



Why Kat Stickler Doesn't Have Vulnerability Hangovers

The TikTok star's funny impressions of her Venezuelan mom and her candid insights into motherhood and divorce have earned her more than nine million followers and counting. In this episode, Kat shares what happens behind the iPhone lens: how she learned to monetize her content, develop boundaries around followers' feedback, and embrace the power of making others feel less alone.

Alicia Menendez: If you are among Kat Stickler's millions of TikTok followers, then you have seen her do everything from an impersonation of her Hispanic mom to sharing the details of her divorce and her adventurous parenting her daughter MK. It is a lot of sharing, so much so that it might give someone else a vulnerability hangover. But Kat says that for her it's the opposite. She feels weirder when she's holding back. We talk about what it actually takes to be a social media star, the lessons Kat has learned about monetizing content and the one thing she told her publicist she did not want to talk about during this conversation, but she ended up sharing anyway.

Kat, thank you so much for being here.

Kat Stickler: Thanks for having me. I'm sorry it took me so long to find my AirPods.

Menendez: I was getting a personal TikTok. I love the story behind why you couldn't find your AirPods.

Stickler: Yeah, MK is usually... I know she knows where she put them. She just didn't want me to take them. She's like, "Yeah, I don't remember."

Menendez: Yeah, anytime anything is missing in my house, it's my three-year-old. I'm like-

Stickler: You feel like you're losing your mind. You're like, "They were just next to me. Just here."

Menendez: Kat, it's interesting me when I read almost any profile of you, it is as though your life began when you exploded on social media, but there's like a lot of life that precedes that moment. I want to go back to that. Your dad's Brazilian, your mom's Venezuelan. What was your home life growing up?

Stickler: My dad and my mom separated when I was a baby, and then my mom actually remarried her divorce lawyer.

Menendez: Fantastic premise for a romcom.

Stickler: I know. I was like, "Well, I was a born to be on the screen." Then we all moved to Tampa. My biological father moved back to Brazil. We still have a relationship, but so my stepdad who raised me, my dad is Cuban. My parents weren't that strict. I think I just put a lot of pressure on myself to be this perfect. I didn't want an A, I wanted an A plus. I wanted excellent, not good or great. I wanted excellent. It was very weird. I just felt like I had to make them proud all the time. I think it was so hard for me when I had to tell them I was pregnant, because I felt like I totally let them down and I realized at that point that it was their hopes and dreams for me that I was projecting onto myself. It definitely... I like how you eloquently put it. There was a lot of life preceding it, but I think I figured out who I was after giving birth.

Menendez: What was it that you imagined you were going to be when you grew up?

Stickler: I loved my job before. I was a research coordinator at the hospital. I was working with psychiatric patients. We were on a new study for post combat trauma veterans who were experiencing PTSD and weren't able to heal through medication or therapy. And my job before that was working on an exoskeleton study. I would see people walk. I just really didn't have an ideal job. I just knew I wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself. When someone was able to sleep and it sounds so little, but without a nightmare and they're able to reconnect with their kids again and they come and bake me stuff, when I first met them, they wouldn't even talk to me. It's so cool to feel like you're a part of something bigger and that bigger part in my opinion was bettering a human being.

Menendez: It's so interesting because it is a different path than a lot of folks have to building a social following, which is essentially a desire to entertain, a desire for attention. For you, it actually has more to do with the community piece than it does with the, "Look at me," piece of things, which also makes sense, given your entree into this world. Can you take me back to the genesis of Kat on TikTok?

Stickler: It was a research study. This is when COVID was in full force. I had just given birth and I couldn't go back yet. I was just sitting at home with this baby of mine, dealing with postpartum depression, not really understanding what was going on and trying to process it. It was so weird. I mean, I don't know if you've experienced that, but it was like I would cry uncontrollably and could not stop. And I'd never heard the sounds I made crying. It was just like I felt like I fell asleep and then I woke up and I was in somebody else's life and it wasn't my life. I didn't identify with being a mother. I didn't identify with being a wife. I didn't identify with being a human being at that point. It was so weird, out of body.

