huge, there's so many reasons what leads to that percentage, but one is most certainly transportation, getting to the job getting to the interview, not being able...

Mia Voss 29:08

Getting dressed for the interview.

Mindy Scheier 29:10

Exactly all of these contributing factors where if you remove some of these obstacles which we're doing right now you know, in that I didn't have to travel to you. I may or not may not be still wearing my pajamas bottoms. But these things, you know, are really amazing for this population to be engaged and be able to be present in our in our workforce and our world.

Mia Voss 29:43

Right. Right. An first of all so educational and edifying for me as well. Thank you for that reminder, because that wasn't my world. So getting out of my own mindset of my own experience is so normal for us to hear that too, that specifically what just your family went through so then multiply that as well too. But I do love and I think this is the important thing. And we're going to wrap it up because you have other cool things to do today. So I so appreciate your time. But I think this is what's important for us too is to keep normalizing the strides that we made during COVID To make things more accessible. And I want to

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shout out a few more things that I love. I love that you're working with huge brands as well. So I saw your just recent show was like Target, JC Penney, you had all these cool companies that you're working with. And by the way, I love Jamie Chung that was so cool to see her.

Mindy Scheier 30:32

Yeah she was amazing.

Mia Voss 30:35

She is. Kohl's, obviously, Tommy Hilfiger, but you're incorporating smaller brands. And I love that. So thank you for normalizing that for the smaller brands to get into this game as well.

Mindy Scheier 30:45

Absolutely. So important.

Mia Voss 30:47

All right, any closing thoughts? And I have one more question, then we're gonna get out of here. Anything else you want to tell us.

Mindy Scheier 30:51

I'm so grateful and really just underscoring what you said, you know, these conversations are so critically important to making change happen. I would love you know, after listening to this podcast, really just take a thought tomorrow morning, when you go to get dressed and think about how if you could not wear what you were intending to wear because of what your day was dictating how would that affect you? Think about all the incredible things that that clothing dictates, a date, a job interview, just making yourself feel good, etcetera, etcetera. That is game changing.

Mia Voss 31:33

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Oh that is an excellent Mic drop. So everyone go to www.runwayofdreams.org. And of course, we'll have everything in the show notes. One quick question. Do you have a favorite swear word or swear phrase that you just love to bust out when you're really frustrated?

Mindy Scheier 31:45

Thank you for that. Nobody's really asked me that question before and I really appreciate it. On days like I'm going to imagine today is going to be if I get frustrated, I love to say for fuck sake. Fuck in any adjective, verb, noun, pronoun, you name it, I will use it.

Mia Voss 32:12

Okay, so we might need to stay in touch. Yeah, because that is my love language. And a well-placed FFS. Yeah, it's just yeah, it's actually cathartic and very healthy for you.

Mindy Scheier 32:26

I agree.

Mia Voss 32:27

Alright, everybody, thank you for tuning in. Thank you for joining us today, Mindy. I so appreciate you. Make sure to follow on Mindy and her amazing work at runwayofdreams.org and www.gamutentertainment.com. And we'll also have all the links in the show notes at www.shitwedonttalkaboutpodcast.com. If you liked this episode, please subscribe and leave a review. Especially if it's a good one. If you really liked the podcast and you want to show it, head on over to www.shitwedonttalkaboutpodcast.com. Click on the patrons button and become a full time supporter of the podcast. And if you want your very own podcast, but you don't know where to start, go to www.helix-interactive.com Get yourself some and tell them that Mia sent you. Thanks for tuning in. I'll see you next time. Bye bye