

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

Shohreh Davoodi: Get excited for episode number 40 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast, because today I am chatting with the most adorable and badass power couple comprised of Rocky Lane and Sarah Swofford. I first met Rocky right around the time I launched the podcast when we both participated in a panel about body-positive fitness, and I immediately loved his energy. Rocky is transgender, and he and Sarah are dedicated community advocates here in Austin.

I spoke with the two of them about common misconceptions about trans people and cis-trans relationships, barriers to health and wellness for trans people, how to be a better ally if you're cisgender, and more. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/40. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/40.

This episode is part of the Health & Wellness Changemakers series, sponsored by Superfit Hero. The series runs from episode number 37 to episode number 48 if you want to catch them all. The goal of this series is to highlight people making waves in the health and wellness industry and taking it in a new direction. I am so grateful to be collaborating with the body-positive brand, Superfit Hero to introduce you to these changemakers.

Superfit Hero is an inclusive activewear brand with sizes that range from XS to 5XL, and their goal is to provide clothing for ultimate confidence, no matter your size or sport. All of their clothing is also ethically made in Los Angeles, California. To get 15% off your first order, you can use the special series discount code, which is CHANGEMAKER, when you check out at www.superfithero.com.

And stay tuned for the Superfit Hero Wellness Tip of the Week later in this episode.

[Music plays]

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.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

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.

Rocky and Sarah, it is so lovely to have you on the podcast. Thank you so much for making time to be here, especially with all of the craziness out in the world right now.

Sarah Swofford: Thank you so much for having us, Shohreh. We're so excited to be here, and yeah, it is, it's crazy times. So it's much more fun to be in our closet doing this than out in the world [laughs].

Rocky Lane: Yes, thank you for having us. Thank you very much. We're happy to be here.

Shohreh: Of course, I mean, we're doing exactly what we're supposed to be doing right now. We're podcasting virtually. Nobody is in each other's space. So it's perfect.

Sarah: Excellent social distancing practices [laughter].

Shohreh: Wow, go team! I'm so proud of us.

Sarah: Right? [laughs]

Shohreh: So, before we dive in, I figured it might be helpful to first define for our listeners two terms that's it's possible some of them don't know what they mean, and those are simply 'cisgender' and 'transgender.' So, would one of you like to just take a stab at defining those in a way people can understand in case they haven't heard those terms before?

Sarah: Sure, so I as the cisgender person here can define cisgender for you. So, cisgender means that you identify with the gender or sex that you were assigned at birth. Sometimes you might also hear things like AFAB or AMAB, that means 'assigned female at birth' or 'assigned male at birth.' And if you identify with how you were assigned at birth you would consider yourself cisgender. So, I identify as female, which is what I was assigned at birth, so I'm cisgender.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

Rocky: And I as the trans member of this relationship will describe what trans is, which is odd in itself, but I will do as best I can to try to explain it in a good way. Which is the opposite of what Sarah said—which is that it's a person that doesn't identify with the gender assignment they were given at birth. A term that has been used recently, but over the last decade or so, I think, that people have really started to use it as a term to describe a much larger community of people who do not conform to that gender assigned at birth.

That doesn't necessarily mean that they're having any transition-related or gender-related care, but it does mean that they don't identify with the gender they were assigned, or they don't participate in the gender norms, in some way. And that usually puts them under a term that people use as transgender.

Shohreh: Thank you very much. I know that probably seems very basic to all of us, but you'd be surprised how many people out there don't know those terms yet. So I'm glad that we can just put that out there for everybody.

So, let's start by having each of you just tell me a little bit more about yourselves, who you are, what you do. and then I feel like we have to talk at least a little bit about your love story and the birth of SwirlBaby.

Rocky: Yes, we can do that. I'll start, that sounds good. So, my name is Rocky Lane. I am 37 years old. I'm a black trans man. I'm married to Sarah. I participate in the community in many ways. I have always been a huge advocate for the LGBTQPIA+ community in one way or another, whether that be Pride events or something like that. But more recently, since I started sharing part of my story and part of our story online, have started to enter into leadership into the trans community which is a more specific segment within the LGBTQPIA+ community.

Recently entered leadership for an organization called TENT which is the trans-led, trans-focused advocacy organization based in Texas, and it does legal and educational advocacy for trans quality of life issues at all levels. We started working with them—I started working with them and then Sarah has also been helping in that—and I think that started because we shared

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

the story of my top surgery, my entering into gender-based care, taking hormones, and those changes.

I work as a massage therapist, have been a massage therapist for three years. My advocacy work is just a volunteer thing that I do, but I make my living as a wellness professional. I'm a former paramedic and I moved into massage therapy after I was injured and had to do some recovery.

And I recently added personal trainer, which meant that I got to start working at a gym here in town, and that's called Autonomy Movement. So that's the other thing I do and I'm known for, among other things. But that's the basics about me and who I am. And now I'm going to let my beautiful wife do her thing.

Sarah: My name is Sarah Swofford, and I am just recently 32 years old [laughs]. I am a personal stylist ,and a hair stylist and makeup artist—a licensed cosmetologist here in the great state of Texas. I have a focus in my business in serving the LGBTQPIA+ community as I am a queer, pansexual fat, feminist lady [laughs].

Shohreh: Hells yeah.

