

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #8

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi, Jessica

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**Shohreh Davoodi:** Hello there. You're listening to episode number eight of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. In this episode, I got to catch up with my friend, Jessica [last named redacted]. Jessica is an IP and technology lawyer focusing on media and entertainment.

In her spare time, she engages in fandom communities for some of her favorite topics including Star Wars, Disney, and anime. We discussed the ups and downs of participating in fandoms from the self-care and community they can provide to the gatekeeping and discrimination that can happen within them.

To access the show notes for this episode, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/8](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/8). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/8](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/8).

Onward, and may the force be with you.

[music plays]

**Shohreh:** Hey y'all. Welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. I'm a certified intuitive eating counselor and a certified personal trainer. I help people improve their relationships with exercise, food and their bodies so they can ditch diet culture for good and do what feels right for them.

Through this podcast, I want to give you the tools to redefine what health and wellness mean to you by exposing myths and misconceptions, delving into all the areas of health that often get ignored, and reminding you that health and wellness are not moral obligations. Are you ready? Let's fuck some shit up.

All right y'all. I'm super excited because I have my dear friend Jessica on the show today. I met Jessica way back when I was an attorney in my past life. We worked at the same firm and became really good friends and just kind of held each other up during a very tough time in our lawyer lives.

Jessica, it is so awesome to have you on the show today. Thank you so much for being here.

**Jessica:** Of course. Thank you for having me.

**Shohreh:** Yeah. So maybe you can first just tell us a little bit more about your background, like who you are and what you're about.

**Jessica:** Sure. So like you said, my name is Jessica. And I still am a practicing attorney. Right now, I practice intellectual property and technology transactions. I mostly focus on the entertainment space. And I used to be in Austin, Texas. And now I've moved back to the Bay area where I'm currently practicing.

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**Shohreh:** So I specifically brought you on today because you are very active in the fandom world. And I think that social health is a really important aspect of health that often goes ignored. And I think that fandoms are a fascinating microcosm of kind of that social health and hobby space.

So for those of you who don't know, maybe you could first just sort of broadly define what a fandom is.

**Jessica:** Oh boy. I think fandom means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. For me, at a very, very base level, fandom to me is just a group of people with shared passions or shared interests. At a very basic level.

I think the common perception of fandom typically ties to like nerd-culture, science fiction, video games, like that sort of thing. But I think as it's become more mainstream, I think that the definition has expanded to other areas of entertainment and the arts like sports, music, that sort of thing.

For me personally, I tend to be pretty active in some of those, like, nerd-related fandoms. So I'm a huge fan of Star Wars, huge fan of anime, that sort of stuff. And so as far as what I consider to be my active fandoms, Star Wars is probably the biggest. And, you know, we can talk a little bit more about how I personally engage because I think they are also different ways to engage in a fandom. But that's kind of my conception of what I think a fandom to be.

**Shohreh:** So do you need to be, like, a certain level of fan to consider yourself as being in a fandom? Like, how exclusive is this club?

**Jessica:** In my opinion, no. Absolutely not. You don't need to-- I think that defeats the very purpose of fandom, right? When I was thinking about this topic and ways to engage in fandom in a healthy way, I thought of some ways to not engage in fandom and ways that are toxic, and this sort of gatekeeping culture that you touch on is one of the main ways to not engage in fandom.

So I don't think that fandom should have any sort of benchmarks that you have to hit whether that's time engaged or how much money you spend on merch, how many facts you know, like did you read all the novels and see all the films and all the comic books, how passionate are you online, right? I don't think there should be any sort of benchmark or metric in order to consider yourself part of a fandom. For me, if you say you're a fan and you're part of the fandom, then you are.

**Shohreh:** Yeah. And people shouldn't question that even though I know that's definitely something that happens in various fandoms which wie/" get into a little bit later, some of the specifics about that for sure.

So I know that you're really big in the Star Wars fandom in particular, and you also mentioned anime. So maybe you can tell me a little bit

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about how you got into those fandoms and what your role in them is specifically.

**Jessica:**

Sure. I think I'll talk about it chronologically. And so I'll start with anime. So I was really into anime growing up in kind of elementary school and middle school. And at that point, for me, fandom was a little bit of a solitary experience. And I think that's true for a lot of people in our generation who kind of bridge the gap between, you know, pre-internet and post-internet, right?

So a lot of my engagement with fandom was in, like, web 1.0-

[laughter]

-where you have, like, GeoCities and Angelfire websites that you access via dial-up, right? And there was like one comic book shop that I was able to go to and save up money and buy, like, VHS copies of Sailor Moon in Japanese, right?

So that was why I initially got into fandom. When I look back on it, I think some of the reasons I got into fandom in the first place is both a form of self-care-- And self-care can range from-- You can use it as a form of escapism and comfort, right? You can also use it as a form of finding your identity and understanding yourself.

I think those are probably the two reasons why I perhaps subconsciously got into fandom way back in the day.