Menendez: Well, and let's be honest, that can be a very common postpartum experience, but it also especially makes sense for you given the fast track that you were on. A whirlwind romance, getting pregnant very early in the relationship, being what is fairly young. It additionally makes sense when you consider the contours of what you're going through.

Stickler: That definitely exacerbated everything. But I started going on TikTok. I started seeing a doctor and going on TikTok at the same time. That was good. You guys didn't see me off the rails.

Menendez: I was going to say, TikTok not a replacement for therapy.

Stickler: And then I just started making videos because that's the thing. When I was working at the VA, they'd always give me the, and I'd pride myself on this. I would get the pretty difficult patients and I loved it. I loved getting to know people. I loved it when they were super rude in the beginning and then... I was just never really phased by that and I loved that I could make them laugh and make them feel better in some type of way. I did one video. People started commenting. They liked it. It honestly is something I did while MK was napping because I was so bored out of my mind. I had nothing to do. I'd never not had anything to do, so I just kept doing it.

Menendez: Did you feel as though you were directing yourself or was there an element of allowing the feedback you were getting to direct the direction you were going in?

Stickler: Definitely an element of allowing the feedback I was getting. It's like a whole new world. I was a very private person before, just naturally kept private. It was difficult, because you feel like you owe people something and they also feel like they own you because they made you, so they have this sense of entitlement towards your personal life and you feel like you owe it to them in some weird way. When I had to announce my divorce, I just

remember feeling so mortified. I just didn't even want to tell my family. It was just... So, yeah, it's definitely dictated a lot.

Menendez: I have a mentee. I actually feel like it is perfect that I was doing a mentoring session with her this week and now I'm talking with you, which is... She is telegenic. She's got a ton of energy and personality. She has a lot of things she wants to say and put out into the world. She has the person who has all of the makings of a fantastic social media star. She has worked a side job so that she can get all of the things she thinks she needs. A fancy camera, a mic, this, that, and she's just almost having trouble getting started. And it is one of those cases of perfect being the enemy of the good. If you were counseling her, how do you just say, "Screw it, I'm just going"?

Stickler: I'd say I got to where I got with my iPhone. I didn't use any fancy equipment. It's not about that people. And that's not really what TikTok is right now, or even social media. It's not about this fancy equipment. It's personable when you hold it on your phone, it's personable when it has that quality from the camera, and people really don't care about that. It's whatever. I would get to know her, see what she wants to bring to the table, what she would feel comfortable with, and then she would do that and then she'd get feedback from other people being like, "This is what we want from you. This is what will help us and help grow you, essentially." It's like a mutually beneficial relationship.

Menendez: Talk to me about your impersonations of your mom or your impersonations of your mom, ones that predated your time on TikTok. I do an amazing impersonation of my non-Latino, New Jersey mom that she's like all the time. She's like, "You got to make a lot of money off of me one day." And I'm like, "I'm still waiting."

Stickler: No, I think... I mean, I done it. I grew up with her. I did it since I was growing up. It's so funny. It definitely did because English wasn't her first language, so it did bring a divide in our relationship at one point. But again, humor has always really helped me with that. When I change it into something funny, then all of a sudden it didn't hurt my feelings as much.

Menendez: Tell me about the divide in your relationship.

Stickler: If she would misunderstand something I said it would always be, "Well, English wasn't my first language. English wasn't my first language." Even if it had nothing to do with that, it doesn't matter that English wasn't your first language. I just had a breakup and I want you to talk to me. She was always very cold. She wasn't mean. She was just cold. It definitely caused a divide. And I think I've never really said this, I always felt, which I know now is wrong, I always felt like I was smarter than her. "I am smarter than you. You helped me on my homework and I got all these answers wrong. You gave me the wrong answers. I'm smart." And that just wasn't a good relationship to have. But I feel like... I mean, was early teens. I feel like every teenager with their mom always has a little rebellion phase.

Menendez: But I think it's also different when you're first gen, and I think it's different when your parent doesn't have a mastery of the language that you're being asked to do your homework in. And I imagine there's a lot of shame about having harbored this feeling that you were smarter than your mom. Who imagine, the bravery it takes to operate in a language that is not your primary language, the bravery it takes to raise a kid.