Sarah: Hells yeah. And I also have a special focus on serving clientele in fat bodies. And I really want to support the Health At Every Size movement. I really have a focus on just self-love, fat acceptance, body acceptance, body positivity. Yeah, that's a lot of what I do when people come in to my chair, or come into my office and hang out with me.

Right now, obviously those services are kind of hold. I'm transitioning to doing some more internet-based styling services, hopefully in the next couple of weeks, so that I can continue to touch base with my clientele if I can't actually put my hands on them to help them with their hair, their makeup or their personal styling,, or whatever.

In addition to my business, Rocky and I together try to do a lot of community-focused events, especially for the LGBTQPIA+ community. We've done some fun stuff like hosting different Pride-related events or queer-related events, and we find ourselves often at fundraising dinners,

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

and galas, and silly things like that. So [laughs], yeah, that's kind of what I do, I guess.

Shohreh: And I guess for future months' and years' worth of people listening to this episode, I should just mention that we're recording this during the coronavirus pandemic, and that's why we keep alluding to the fact that our businesses are in weird places right now [laughter].

Sarah: Yeah, we're working it out, okay? There's a lot of kinks. We're trying our best.

Shohreh: It's really hard, you guys [laughter].

Sarah: It is, it is!

Shohreh: Awesome, well, thank you for sharing that. And also I want to hear about how the two of you met!

Sarah: Oh gosh, this is our favorite.

Rocky: I always find it's easier to let Sarah start, and I'll add the color commentary, if you will [laughter].

Shohreh: Perfect.

Sarah: Rocky will embellish. Okay, all right, gosh, so how did we meet? We actually met online. We met on OkCupid, shout out to OkCupid, not sponsored [laughter].

Shohreh: I wish! If OkCupid wants to sponsor me, they're more than welcome.

Rocky: We 100% credit them with a beautiful, lasting love story, for sure. What a lovely platform they have.

Sarah: Yeah, it worked out really well for us. We met online. We started talking online through the OkCupid app or something, and Rocky asked if he could add me on Facebook. And I said, "No, that's weird, I don't know you. Let me look at your Facebook first." [Laughter] So I looked at his Facebook. I saw we had two mutual friends in common—two very long-term, dear friends for both of us—and of all the people in the world they were just two of our most favorite people.

Redefining Health & Wellness #40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

And I thought, “Wow, if we have these mutual friends in common, Rocky must be a pretty stand-up guy.” So yes, okay, I’ll let you add me on Facebook [laughs]. So we started kinda talking on there.

We met up for a date at a hookah bar [laughs], yeah, and we barely smoked any hookah. We mostly just talked, and like stared at each other, and held hands. We closed the business down.

And then shortly after that, we moved quick, we moved in together. We fell in love fast [laughs]. And now, let’s see, November 2019 we just celebrated our four-year wedding anniversary, and here, March 25th, 2020, we will be celebrating our sixth-year-together anniversary.

Rocky: Yeah, our quarantine-a-versary.

Sarah: Our quarantine-a-versary! [laughs]

Shohreh: Awwwww.

Rocky: We’ve been inseparable since. I can’t think of many times that we’ve been apart from each other, except for a few random times, but we do most of our things together now.

Sarah: Yeah. Yeah, we’re very much a team. We got a lot of grief from our friends and loved ones when we were first together, because they were like, you know, “This is infatuation! You guys are just so up each other’s asses!” like that’s [laughs], “It’s gonna stop! You know, it’s gonna run out!” And here we are six years later, like still just, if not more, up each other’s butts [laughter].

Rocky: Yeah, we’re like, “That’s my best friend! You don’t—don’t ask me about my best friend! We’re spending time! Quality time!” And people didn’t understand. But now all our friends are falling in love too, and they can’t get away from each other, and you know, it’s lovely to see.

Shohreh: I mean, the love and support the two of you exude for each other is clear as day, even not being in that closet that I know that you’re both in right now recording [laughter].

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

Sarah: It's very cozy in here, Shohreh, I wish you were here to be in this quarantine party with us [laughter].

Rocky: I was thinking it's actually still very appropriate, because we're kind of in the closet about the fact that we met online.

Sarah: We were in the closet about our online meeting until fairly recently. We, I don't know why, we felt like there was some shame and stigma, so we were like, "Oh, we met through mutual friends," which, as I said, was partially true.

But we were in the closet in a lot of other ways too. I mean, when we met each other we were very clear and very honest and up front about who we were, but we were both very much in a state of coming out of the closet on our own, individually.

I was really just kind of coming out of the closet in a lot of ways, to my family anyway, about being a queer person. Rocky was really just kind of coming out of the closet of being a trans person. So yeah, it's appropriate that we're having this conversation here now [laughs].

Rocky: Yeah, it's been a wild ride, wild ride.

Shohreh: Yeah, before we started recording, we were making jokes about them being back in the closet, and now you've invited me back in the closet too. And I just came out of it! I don't wanna go back in there! [laughter]

Sarah: Yeah, yeah, you're in the pink clouds phase right now. Like you've gone out, things are really good. You know, you do not wanna go back in [laughs].

Shohreh: Exactly, exactly. I'm still a baby queer.

Sarah: Yeah [laughter].

Rocky: Yeah, I'm a long-time listener and first-time caller, and I thought your coming out stuff was great -

Sarah: Yeah, it was awesome.