Fast forward through high school, college, grad school, I still had a casual interest in anime. And I was a pretty avid Star Wars fans even growing up but not to the level of kind of active engagement in fandom.

It wasn't really until I had graduated grad school and had started practicing law with you down in Austin-

**Shohreh:**

Woo.

**Jessica:**

[laughs] Yes- that I turned back to fandom. It was during a time where I was working, hours-wise, harder than I'd ever worked in my life. It was a pretty toxic political climate at the time. And that toxicity was at least very new. I don't think it has gone away necessarily, but we've kind of found ways to cope.

**Shohreh:**

Right.

**Jessica:**

[laughs] Another story for another day.

It was a pretty dark time for me. And so I inadvertently turned to the Star Wars fandom, again, as a form of, initially, escapism and comfort,

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right? I think that was around the time the first movie of the sequel trilogy had come out. And so I watched that.

And then I just started searching online, and I found these online communities who were engaging with the subject matter and with Star Wars in various ways. And it just kind of took off from there.

**Shohreh:** The subject matter being Reylo, of course.

**Jessica:** [laughs] That and several other topics. But yes, that is a primary topic of interest in the fandom.

**Shohreh:** So obviously, being an attorney is a bitch. That's the best way that I can say that, and it especially was for us at the time. So would you say that participating in the Star Wars fandom, particularly at that time, did that help kind of improve your quality of life?

**Jessica:** I think it absolutely did. And again, getting back to that idea of self-care, people might not necessarily think of fandom or, like, watching TV or watching movies as self-care, but I certainly do. Because, again, it provided me the chance for my brain to finally think about something that wasn't causing me pain and stress, right? And if we actually afford ourselves to do that, I think that can be incredibly beneficial.

It also allowed me to find-- And this was-- I can't say that this was intentional in any way, but in hindsight now, I see how powerful it's been. Fandom and the Star Wars fandom allowed me to find more social connection in my life through and with people that I wouldn't have previously gotten a chance to interact with. And that has absolutely brought a great joy and, you know, more balance into my life.

**Shohreh:** Because fandom at its best is really a community. Like, when it's functioning the way that it's supposed to, it's giving you these social connections and a community of people who like the same stuff as you which is something we all want, I think.

**Jessica:** Yeah. I think that's exactly right. And I think with fandom in particular, and especially these more niche fandoms-- I wouldn't consider Star Wars a niche fandom necessarily, but you touched on kind of a subset of the Star Wars fandom which is the Reylo fandom who are-- consists of people who are interested in Rey and Kylo Ren.

When you get into these kind of sub-fandoms or niche interests, it's sort of like when you find somebody who really loves some random song that you discovered and you didn't think anybody else knew it. And you're like, "Wow. You like this really weird, specific thing that I also really like."

And so, in a way, you actually feel more understood by that person because you're connecting on this, like, very specific, unique facet of

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yourself. And it's probably a facet that you don't normally share in kind of everyday life. So I think it can be very, very powerful and meaningful to engage in something like that.

**Shohreh:** And for you, engagement I know has come in a lot of different ways, but your art is one really big aspect of that, if you want to talk a little bit about kind of how you got started with your Star Wars fandom art.

**Jessica:** Sure. So it's sort of a similar story where I had-- Back in middle school and high school where I had all the time in the world, I created a lot of fan art, right, for the anime shows that I enjoyed. I kind of fell out of that during college and grad school as I got busier with other activities and, you know, getting through school and achieving these goals until I finally got my job and then what's next.

So again, as sort of a form of self-care and a form of a way to just check out from everything else in my life that was, you know, causing a lot of pain and anxiety. I took up drawing again because I felt inspired by the new Star Wars stories. And I decided to start making fan art again.

And this really took off because of the combination of being able to express myself through this art as well as the social connection in fandom because, you know, once you start creating works-- and we can also talk about the power of transformative works in general later on- but once you're able to kind of express yourself through these works, you end up, again, connecting with other people.

And that has a really powerful impact, right? And it becomes this, like, feedback loop, right, between you and other people in the fandom if you're, like, a content creator. And then you become further inspired, and you want to create more works, and you want to create works for other people.

And that's kind of how my art has blossomed. And now my art, in and of itself, is a hobby of mine. So now I actually take drawing classes in the evenings. I have expanded, you know, my art beyond just Star Wars fandom. I create works for other fandoms too, but I also love to create original art.

And so it really tapped into this part of me that had laid dormant for a while. And having the ability to tap into my creative and artistic side which is I think a critical aspect of who I am, has been invaluable over the past few years as I've just kind of worked harder and harder in my job.

**Shohreh:** I remember, when I was an attorney, one of the things I found so frustrating was the lack of creativity in my work. I mean, to a certain extent--

**Jessica:** You mean writing contracts--

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**Shohreh:** [laughs]

**Jessica:** -wasn't super creative and fulfilling, Shohreh?

**Shohreh:** I was about to say that I'm sure there are attorneys out there who would definitely argue with me that there are some creative aspects to contract writing and writing wills and all the kind of stuff that I used to do, but it's a little bit different than other forms of creativity that I'm used to.