Stickler: Honestly, my mom's life is like... She's the smartest person I know. She got sent to boarding school from Venezuela in New York, but first three months she could not speak English and she learned it. Then she went to high school in Italy and then to college, went to France and went back to Miami. I mean, she's just been all over the world and is so

cultured. And I was in my little bubble and I felt upset that I didn't feel included in this new world that they put me in, because we moved from Miami to Tampa and our Christmases or our Thanksgivings, it would all be in Spanish. Everyone would be talking in Spanish. But when I would go to my friend's houses, no one would speak in Spanish. I think I just had also this identity of I just didn't know who I was. I was one person at school and with friends and one person with my family. I think that got better as I developed in becoming the woman I am right now.

Menendez: Do you remember when you realized when that flipped, when you went from your thinking, you were smarter than your mom to embracing the fact that she is, as you said, the smartest person you know?

Stickler: Well, it was before I gave birth, but honestly when I did become a mom, I understood her on a different level. Everyone always says that you understand your mom differently. When I was going through the postpartum depression, she was this beacon of not just hope but certainty that it would be okay, and no one could provide me that. And she was just so cool under pressure and just how she handled everything. Even when I was getting my divorce, she was just... The way she handled things, I usually would throw people for a loop, I think was when I was like, "Wow, I have so much to learn from her."

Menendez: To go back to my mentee, one of the first videos that she did was about her Dominican mom and somehow her Dominican mom caught wind of the video and did not like it so much, which is a thing that you have navigated yourself. How do you contextualize a thing that is meant to come from a place of love but may not be understood that way? And how do you explain this brave new world where you are monetizing that humor?

Stickler: I think that's how we just grew up, making light. I felt like my gift and my family was making light of situations and bringing laughter. That's what I identified my role as, being funny, being entertaining. And with her, even when I emulate her, it is a confident woman, very self-centered, very vain, but very level-headed, especially when it comes to men, friendships, work, kids, always very level-headed. I think the balance also helps that I keep her integrity and show her as she is. And I think it's cool for her to see me being successful through that.

Menendez: So interesting to watch because you have millions of followers, other people comment on your relationship with your mom and reflect it back to you in a way that doesn't seem like the way that you process and understand it. People who feel that she is unduly harsh or feel that it is an unhealthy relationship, and I wonder what you do with that.

Stickler: I mean, people will feel that way if I'm in the most loving relationship with the guy, if I'm in the best relationship with my mom. I just wasn't really bothered by that, because also you're Latin, and it's just a totally different culture. When I would be at my friend's houses and they'd talk to their mom, they'd be like, "Did You just tell her to shut up? You're going to get us both killed."

Yeah, it was just a very different dynamic, and I understand that. Maybe I wouldn't be as receptive if I saw another culture doing interacting mother-daughter, maybe I would think the same way. I just view it as harmless. It's harmless. It's what people think and they're always going to think something.

Menendez: You are of course really vulnerable. You've share quite a bit. You've shared a lot about your pregnancy. You shared a lot about your divorce, you shared about dating post divorce. Do you ever get a vulnerability hangover?

Stickler: Not really. I think it is good for me to talk about it. It's funny because my publicist, she was like, "Is there anything we don't want to talk about?" And I was like, "Well, it's about what I'm about to tell you now, but it's okay for me to talk about it now because it helps me process. And I found out my ex-husband got his girlfriend pregnant," so they're going to be having a baby. And it was so difficult for me to hear that because I found out on social media. All my followers started DMing me and I was like, "What is going on?" And I didn't process it, but I think with my platform I'm forced to because it's not just about me, it's about other women who have gone through the same thing because it is hard. It's such an odd thing to understand because I guess I thought it was embarrassing. We got a divorce and now he's the one that's starting a family again, and I'm here at home with my daughter. I responded when you said vulnerability hangover, because I don't think I could, honestly, because it does so much good for me and I feel like it does good for other women. I've never been able to connect with people when I haven't been vulnerable. And I always say this, I think vulnerability is the root of all connection. And I think as human beings, we crave that and it's healing. When I started shifting that perspective and actually talking about it out loud, it helped a lot. I actually think I get a non vulnerability hangover. When I'm not vulnerable, then I start losing my mind a little bit and faking my emotions.