Rocky: I thought it was fantastic.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

Shohreh: Aw, thank you, that means so much to me. I've gotten so many people who loved the episode that we did on bisexuality, so I'll link it in the show notes too for anyone who hasn't heard that episode, because it's super fun.

Sarah: Yes, please do.

Shohreh: Awesome. So, I think that it's quite possible that for some people, or potentially many people listening to this podcast episode that Rocky may be the first trans person they've ever heard from and that the two of you may be their first exposure to a cis-trans relationship. So, given that, I thought a good place to start might just be with some common misconceptions that the two of you have been running into a lot.

Sarah: I think when we first got together there was a lot more misconceptions that we probably encountered. Especially when Rocky was like early in his transition journey. I think a lot of that, unfortunately, has to do with cis-passing privilege, which is, for those people that don't know, there's like a very common misconception that transgender people want to fit into the gender binary. And some of them do, and that's totally great and fine, if that's what you wanna do. But there's many trans people that don't, or can't fit into the gender binary, for whatever reason, whether that be like access to healthcare or transition-related care or whatever. But all that being said, a lot of trans people end up kind of falling into a category of cis-passing privilege.

So that means that when people see them out in the world, nobody would "clock you" or like recognize that you are trans. So when people look at Rocky *now*, they look at Rocky and they just think he's a cisgender man, most of the time. People don't really look at him and think, "Oh, hmm, is there something else going on there?" or "Is this a trans person, or is this a woman or a lesbian?" or whatever.

And, I would say, like early on in our relationship, before Rocky kind of had that privilege, I guess you'd say, of cis-passing privilege, people definitely assumed a lot of other things about us, or were confused about other things. We got a lot of comments about like "Oh, weren't you guys just lesbians?" and like, "Why can't you just be lesbians still?" Which I personally never identified as a lesbian, which again, I have lots of lesbian

Redefining Health & Wellness #40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

friends, lesbians are amazing, I love the lesbian community [laughs], especially here in Austin. But I've never identified as a lesbian.

Even medical professionals said things to us about us being a same-sex couple, which we aren't—weren't and aren't. Or things about us just wanting to fit into cis heteronormativity, which also is not who we are. We're still a queer family. Our life, and our love, and our relationship has gone through many phases and many iterations.

But I think there's a lot of common misconceptions that all trans people just wanna look, and live, and act like cisgender, heterosexual people. And that's definitely not always the case. There are ways that like Rocky and I definitely do lean more into the gender binary, in some ways we are like "heteronormative," and things like that. But that also doesn't take away our past or who we are still. Just because I'm married to a man doesn't make me less queer. You know, just because Rocky is a man, also he really embraces his trans identity as well.

Rocky: I think I've noticed that a major thing that people think, that you talked about, is that trans experience is the same across the board for everyone. And that if I know something, or if we share something, that that must be the same for everyone. That everybody kind of wants to do this one intervention or these interventions for themselves.

Sarah: Or surgeries, or -

Rocky: Surgeries or hormones. And what we are realizing is that we had to learn a lot to be able to answer all the questions that come from this particular community, the community that we may be the first couple like us that they've ever met or been able to speak about our experiences. And yeah, when we were first dating and people assumed that we were a lesbian couple, the way they treated us was much different than it is now.

Sarah: Yeah.

Rocky: It's like, why do you treat lesbians different? A big thing we hated was like people being like, "What can we get for you *ladies*?" [Laughter]

Sarah: Yeah.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

- Shohreh:** Ugh.
- Rocky:** In a full suit, like -
- Sarah:** Suit and tie, yeah
- Rocky:** Yeah, we have a video about this, like the 10 things to stop saying to trans guys, and it's like, stop calling us ladies. Like, just pick a different word.
- Sarah:** Y'all is gender neutral and inclusive [laughs].
- Rocky:** Yeah.
- Shohreh:** God bless y'all, seriously.
- Sarah:** Yes.
- Rocky:** God bless y'all. I think people have a lot of questions around how we're intimate.
- Sarah:** I think there are times and places to talk about those kinds of things and I think, you know, when you have a certain kind of relationship with somebody, like a really confidential friendship, or a mentorship kind of relationship, or whatever, those kinds of conversations can be appropriate in those times, in privacy. But it's not something that we broadcast, not because we're ashamed. We're both very proud of our sexuality. We're proud of our healthy sex life. We're proud that we spend a lot of time to try to cultivate that aspect of our relationship and really nurture our love and sex part of our relationship.
- But also, it's personal. There's times that we would be open to talking about that kind of stuff in the right situations, but just for the general public, like no. I don't need to know what goes on in your bedrooms. Like why are you so curious about what goes on in ours? I can tell you, also, it's really not that different [laughter]. You might think it is, but it's, you know, whatever.
- Shohreh:** Wait, wait, so you're saying I shouldn't just walk up to you on the street and ask about personal details of your sex life? I mean that seems pretty rude, y'all.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

Rocky: Yeah, and also we gotta add genitals to the list; we've got to talk about all that, you know, like people always wanna know those questions. And it's just, it's super inappropriate. People only seem to ask the trans people these questions [laughs].