And I just remember feeling very hollow in that way and just like, "Wow. I'm really lacking something that has always been very important to me."

And of course because it sucks up so much of your time to do a job like being a lawyer, it's very hard to prioritize and be able to make time for that creativity, which, ultimately, for me, meant I needed to leave the profession because I was unsuccessful at finding a way to balance any of that. You have done a better job of that than me.

So practically, for people who do have really demanding jobs and lives, like, what are some ways they can integrate fandoms and other hobbies into their lives? Because I know you're also in choir as well. It's not just the art work that you've managed to make time for.

**Jessica:** Right. Yeah. And I have to tell you, it is always a work in progress, right? And it's always something that I need to kind of hold myself accountable for and to because it's hard. Like, I'm not going to lie. It can be tough to keep things integrated. But some of the ways that I do that—

One extremely helpful way for me are the things like art class and choir where I have-- I know this might sound super basic, but it's a really powerful trick, right? Like, for the art classes, I have to pay up front. And so then, if I miss it, I'm wasting money, right? I tell people I'm going to art class. I tell people that I'm in choir.

So you kind of create this-- If you do that-- Again, it sounds very simple, but I think it is quite powerful. You create this kind of responsibility on yourself, right? Like, "Okay. I've told people I'm doing this, and so now I better do it," right?

And I will tell you, like, I definitely have times, even just a couple weeks ago where I was working really hard, I was super tired, I didn't want to go to art class. And I was able-- Like, I talked to some of my friends, and they were like, "You should just go. You should just do it. You'll feel better afterwards." And lo and behold, they were right.

So that's one practical way is rather than just say, "Okay. I will draw on the weekends," or, "I'll make sure I go to choir on the weekends," or, "I'll make sure I do X, Y, Z," you know, whatever form of extracurricular

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activity it is, I actually schedule these things, and I tell people that I've scheduled them, right? So that creates some sort of, like, responsibility. That's one way.

Another way that I-- especially on the social connection aspect of fandom. Another way I stay engaged, for better or worse depending on your frame of reference, is through these, like, real-time online communities like Discord and Twitter. And the reason I say "for better or for worse" is just in case one of my fellow colleagues is listening to this podcast and knows I'm chatting on Discord all day.

But it's actually-- I think it's an incredibly powerful tool, especially Discord. And so for folks who aren't aware of what Discord is, it's sort of like Slack, but for fans. And if you don't know what Slack is, it's basically like a real-time group chat platform. And Slack is used by a lot of companies and businesses to set up teams or groups, like, within the company, and then you guys can, like, chat real-time about stuff.

Discord is effectively the same thing. It's just more focused on the gaming world and fans and that sort of demographic, but anybody-- I mean, Discord is free, so anybody can join and create a community. And within Discord, you have these online groups called servers, right? And servers typically cover some sort of topic.

So some of the servers that I'm in-- most of mine right now are Star Wars, but even within those servers-- like, different servers have different functions. So I'm in, I think, like, three servers where it's all of, like, the artists in the fandom.

And people will share their work in progress or resources, tips, they'll talk about their personal lives, that sort of thing. There's also servers for, like, group projects within the fandom. So right now, I'm part of, like, a comic project where, you know, each artist gets to sort of do like a round robin where each artist creates a comic page, and then you kind of go one after the next, and you see where the story goes, things like that.

I think that my fandom experience, and my just everyday life, would be severely inhibited if I didn't have Discord. Another one of the main reasons why Discord has been so important for me is that I am also able to chat with some of my closest friends that I found through the fandom.

And it's funny, I actually talked quite a bit with some of my friends from law school, or business school, or from home. And I talk about, like, my internet friends and how I meet my internet friends in real life. For some people, that sounds like a very foreign concept to them, but I found some of my closest friends through that, right?

**Shohreh:**

Yeah. I think I've had that experience as well running a business that has a very big online presence. I spend a lot of time on social media.

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So there's definitely people that are online who I've maybe never met in real life but who I talk to almost every day. I know about what's happening in their lives. They know what's happening in mine, and we're supportive of each other.

And, like, there are people who, if I'm ever in their city, like, I'm going to seek them out. And if they're in my city, they're going to seek me out which I think is a really wonderful aspect of the internet which-- Obviously, there's many horrible aspects as well, but being able to make real friendships that are meaningful and, like, people that you would want to hang out with if you were in the same place is so cool. And I'm sure that that happens a lot within fandoms.

And I know for you, you try to go to a lot of the Star Wars in-person events. And through that, you've been able to meet a lot of your online friends in person.

**Jessica:** Yeah. That's what I was about to say too. Just kind of getting back to the-- like, just the overall question of, "A) How do you make time for this sort of stuff? And how do you hold yourself accountable for this sort of stuff?"