Menendez: We originally imagined Latina to Latina as how I built this for Latinas, how women build their businesses, how they build their brands. I do want to make sure that I ask you about the path to monetization. Because you've been very clear, this is a job, this is a profession. You invest in it. You do it for the betterment of your daughter and the path you want to be on, you want her to be on. Can you talk us through the lessons you've learned about monetizing this content?

Stickler: That's good.

Menendez: That deep sigh tells me everything I need to know.

Stickler: That's a good one. I got lessons, got lessons about divorce. I got lessons about the business. Let's talk about it. I think never feel like you've made it, kind of thing. I always wake up and I'm like, "I still have zero followers. I still have zero followers." Because you have to be grateful. You have to work hard and you have to be kind to people. And that's what I've realized. And it's also working with companies. If you're wanting to monetize, it's being okay to say no. Because I remember it was so scary to turn down a deal because this was the only form of income I was getting. And I'm saying no, but it's like I can't be associated with brand A anymore because I want brand B to reach out to me, and it wouldn't be on brand if I worked with brand A. It's the immediate gratification, just holding off on that and seeing the bigger picture. But more importantly, having enough trust and intuition in yourself and what you're capable of to stick to it. Because it's so easy to think, "I'll say no." And then when it's time you're like, "Eh, I'll just do it one time." Again, it's also marking your worth, understanding how much you're worth. I say, whatever you think you're worth, make a devil.

Menendez: Can you mark the spot for me where you started being approached with the types of deals that were actually worth your while?

Stickler: I actually can't because everyone that reached out, I had emailed already. I had emailed so many people. I'm so used to getting told no, it was so normal for me. I remember working with a brand and they were so rude about it. They were like, "You're just not our look." Like you could just say, no, you don't have to tell me I'm not your look. And then they came for me after I had gotten, I think it was a million on TikTok, and then I was growing. I was a little

over 100,000 on Instagram. I think that's when it happened when they were just coming back to me, but I never acted like it did.

Menendez: I think part of the lesson I'm getting from you is that the business piece of this was very proactive on your part, that in as much as some of it boomeranged around, the seeds were planted by you. How were you choosing who you were reaching out to? And can you give us a sense of what those pitch emails from you to them look like?

Stickler: Oh, copy and paste. I would just add a little story or an idea. I had to boost it. Like, okay, let's say I'm promoting this fray. Get the email, get the Instagram, go on their website, find out everything I could, send it to each individual contact I could find. I would explain who I was, why I loved their brand and my ideas to promote that brand on my platform. For instance, if I was doing this Beauty Elixir spray, I would talk about a video idea I would have, "I'm tired for the day I put on the spray. Even MK loves it." Just give them value before they'd given me anything. Like to just give value, just because. When I started doing that, that's when I started getting way better feedback.

Menendez: Anything else you wish you'd known at the start of this journey?

Stickler: So much. But if I had to pick one thing, I guess to always own my decisions and to always respect myself enough to stick with my decisions and believe in them because not everyone's going to do that. And if you're not confident in yourself and your own decisions, then why would anyone else have any reason to be? Just reminding myself to consistently feel that way. Because it's so easy to think anything when you're not in the right state of mind and you read a mean comment. Or when you feel like you're not being as creative and you're not posting as many good ideas. It's so easy to feel less than, but have this image of yourself and own it and don't lose touch with it. Don't let it be based by views or virality or by a comment or anything. Let it be steady. The only thing steady.

Menendez: Kat, what a treat to get to spend more than 90 seconds with you. Thank you so much for your time.

Stickler: Thank you.

Menendez: Thanks for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Kojin Tashiro is our lead producer. Tren Lightburn mixed this episode. We love hearing from you. Email us at orla@latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram or tweet us at Latina to Latina. Check out our merchandise [Latinatolatina.com/shop](https://www.latinatolatina.com/shop). And remember to subscribe or follow us on radio public Apple Podcast. Google podcast, good pods wherever you're listening right now. Every time you share the podcast, every time you leave a review, you help us grow as a community.

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