Sarah: Yeah, or people in close proximity to trans people, like parents and partners. And that's just so inappropriate. To ask about, especially, I mean, this is a whole soapbox I could get on, but especially when it comes to children. Like how fucking dare you, excuse the f-bomb, but...

Shohreh: No, this is a cursing-friendly podcast. Please, all the f-bombs you want.

Rocky: When you come for children, and the ways in which people are trying to enforce these very strict, binary, like "this is what girls do, this is what boys do" kind of thing, you leave out a huge segment of the population, some of which don't even know that they're part of this community yet. And you make it so difficult for them to truly be themselves and be honest about what they're experiencing.

Sarah: And stop asking about children's genitals or children's puberties. These are things that's just so inappropriate in every way, shape, and form. There is never a reason to talk about that. Of course, it's really in bad taste, it's super rude to do that to adults, but if you're asking parents or children about surgeries or their bodies, that's violence. That's an absolute violation. There's no reason that you should ever, ever, ever do that [laughs].

Shohreh: Yeah, and unfortunately it's just so common because people essentially just let their curiosity get the better of them. And I think part of the problem too is, it's othering, right? It's this idea that "Oh, you're different from me, so I want to learn everything that I can about you," even though that's none of their business.

Sarah: Yeah. And like Rocky and I both feel very passionately about education. And I think people get confused sometimes, like "Well, you know, I'm coming from a good place; I don't mean any harm, what's wrong with me asking these questions?" But I think a lot of it, at least for us, I can't speak for other people who talk on these subjects or who are educators in these fields, but at least for us as just human beings sharing our experience, like

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

it's how you ask it. It's a lot about how you ask, when you ask, things like that.

It's like, if you're approaching somebody like with genuine respect and also genuine concern and curiosity, I think there's a lot of tolerance for that in the community. And as much as a lot of people, especially trans people of color, especially black trans people, and especially black trans women are exhausted from having to educate people and it is not their responsibility at all, I also think, again, just from our experience, there seems to be a very high threshold for what people are willing to talk about as long as you approach people with respect.

I think people want to share information, and they want education, they want correct information to be shared. They want there to be so much education available. So I think people really are willing to meet you halfway, you know, if you have questions. But just like really try to approach it with love and respect.

Rocky: And that brings me to this idea that there are people in the world that truly this is the first time they're finding all of this out. And they think that the only way to get this information is from people like us, when in fact there's a wealth of information because trans people have always existed. Trans people are just part of the natural order of things. And so that information is out there for people to get and experience and really dive into, especially with the way YouTube and virtual stuff is happening now where everyone can share their story. It's out there for you to discover. And before you ask questions, really dive into the details yourself [laughs].

Sarah: Yeah.

Rocky: And I think what we're seeing is people acting like this is a brand new thing, and what's exhausting about that is that it just truly isn't. I think we learned that over our time together, and as I've entered into leadership and we have started doing more community-based things, we're learning about this vibrant and powerful community really, that really has very little interest in assimilating or sharing this information with cisgender community for acceptance of any kind.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

But it's important for cisgender people to educate themselves and know about this and understand how they're contributing to the difficulties and barriers that exist for, not only trans people, but the people that love us and support us, our families, our children. It's wild out there, right now, what we're seeing. I think we're trying to be part of the solution by sharing our story, but there's only so much we can do, so much reach we can have, and we've done this the best we can with the people we know and love.

I think our community is a great example; the people that support us are a great example of how it should look.

Shohreh: Right, and I think this is such an important point in general that if you are a person coming from a place of privilege and you're trying to get educational information from a marginalized individual, like, Google is out there. There are lots of educational resources that you can check first.

And if you *are* going to reach out to a marginalized individual to try and get more information, Sarah like you said, the way that you ask is important, and also, you're asking for labor from that person, and you should pay them for that labor. There are trans educators online who do that for a living. There are courses. There are consultation calls. There are so many options. So if this is important to you, then recognize that what you're asking for is labor, and that you should pay for that.

Sarah: Absolutely, thank you so much. We both just have chills because it's so important to hear people say that. And quick plug, Transgender Education Network of Texas that Rocky works with, if your business or school needs training, they provide this training for the state of Texas. So, please reach out to Transgender Education Network of Texas if you are looking for these kinds of resources. And yes, you will pay for it, as you should [laughs].

Rocky: And the paying for it, in fact, does support the community, and I think people are missing that piece. Like often, what we'll have is a request for training, then that will go to somebody's HR department or something, and that HR department won't see the need or the value in that. And so, there's people offering these courses out there, but yeah, no one's really using

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

them. I think the resources are low, especially people don't realize how little resources from the larger collection of funds for LGBTQPIA people, not very much of that goes to the T. It's like a dollar for every hundred or something like that.

Sarah: Yeah, it's like, for all the money that is raised for LGBTQPIA+ charities overall, if we were to lump all that together, I believe the statistic that is 1% or less actually goes specifically to transgender-related work, advocacy, charities etc.

Shohreh: So yeah, it's really important to go to those organizations specifically and make sure that we're supporting those. And I'll definitely link to the TENT website and those resources in the show notes so people have access to those.

Sarah: Thank you.

[Music plays]

Shohreh: Welcome to our Superfit Hero Wellness Tip of the Week featuring trainers and coaches from Superfit Hero's Body Positive Fitness Finder. Let's listen to what wisdom is being shared with us today.