Another way that I do that is through actually going to meetups or going to events and meeting people in person. That can definitely make for a hectic schedule. But on the whole, I found those-- like, going to those events has been incredibly, incredibly helpful. I mean, those are the ways that I actually recharge after a busy week.

**Shohreh:** And that's another wonderful thing about the internet is I think, now, you can find communities for almost everything as well as, often times, in-person meetups for almost everything which is really great because I think, you know, several decades ago, it was probably a lot harder to find people who are into very specific, niche things than it is now.

**Jessica:** Yeah. I would definitely agree with that. And even in the Star Wars fandom, it's pretty amazing to see these groups organized. Like, they've got a group on the west coast, and then some in Northern California, some in Southern California. We've got people on the East Coast. We've got people in Southeast Asia, people in Canada, just all over the world. So it's pretty incredible to see these kinds of communities come together.

And I think part of the reason why these communities come together is, not only that specific shared interest-- I kind of almost view that as sort of like a gateway drug, right? Because inevitably, you come across, you know-- These fandoms are very big.

So you'll come across people who you get along with. You'll come across people who you don't, and I think that's just a natural facet of life. But you'll find people in your specific community where you can

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actually connect on other interests even beyond that shared fandom interest.

So for me, my closest group of friends-- and I think this happened very organically and naturally. My closest group of friends in the fandom also tend to be busy, professional, working women who also have this interest in this fandom. They may also work in the industry, like that sort of thing. It's a pretty wonderful thing to see and to find.

I know for me, as a professional woman in this space, it's can be kind of tough sometimes to find people who I feel I can really connect with on multiple levels.

And so, you know, being in the Star Wars fandom has actually allowed me to do that more so than, like, meeting up with, like, professional groups and that sort of thing. Yeah.

**Shohreh:** Right. Those.

**Jessica:** Not to throw shade on, like, those kinds of groups. But the reason I say that is because I don't think I can underestimate the value that these communities have provided to me over the last few years in multiple arenas.

**Shohreh:** Absolutely. And I actually want to go back to what you said about there's some people that you get along with, and of course, there are some people that you don't get along with, which is to say that-- So it's no secret that probably in fandoms in general, but definitely in some of the nerdier ones, and Star Wars for sure, that there is a lot of sexism, and I imagine racism, as well.

So can you maybe speak to your experiences as a black woman being in a fandom like Star Wars?

**Jessica:** Yeah. So it can certainly be tough in the greater fandom. For my personal experience-- Again, this is anecdotal, and I'm sure different people have different experiences. From my personal experience, the online communities and the online fandoms tend to be harsher than in person which is not that surprising, right? A lot of these people's bark is worse than their bite, right?

**Shohreh:** Keyboard warriors. Yeah.

**Jessica:** Exactly. Exactly. As an aside, not to undermine the danger of some of those folks, right, because the concept of doxxing can be a pretty bad thing, and it can become prevalent in certain fandoms if you kind of allow toxicity to grow.

But kind of setting that aside, I have found, yeah, the online communities tend to be worse than kind of in-person antagonism. But I

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think you're absolutely right that these fandoms can turn ugly pretty quickly.

As a black woman myself, I definitely have seen both sexism and racism in the fandom. I think it's no secret what happened a little over a year ago to one of the stars of The Last Jedi, Kelly Marie Tran, who was harassed repeatedly on social media by certain parts of the fandom and suffered from a lot of racist and sexist comments. It's definitely something that occurs, and it happens, and I wouldn't want that to be a secret.

I think some of that, in my opinion-- And this is-- Again, my viewpoint for this issue is mostly tied to the Star Wars fandom and how a lot of those fans specifically feel and how they act. So this may be different for different communities, right? Like, I don't know if, like, sports fandoms or Ariana Grande fans would act the same way as, like, you know, your Star Wars fans from the 1970s, right?

**Shohreh:** Well, sports fandoms are sexist as hell.

**Jessica:** That's true. That's true. That's true. But that's just the lens through which I'm kind of looking at this issue.

**Shohreh:** Right.

**Jessica:** I think a lot of it stems back to two things. One, the gatekeeping that you kind of touched on in the very beginning. And again, it kind of proves, like, why that sort of mentality is toxic, right? So I think it's-- With the advent of the new trilogy, you have some brand new kind of female leads, right, some powerful women who are taking center stage. And some of the older fans take a lot of issue with that in part because there are a lot of newer fans for the sequel trilogy.

And a lot of those newer fans are from, you know, typically underrepresented communities in media. And that could be women. That could be LGBT communities, minorities, etc. etc. I think it also comes from this place of, "Oh. Now these people are coming in and taking this thing that was made for me." And that's not quite true, right? Because I think going back to what we talked about at the very beginning, I think fandom is for everyone.