Melanie Camellia: Hey heroes, my name is Melanie Camellia. I'm a yoga teacher in the D.C. metro area. My top wellness tip is to balance your holistic budget, and do it every day. For me, this practice looks like making a list of all of my resources. That might be money, it might be time, it might be my physical resources, like strength or stamina. It might be mental resources—a sense of happiness or groundedness that day. It might be social resources outside of myself.

I'm going to look at that list and see where I have an over-abundance. The things that I have a little extra of that day that I could spend to meet some of my wellness needs, and goals, and desires. And then I'm gonna make that list. What are those needs and desires today? It's gonna change day-to-day, that's why it's a daily practice.

I'm gonna see how I can use those over-abundant resources to start filling in those gaps. So, rather than setting a goal of, say, running every day or

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

doing something in particular three times a week, I'm going to take this daily accounting, move away from setting those strict wellness goals, and start honoring change and adaptivity by making this my daily accounting practice.

This always helps me remain grateful for what I already have. It helps me meet my needs more mindfully and with a greater sense of overall balance and well-being without feeling like I'm contributing to my own sense of lack in any one area. I get to make choices. Thanks.

[Music plays]

Shohreh: I hope you enjoyed this week's wellness tip. You can find out more information about the dozens of amazing trainers and coaches included in Superfit Hero's Body Positive Fitness Finder at www.superfithero.com. And don't forget to use the series code CHANGEMAKER for 15% off your first purchase. And now, let's get back to the show.

So, I want to shift to talking about health and wellness. Obviously this is a health and wellness podcast. So, let's talk about some of the biggest current health and wellness barriers for the trans community specifically, for sure, and we can also talk about barriers for the queer community more generally if you'd like.

Sarah: Awesome.

Rocky: This is a question that I've had to be answering at all different kinds of levels and all different kinds of conversations, especially since I started in leadership. I created a vector map [laughs], and I try to share that with people as much as I can to see what they wanna add to it so that we can kinda do a needs assessment. But those barriers are so plentiful.

The main barrier is that people are too busy fighting for their own justice and their own basic human rights that they can't even focus on these other things people talk about, like wellness activities and health behaviors that are popular.

But the other thing is, the healthcare access is really poor. Even if that was fixed, it would be a huge improvement. The number one thing I'm seeing is

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

people denying gender-affirming services to people. And that is definitely happening in Texas. I know it's happening all over the nation. We've been to national conferences, hear people reporting this all over the country. America is way behind on the way that it cares for its transgender citizens, and it's a lot of hoops.

Number one is the denial of claims to cover simple procedures that everyone usually gets as part of a package deal. So let's say you need a hysterectomy, and a top surgery, and hormone therapy. Well, you could probably get the hormone therapy. You could probably get the top surgery, but you might pay out of pocket for it, which is our story. Because if you try to go through your healthcare provider, they would tell you that you need to change a number of things on your personal documents—that costs money. They might still deny it once you get all of those documents changed to the right gender

Sarah: Your name change, your gender marker change, your social security card, your passport, your ID.

Rocky: Yeah, and that costs a lot of money, in addition to having the procedures or having the hormones, in addition to paying to heal somewhere because there's no center for you to heal from any kind of gender-affirming surgery you may have. Those are just regular cisgender based systems based on non-trans specific services. There's no services to help people connect to the correct insurance to make sure they can get their stuff covered. So it's really people choosing their own path, which equals a lot of different answers on how you might go from point A to point B, whatever your goal may be for your transition care.

There's economic barriers that exist. People are homeless; they're getting kicked out of their homes, especially very young people getting kicked out of their homes the moment they start to talk about these things. They are getting fired from their jobs the moment they come out, so they may lose insurance coverage or they just lose money. There's barriers that exist in just going into facilities. So, you go into a gym and there's only two options for bathrooms. There's not a family restroom, there's not a single stall restroom, there's not a single shower facility. So you have to pick a box essentially, and go into that.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

And we've talked about this in all kinds of programs, the barriers that exist, and no one really has like a perfect answer to getting over these. A big part seems to be collecting the data that shows the need, so that the resources flow. But again, the other barrier I see is that people are largely not coming out in public. So they're not wanting to admit that they are trans, for fear based or because they wanna be more private about it. So how can you help a community that you don't know exists, essentially, is another major barrier.

Shohreh: Yeah, and of course that fear is extremely valid in a society that is so stigmatizing against trans people.

Rocky: Mmm. Yeah, exactly. And it doesn't help that we have like, you know, an administration and even here in Texas, a legislation that is 100% trying to go after trans people with false statements and getting people to believe that trans people are predators. That's not the case. Trans people are not bad people. Trans people are everyday people. You might not even know you know trans people, that's how many trans people there are. It's hard to describe this to people, but that's a big part of the work in education is dismantling these false things that are said by really powerful people, when we're just a small group of people trying to survive.

Shohreh: Yeah, and I think it's important to call back here to what you said earlier about how there's no singular trans experience because if we even, let's say just look at healthcare. If we look at it from an intersectional perspective, Rocky, you're a black trans man, so you're gonna deal with additional and different healthcare barriers than say a white trans man. And a fat trans person is gonna deal with different barriers, particularly considering medical fatphobia, than a thin trans person. So, there's all of these other pieces that come into it, outside of just the fact that being trans alone is a marginalized and stigmatized group.

Rocky: I totally agree. I feel like my whole life has been me trying to convince doctors. I think that's something that Sarah and I actually share. We find a lot of similarities in our experiences with trying to get healthcare, trying to be well, you know, people not believing what we have to say.

Redefining Health & Wellness #40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

When I was 19 I said, “I want to have my uterus removed. I don’t need it, I don’t want it, you can yeet it as far as you want [laughter]. I also would like you to flatten my chest.” And this was at a university; they just acted like they didn’t know what I was talking about. Like I’m a student, I know that something’s off, I’m trying to find the information that’s out there, but people are telling me they don’t know what I’m talking about. Or they want to say, “Try losing some weight and maybe that’ll make you feel better in your body. Maybe flatten your chest by losing weight.” It’s like, that’s not what I’m asking for, what are you even talking about? Like why are you bringing these up? What I am asking for, you can’t even give me. And people not believing me or not even having the right resources and info to give me.

It’s just really harmful. And instead of admitting you don’t know what you’re talking about, you know, and sending me to somebody that does...you know, we run into that with Sarah’s stuff too. We were talking about this as family planning.

Sarah: Oh yeah.

Rocky: We’re a special kind of family; we need a special kind of planning you know, kind of thing. And we were on YouTube, which is the worst place to try to look for really direct information. You can kind of find it, but you know, we’re on YouTube trying to find other couples like us, or just online trying to find anybody who is doing this successfully here in town. And it’s impossible to find somebody who is just like super competent with what we wanna do.

Sarah: There’s so many barriers, like you said Shohreh, to healthcare, specifically for the trans community and all those intersections. And then, as you said, as we’ve all mentioned too, just the greater LGBTQPIA+ community, and women. There’s so many barriers to good, safe, competent health and wellness care, unfortunately, it seems for so many groups. And it’s just, yeah, as your intersectionality continues to intersect with more and more places, it just gets harder, and harder, and harder.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

And that's something that Rocky and I both work really hard to try to support businesses, organizations, groups, that are actually doing that work for the most marginalized of those people.

Shohreh: Yeah, and you know, with the barriers we just talked about, it's important for people to remember too, like, these are like the bare minimum of what people need to survive, right? We're not even talking about next level of moving into thriving. And—

Sarah: Absolutely.

Shohreh: you think about, we have this health and wellness culture, this diet culture, especially in the United States, that defines itself by these very privileged things, like your ability to work out a certain amount of times and have access to that, and eat organic whatever food, and things like that. And it's like only a small percentage of people have the privilege where *those* can be the things that they're even worrying about, and yet people act like those are the only options to be healthy and this is the only way to define health. And that's really fucked up when you start to look at these different communities.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely.

Rocky: And that's why people are so, you know, disengaged from it, I think.

Sarah: People in the marginalized groups especially.

Rocky: Yeah, they're just like, I don't wanna hear any of it, you know, those yoga ads are going right over their heads. You can only buy what foods you can buy. You can only move as much as you can do. And I think it's such an important thing to have people speaking out more about what their journey looks like. And I love that.

And that's why we've tried to share a lot of our experiences too, because I wouldn't say I'm like the healthiest person in the world. I really try, but I've lived a really hard life.

Sarah: We live in a place too where there's an abundance of resources, to a degree, but at the same time we still live in the state of Texas where, like

Redefining Health & Wellness #40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

Rocky said, there's a lot of things working against the trans community. But not only the trans community. That's something that we face as a family.

For example, if something isn't an issue because Rocky is a black, trans man, well, then something's an issue because I'm a fat, queer woman, [laughs] or vice versa. There's so many little overlaps, and when you are in a place...like Austin is a place where there's a lot of resources, and Rocky and I do have a certain level of privilege because of who we know, and we have educational privilege. We have support, like family support. We have businesses. We have a lot of privilege—I have extreme white privilege—that allows us to have access to a lot of other resources.

But at the same time, still, yeah, no matter who you are, if you're living in a place that is actively trying to push so hard against the organizations, and businesses, and groups that are trying to do the right thing, it makes that squeeze even harder.

Rocky and I are so lucky that we are in a place of privilege, and that's why we work really hard to help spread some of that love in our communities. But at the same time, it's challenging and it's frustrating when, you know, you see other people that are as privileged or more privileged than you and they're really trying to do the right thing, but they're in a place where they're not allowed to. They're in a place where, you know, they're not given financial incentives to treat people better or treat their employees better. They're not given any support from the larger infrastructure that is our state, much less our country. That's a hard squeeze, like we said.

But at the same time, people are still out here doing the work, and that's what's really amazing and inspiring. There's so many people doing the work, and as long as everybody keeps doing it, we will succeed; we will rise to the top. But it's hard. It's a lot of keeping each other motivated, I think. And a lot of those of us that are privileged, trying to give people that don't have those same privileges a break because they're fucking exhausted.

We're all tired, but they're really tired. Again, I will say, black trans women are really fucking tired you guys [laughs].

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

Shohreh: I think that's a great segue into asking, for the cis allies out here wondering how they can best help the trans community and be most effective with their advocacy, do either of you have thoughts on that?