And I think a fandom that is functioning properly is all-inclusive because the point of fandom for me is not necessarily just to own all the merchandise, and know all the facts, and see all the movies, but it's also to engage in the community and critique the source material, to write transformative works like fan-fiction or to create art, to explore other parts of this media, right? And in order to do that, I think it needs to be an inclusive community.

**Shohreh:** Yeah. And I think there's such an entitlement for people who are suggesting, you know, "Oh. Women shouldn't be at the center of this

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franchise because they weren't in the past" or, "People of color shouldn't be at the center of this franchise because they weren't in the past."

I mean, you see this all around America, right? Like, people clutching onto the quote-unquote old ways of doing things and not wanting to be ushered into a more inclusive era. And it's really unfortunate I think because it can lead to people feeling like they don't belong or, like, this fandom doesn't want them which is sad because, like you said, it should be for everyone, and we should be able to critique, we should be able to make changes.

I mean, we saw the same thing when they released the Ghostbusters reboot with women instead of men. Everyone just, like, freaking the fuck out and, like, trying to tank the ratings online before the movie even came out. I mean it's absolutely atrocious to see that kind of stuff happening.

**Jessica:**

Yep. No. I think that's right. And some of my friends and I have definitely talked about the fact that, like, the Star Wars fandom, like-- in some ways, it's a microcosm of some of the cultural problems we're having in the U.S. right now.

And getting back to the point of self-care and, you know, finding comfort in fandom because, obviously, everything we just talked about is not super comforting.

So the ways that I try to engage and fandom in a healthy way is to quite frankly do my best to not engage with that side of the fandom.

My experience, at least online and through talking with some of my other friends who have experienced this toxicity, it tends to be a loud but small minority of people.

And I think if you are very liberal in kind of blocking those voices out, and I mean literally just blocking accounts on Twitter, right, and kind of catering your own experience in this.

I think that is extremely important because I've seen people time and time again try to engage with this behavior, and it turns fandom for them from something that was positive to something that is toxic for them.

And so I try to do my best to not directly engage with those kinds of people, but then also discuss with my friends and kind of vent and talk about ways to navigate that and figure out ways to advocate for ourselves.

I talk about all of those topics with my friends. So for me, it doesn't just avoid the issue, right, because I don't think that's helpful, but I also find ways that I can engage in a healthy way so that this thing that I go to

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for understanding myself and for taking care of myself and connecting with people doesn't turn into something ugly.

**Shohreh:** And this actually brings up too-- You had posted an article recently about class differences in fandoms as well and how it can be difficult for some people to feel like they can buy into the full experience if they don't have a lot of money.

So I was wondering if you have any thoughts on that and just, like, how fandoms can become more accessible so that doesn't become such a big issue.

**Jessica:** Yeah. Absolutely. And that article was actually written by a very close friend of mine who I met through the fandom.

**Shohreh:** That's awesome. And I'll link to it in the show notes, too, for anyone who wants to read it.

**Jessica:** Yeah. Yeah. She's fantastic. And she has a lot of thoughts on this issue and has been in multiple fandoms for quite some time. So she's definitely somebody that you'd want to take note of if you were thinking of these issues.

But yeah. And her name's Shi. Shi I think pointed out in that article that there seems to be, in some fandoms-- I think it's coming from both sides of fandom, and by sides, I mean fans themselves as well as the brands and the companies pushing the content.

So there seems to be this push right now of getting back to that gatekeeping issue and kind of creating hierarchies and stuff. There seems to be this push now of, like, performative fandom where the more Cons you go to, the more exclusive merch you have, if you get to go see, like, an actor in a show, or if you get to meet some actor, like the more of those things you do or the more of those, like, trophies you have, the better of a fan you are.

And again, getting back to some of the reasons not to engage in fandom or some of the ways you shouldn't engage in fandom, I think that sort of behavior ends up creating the type of hierarchies that shouldn't be prevalent in fandom.

And I think-- I can't test or I can't ascribe intent, right, to, you know, people I don't know and companies I don't work for, but I do think that certain companies and brands are certainly aware of this. And at the end of the day, they're corporations that are going to capitalize on that.

So again, I see kind of this overload of, like, media, and content, and events, and merchandise. And it kind of creates this sense of urgency of like, "Oh my gosh. I have to create all the things or do all the things, or else I'm not I'm fan."

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And then on the flip side, getting back to this performative fandom problem, you will see people on Twitter or, well, less so Tumblr nowadays because they've just kind of crashed and burned, Twitter, Instagram, other social media websites, you'll see folks who will consistently post whenever they get to go on a trip to a con or they managed to buy XYZ thing.

And those posts get a lot of attention, right? And you'll see comments like, "Oh my gosh. I'm so jealous. Like, I want to do this. I want to be like you." That's not, to me, what fandom is supposed to be about.