Sarah: My first thought, give money. And when I say "give money," I mean give your time, and money, and resources to organizations, but give money to people you know. I see people all the time that are posting their Venmo handles or their Cash App or whatever. Like, there is nothing that says that you have to give a donation that you can write off on your taxes, and that's what's the best way to support your community.

Sometimes, if you have a friend and she posts her Cash App and she needs a little bit of help, send her 20 bucks. Send her 10, send her five. At the end of the day, give money. I mean, if you can. And I know that that's not something that everybody has the privilege to do. But when you can, do it.

Rocky: Yeah, I always say a phrase that I love which is, figuring out ways to weaponize your privilege. So things that I think everyday people can do are challenge the environment they're in and see how it can be more inclusive. How many bathroom options are there? Is that place a place where a trans person could potentially work and not feel threatened by going to the restroom? Make sure that you understand what language is okay to use and stay up to date with that and require that of your management, and your staff, and your language in your applications.

These are things that the cisgender community has 100% control over. Trans people aren't in all positions of management. Most likely the cisgender people have the advantage and the numbers here, which means they have the control over the systems and policies that are kind of holding trans people back from the thriving component—the path to thriving.

A big path to thriving is letting trans people be successful and fend for themselves and go through with the things that they want to achieve in life. And that's not always based on transition related things. It is, like Sarah said, 20 or 30 bucks here and there to keep them going while they're living in a system of oppression.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

Black trans women specifically are the ones that I see often saying that they're collecting money for each other or for themselves.

Sarah:

And as far as like, like Rocky was kind of touching on too, like your workplace, yeah, if you're a cis person, a white person, a person of privilege in your workplace, and you notice that the language on your intake forms. or your HR paperwork. or whatever, you notice that that stuff is not inclusive language to the trans community—which, by the way, the trans community, just to throw this in there, is not just trans men and trans women, it's also our non-binary and gender non-conforming trans siblings—but if you notice that that language is not affirming, it's not supportive, it's not inclusive, the easy thing you can do that doesn't require money and doesn't even require that much time is that you can write in and take meetings with the people that are above you and say, "Hey, our language isn't inclusive, we need to change these things." Those are little ways.

Like Rocky said, the bathroom stuff, if you notice that there's only a couple of bathrooms and they're very gendered, bring that up. Bring that up with your company, with your boss, with your coworkers, and be like, "Hey, what can we do to just make this more inclusive?" Because instead of waiting for there to be an issue or an instance where somebody is hurt, or somebody is harmed, or somebody is a victim of discrimination, much less violence, don't wait for that to happen.

Be the person at your job that's like, you know what, I wanted our bathrooms to be more inclusive, I wanted our language on our intake forms to be better, so myself and my coworkers got together and we made sure that we could make that change. I think those are definitely good ways to help support the trans community in a way that really costs you nothing.

Shohreh:

There is definitely a misconception that in order to support marginalized folk, it requires you to have all the money, all the time, all the things -

Sarah:

Absolutely.

Shohreh:

And the reality is that, like you said, it doesn't have to be something huge, and there's so much power in small things that add up over time. Like just

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

calling in a friend for using the wrong language. The \$5, \$10, \$20 you mentioned, people always think like, “Oh, well, I don’t wanna give \$5 because how can that possibly help them.” The reality is, you don’t know a person’s situation, that could for sure really help them, and even if it isn’t a huge financial help to them, just knowing that you support them, that you care about them, *that’s* huge.

Sarah:

Absolutely, absolutely. I think that’s something that Rocky and I both feel very passionate about. We were both raised, for significant portions of our lives, by our grandmothers, and they were both extremely generous people in their communities. They were the kind of people that if you came to their house, you needed clothes, you needed food, they would have food ready for you at their table. They would have clothes ready for you. They would give you the clothes off their back if you needed it.

And I think that’s just something that no matter who you are, no matter what community you’re in or not in, that’s something that we can all share. We all need a little bit of a pick-me-up sometimes, and sometimes you can’t afford to give somebody a lot of money. Our grandmothers were both extremely poor for most of their lives. But they gave what they had, and sometimes what they had was just the love that they had to give. Sometimes they just opened their home or picked up the phone and had a conversation with somebody.

And we really try to live our lives in the same way, as much as we can, and as much as we can in the 21st century, being in the times that we’re in. But just like you said Shohreh, letting yourself be able to just give somebody a little bit of love, just a little word of encouragement or a pat on the back. And if that looks like doing a favor for them or giving them a couple of bucks, great. But if that also just looks like being on the phone with them, telling them that they’re important, and their life matters, and their struggle is not in vain, and the challenges they’re experiencing are real and valid, those things are so important. The mental health and the emotional health, Rocky and I feel very strongly about, those things are equally as important as your physical health and safety.

Shohreh:

Yeah, that’s so true, and especially I’m thinking now, too, with the coronavirus and everybody being at home, social health, people are really

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

realizing in this moment how big a part of their health that is. And how difficult it is to not be in contact with your community. And everyone is working on finding creative ways to stay in touch and spend time with the people that they love because that's an area of health that I think gets taken for granted. People don't realize how much of their health and happiness comes from being with their communities. So, that's not something that people should assume doesn't matter, because it does.