Again, I think it's supposed to be about, you know, figuring out your own identity, and understanding yourself, and maybe you use transformative works like fanfictions and fan art to help with that. I think it's supposed to be used as a form of self-care and helping you find balance and kind of escapism, particularly if you're living a busy, stressful life.

And then, I think it's meant to help you find social connection with people who have interests similar to yours and people who you might not ordinarily meet.

**Shohreh:**

I think it helps if people can recognize that their interest and participation in fandoms is going to fluctuate and change over time and that they're not always going to necessarily be participating at the same level for many different reasons. Maybe it's because of income or other reasons.

Like, for me, I arguably was very big into, like, the Green Bay Packers football fandom for a long time having grown up with it. My mom's from Wisconsin, so that's how I was raised. I went to college in Wisconsin where, like, everybody literally lived and breathed football.

And then, you know, getting out of college, getting out of it, I wasn't as into it. And then we have things like issues with Colin Kaepernick coming up with the NFL where I no longer feel ethically as interested in watching football and things like that.

So, you know, my interest has definitely waned. Like, I still care about it. It's still something I look into, but definitely do not spend nearly as much time, money or energy into it.

So I think if we can cultivate environments where, like, that's okay and recognizing that we're not always going to have the same interest in fandoms and that also, like, there are things that can go wrong within fandoms that might make you want to step back, like, that is helpful for people.

**Jessica:**

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think Shi-- Again, she's the author of the article you mentioned. I think Shi has also talked about this on her-- this concept on her Twitter of just allowing yourself to disengage with a

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fandom when that fandom is not giving you the joy and benefits it used to and allowing yourself to be okay with that.

Because again, like you mentioned, and I think I kind of implied, there is this, like, unspoken current in a lot of fandoms of like, "Oh. You always need to be, like, hyped up about every single thing and you always need to be engaged," and if you don't keep up with the latest news, then, "Oh, you're just not really a fan. Like, you're not a super-fan like me." That's not healthy, right? And that's not the point of fandom.

**Shohreh:** Yeah. And that also just reminds me of the gatekeeping aspect as well of-- And again, I can use football as an example of this. Like, having this where people will, like, try and test your knowledge and, like, give you trivia questions and stuff which, for the record, I'm capable of answering because,-

**Jessica:** [laughs]

**Shohreh:** -like, I know the information, but, like, I shouldn't have to, right? Like, you shouldn't have to prove yourself a fan whether by how much money you spend, or how much time you spend, or how much knowledge you have, which I know you've mentioned but I think is just really important to reiterate because that is something that is still going on in so many different fan spaces. And it's freaking frustrating.

**Jessica:** It is. It is. And it actually-- This is just an anecdote, but it actually reminds me of a very positive example of this that I experienced when I went to Celebration. So for those of you who aren't aware, Star Wars Celebration is the Disney-Lucas film run convention that is solely about Star Wars. It lasts for, like, four or five days, and they have it in various cities. This past year it was in Chicago, and it was my first time going.

One of the things that I ended up doing was helping out a friend of mine with one of her panels. So some folks who are fans who have, like, podcasts or kind of big communities around the content they create, they were given kind of, like, panels or activity spaces where, you know, they could kind of choose to present whatever they wanted.

And a friend of mine actually did like a trivia night sort of thing. And this friend, she's also an extremely talented artist. And she created kind of hundreds of mini, like, pins, like buttons with the characters.

And as part of this trivia game, you would answer questions. And if you got the answer right, then you got a pin. And then you can take that pin and go trade with somebody else because pin trading is also kind of a big thing.

And so my job was to kind of ask trivia questions of the folks who are attending the event and then hand out pins accordingly. I am not a trivial person just generally, and I know very little of those little, like, of

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those, like, random factoids for Star Wars. And so we had a big set of, like, trivia questions and that sort of thing.

And again, it ended up being one of the most positive experiences for me because the vast majority, like I'm talking like 97 percent of the folk who were engaging with the questions and trying to get pins, were children, like very small children.

**Shohreh:** Aww.

**Jessica:** Yeah. So it was probably like-- the youngest was probably like-- couldn't have been older than four or five years. And most of the kids were probably in the, like, seven to 12, like, age range, right? And for those kids, like, I would ask, like, pretty basic questions, and some would get them right, and some wouldn't. But I always gave them a pin every single time because, to me, that's not what fandom is about. It's just being there, and being excited, and engaging with this thing that brings you joy. It actually made me, like, cry afterwards because I was just like, "This is so amazing and wonderful. This is what it's all about."

**Shohreh:** Aww. That's so cute- them participating and just having a good time and being able to walk away with that memory of like, "I played the game, and I got to have this cool pin." That's awesome.

**Jessica:** Right. And again, it's like, I don't think fandom is specific to nerd-dom, right? Like, you could have-- Again, to me, fandom is just groups of people with shared passions. But for the Star Wars fandom, a lot of people in the fandom are probably people who-- They're considered to be nerds.

So they might not-- Especially in, like, elementary school and middle school where everything is performative, like, you might not necessarily have that many friends, right, or you might not have a lot of friends that are into Star Wars, and you feel socially awkward or whatever. And to be able to, like, give them this opportunity to shine and to feel like they are a part of something, I just think it's so powerful.

**Shohreh:** It definitely is. And speaking of things that are powerful, I want to go back to this concept that you mentioned a couple of times of transformative works in fandom. Maybe you can kind of expand on that a little bit.

**Jessica:** Yeah. So the concept of transformative works at a very basic level and without getting into copyright law which is my favorite topic, but nobody else's favorite topic.

**Shohreh:** [laughs] That's another podcast.

**Jessica:** [laughs] That's a different podcast. The concept of transformative works at its very basic level is creating works that transform or change the source material. So that would be like fanfiction or fanart. It takes

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the original story and it says, "Well, what if this one thing was different?" Or "What if we went beyond the closed door and saw what was behind the door?" Or, "What if these characters were in a different universe? How would they act?"

It's that sort of, like, exploration and almost critique, a light critique, of the original source material. And again, I think two of the primary forms of transformative works are fanfiction and fanart, but I also-- I've seen people who have written songs in fandom. They create fan videos, right? They create GIFS and GIF sets that end up having, like, a meaning all on their own. So I think at a very basic level, that's what transformative works means to me.

**Shohreh:** And would you say that your own art fits under this category?

**Jessica:** I would say so. Yeah. Because when I started making fanart, for me, it was about kind of exploring these characters and exploring facets of their own personality and depicting that in art.

Some of my works also go into what is known as, like, the AU category which is what I touched on earlier where, like, characters in a different universe, and what would they look like? How would they act? So I have some art that touches on that. I have art that I feel like delves into facets of the characters more or depicts that.

So for me, absolutely. I think that it is not just in art. For me, it's not just kind of, like, copying a design of a character and, you know, replicating that. To me, it's much more meaningful and engaging than that. And I think that would be true for-- I think most, if not all, kind of artists and creators would say that in fandom.

**Shohreh:** And I've been seeing your art for years, but for others who have not seen it yet but will after this podcast, Jess just does a lot of work with-- again, around this Reylo concept. So a lot of her works are sort of exploring this romance that, really, we haven't gotten to see as much of in the movies that Jess has decided to take a few steps further.

**Jessica:** [laughs] That's exactly right. I mean, I think Reylo is a perfect example of this concept of like, "Okay. Well, what if we took these characters further?" Or, "Where do you think we see these stories go?" And I think fandoms and transformative works traditionally-- and this is, again, just observation, at least what I think.

For me, it feels like transformative works in fandom kind of pop up around media where there's ambiguity. If there's some story that hasn't been told or it's been left unsaid, I think that's one way they pop up. I think another way they pop up is where-- and I think this is prevalent across all media- where you have underrepresented communities wanting to explore that media but in ways that speak to them specifically.

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And those underrepresented communities could be women, minorities, LGBT communities, basically any community that isn't a white man. It tends to be underrepresented in media, generally. And so when you look at fandom demographics-- I mean, I have never studied fandom demographics, so I can't say with any certainty what they look like, but I know, at least for me, the majority of folks that I personally interact with in fandoms tends to skew towards these underrepresented communities.

**Shohreh:** Which is just a really cool aspect of having these fandoms. Because again, it's just another way to find community, find people who maybe aren't the poster children for Star Wars or other fandoms and still be able to enjoy these wonderful things with each other.

**Jessica:** Yep. No. I think that's right. I also think it's a relatively healthy way-- Again, to go back to this understanding yourself and finding stories that speak to you, I think it's a relatively healthy way to do that.

And it's funny, people in the Star Wars fandom kind of joke because there was all of this backlash, particularly after The Last Jedi, there was all this backlash in certain parts of the community that, "Oh. Like, the director of that film ruined Star Wars, and The Last Jedi was a terrible movie." And they, like, made a petition to, like, reshoot The Last Jedi and have, like, a fan-like version. And that should be the canon version.

And everybody was like, "Bro. Just write a fanfic and call it a day. Like, if you are unsatisfied with the source material, do what everybody else has been doing to make you...to help you find joy in this again and write some fanfic."

Yeah. So again, I think it's a pretty healthy and positive way to kind of both explore and critique the original source material as well as, you know, explore things and find stories that speak to you.

**Shohreh:** And we've talked about self-care. We've talked about kind of self-identifying within these fandoms and just quality of life and everything like that. So this is a good time to ask you what my wrap-up question is which I ask to everybody who's on the podcast, which is how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

**Jessica:** For me, it is frankly balance. Balance and, as a subset of that, self-care. So as you know, and as we've kind of intimated on here, I have an extremely busy and chaotic work life. And so, for me, health and wellness is kind of recognizing that, in some ways, that is literally part of my job, right? And in some ways, like, I simply can't work a nine-to-five job, right?

But also recognizing that doesn't mean that other parts of my life need to go away because of that. That's actually a detriment to me. And this is the business case I make to the firm, a detriment to my clients.  
[laughs]

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**Shohreh:** Yeah. It is.

**Jessica:** It is true. It is true. It's a detriment to myself and ergo to my clients and to the firm if I'm not taking care of myself in ways that work for me. And the ways that work for me are engaging in creative communities, visiting my friends often, engaging in the artistic side of myself and everything that goes along with that. So again, I think the short answer would be balance, right? And balance as that means, like, for what it means to me personally.

**Shohreh:** And I think we would be remiss not to mention that, in the law in particular, there are serious consequences to not having the opportunity to focus on health and wellness or whatever that means to people. I mean, whether that's burnout and leaving the profession or suicide, I mean, which happens a lot particularly in Biglaw because people are worked so hard and not given any personal time to pursue other aspects of themselves, and they're expected to make the law their life.

You either have to find a way to make it work for you like you are where you are making attempts at balance where you can, you are setting boundaries with your firm, or people leave the law, or if it pans out really poorly for their health. I mean, unfortunately, there's only so many directions it can go in in that profession.

**Jessica:** Yeah. No. And I totally agree with that. And again, I am not perfect. Like, I don't want anybody in any way to think that I have, like, figured it all out and have the perfect work-life balance because that is certainly not the case. I am still struggling. I know you and I are talking about more kind of, like, I would say social health and mental health on this particular episode of the podcast, but, you know, as far as my own physical health, it is still very much a work in progress.

I'm two years into my new job. I guess it's not new anymore. I'm two years into this job, and I still haven't figured out a regular workout schedule. That's an issue, right? That's an area where I feel like my health is declining, or it's not in the place where it needs to be.

And so I'm still working on that. But I at least recognize, "Okay. Under health and wellness, there are various subsets, and I need to focus on all of them." So I can't necessarily just focus on mental health. Like, that's obviously important, and making sure I maintain my friend and family connections and have a strong, like, internal kind of health. But for me, I also need to focus on my physical health as well and being in a place where I'm happy with that too. So basically, that means, "Jessica, you need to draw a little bit less and maybe workout."

[laughter]

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- Jessica:** And so again, it's all about finding the balance. And I'm kind of still working on it.
- Shohreh:** It is. And I always tell people too. I mean, similar to how we talked about fluctuations in fandom participation. I mean, because there are so many aspects of health and there are so many different things that are important, they're definitely going to fluctuate in our lives as far as, like, what we're putting our time and our energy into.
- You know, I was talking about this on social media the other day where for, like, the last year-and-a-half, I've had a very erratic sort of, like, strength training schedule which is very different from probably the five or six years before that where I was, like, working out every single week, like three or four times a week, like had program, like everything was very scheduled.
- And, like, at first, it was really hard for me. And I was like, "Oh my God. Like, I'm going to lose all my strength. I don't know what I'm doing." And then I realized like, "You know what? This is just the season of my life that I'm in right now where other things are taking precedent, and I'm prioritizing them. And, like, other aspects of my health are more important to me right now, and that's okay.
- And, like, maybe eventually I'll find my way back to where I was, or I'll find some new version of that that makes sense for me. And just again, being okay with that fluctuation I think is key, both in fandoms and in health.
- Jessica:** Yeah. No. I think that's right. And I feel that something I should write down and put on my wall.
- Shohreh:** Yes. Shohreh quotes on your wall. I like it. Well, thank you so much for being here. This was a wonderful conversation. How can people find you?
- Jessica:** So they can find me-- if you are on Twitter, you can find me at [username redacted]. On Instagram-- and I assume you'll link these in the--
- Shohreh:** I definitely will. Yeah.
- Jessica:** Okay. On Instagram, you can find my art and fandom account at [username redacted], and my website is [website redacted].
- Shohreh:** And you have art that's available for sale as well, right?
- Jessica:** Oh, I do. Yes. I always forget. [laughs]
- Shohreh:** People might want to buy it, Jess. We need to tell them it's out there.

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**Jessica:** No. I do have art for sale. And I've changed my formula a little bit. But a portion of the proceeds of every sale currently split between RAICES and the ACLU.

**Shohreh:** Fantastic. I love that you do that.

**Jessica:** Yes. I have to. [laughs]

**Shohreh:** Good. Well, thank you so much. Everyone, I'll put all of that in the show notes so you can go find Jess. Follow all of her stuff. She talks about all kinds of interesting things, not just fandoms, but there's a lot of that, but also politics and other things that are going on as well. And she's a wonderful person who I'm proud to call my friend.

**Jessica:** Aww.

**Shohreh:** Thank you so much for being here today. I appreciate you making time for this.

**Jessica:** Of course. Thank you for having me.

[music plays]

**Shohreh:** And that's our show for today. I appreciate you listening to and supporting the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast.

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Hope to see you for the next episode.