Rocky:

Yeah, it really does and now they can, I think, people can take time to really connect into and empathize with the absolute isolation that sometimes comes with being a member of these communities that people are still struggling to understand. And sometimes even removing from their family and friend and social groups. It's so, so important to really tap into that and realize how this looks when we're not in a quarantine for other people, and how you can be a part of bridging the gap for them.

Sometimes it's something simple like offering space, capacity building, things like that, that so many people have time for, that the community just doesn't. It's so lovely when I see examples of this, that I just wanna see more. I think that's what we need is more talk, more solutions, and more of this—more conversations like this, I think, are really useful.

Shohreh:

Yeah, absolutely.

So, for our final question, which I'd love for both of you to answer, I want to know how each of you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life.

Sarah:

I appreciate you asking that, first of all, because "at this moment" is a really good qualifier. I'm kind of in my own little transitional place of figuring out what's going on with some health stuff that I'm dealing with. I've had some kind of chronic issues going on for most of my adult life, and I'm working on figuring those out with my doctor, and with my husband, and with my wellness team, my support team.

But also, because of the state that the world is in right now, a lot of the kind of physical things I was doing, like actually having the privilege to go in and see my doctor and get bloodwork, and go in and see my therapist

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

regularly, and stuff like that, some of those things have kind of had to be put on hold.

Rocky and I, we're talking about expanding our family, possibly in the next couple of years, and we're looking at all of our options for that. And so, before this pandemic started, that was one of my main health goals, was like "Okay, if we want to try to think about a pregnancy in the next couple of years, what's that going to look like? What do I need to do for myself? What do we need to do as a family to get ourselves ready for that marathon and that lifestyle change?"

Now that things are where they're at, it's still definitely on our minds, but our priorities have shifted some. Now I would say that, for me, my emotional and mental health have definitely kind of taken more of a priority right now. I am somebody that has a past history of some disordered eating. I have been, again, very privileged that I've had a lot of help and support in overcoming a lot of that, but it's a really triggering time right now. Being in a place where there's food insecurity, whether that's real or perceived, it's still something that's going on for a lot of us.

So, you know, for me, it's just a lot about what can I do to just be present in this moment. Like we said earlier, just kind of live moment to moment, live day to day, and focus on what needs to happen today while still really being true to all the hard work that I've done up to this point.

Shohreh: Rocky, how about you?

Rocky: Health and wellness for myself is a mixed bag. It kind of feels the same because I always feel like I'm in a state of emergency [laughs] because of the things that I work on. But personally, I think it's staying on top of the things that have kept me sane to this point. So it's the stuff that's helped me get through my transition, and my life thus far. I try to stay on top of meditating. I now teach a virtual class every week that is just like stuff that I've learned strength training-wise to help me get through my journey as a trans person.

I am trying to focus on family and making sure that I'm keeping the house in such a way that feels nesty, so that we feel comfortable here, that's very big for me. A huge part though, I think for me, is like the mental aspect of

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

it. I'm constantly in the state of community caring and that means that I feel like this overwhelming need to also make sure that people that I know wouldn't otherwise have this information have it and have correct and up to date things.

So that, kind of, even though it seems hectic sometimes, especially in quarantine, is a huge thing on my list. I'm working on all kinds of random stuff, making sure that people have access to workouts, that's huge for me. Making sure that my community understands the importance of data. So, for instance, I'm having all these conversations about HIV awareness testing day for the trans community is coming up. So I have info on that and how people can get tested and how that's so important, and that's important to me because I'm somebody that also benefits from this stuff. So I'm mapping a lot of that, and using this down time to do that. There's also this big talk about us queering the census.

For me, my health and wellness has to be on the pillars of community care, like checking in with myself and checking in with my family. Checking in with my wife and what we're doing here. It's so exciting because we're just gonna like put out as much content as we can on our YouTube channel that we think is helpful. That's what we always do on our Facebook and stuff, we'll just put out a blast of like, here's how you can help, here's who you can help, and that makes me always feel like mental health-wise, like so, so complete inside.

Shohreh: I love that. Well, y'all are like the most adorable couple, and I'm obsessed with you.

Sarah: You stop it! You stop it!

Shohreh: No, I'm not gonna stop it! So thank you for sharing your afternoon with me, your quarantine time with me, and how can people find you so that they can see more of you in their lives as well?

Sarah: Oh yes, please find us, please see more of us! We'd love to see more of you! You can find us at SwirlBabyTV, that is our YouTube channel. That is SwirlBabyTV, all one word. And then we're also on Instagram @swirlbabytv. So, yeah, definitely check us out there.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

We have our website too, which is...honey?

Rocky: Swirlbabytv.com. But we are updating that right now, so it's best to find us on YouTube. We're gonna try to put some stuff out so people can meet us.

Sarah: Yeah, we'll have a big YouTube blast of videos coming for you guys, probably in the next week.

Shohreh: Perfect, I will link to all of that in the show notes. I'll make sure that it's available for people. This has been a blast, this has been one of my favorite interviews ever, so after the pandemic -

Sarah: Oh stop!

Shohreh: Can we like maybe hang out and have a fun time -

Sarah: Yes, please.

Shohreh: Like outside of a closet, preferably.

Sarah: I can't promise that Shohreh, but sure [laughter]. We're starting to like it! It's cozy in here!

Rocky: Thank you so much, we had a great time.

Sarah: Thank you, you are just lovely and wonderful, thank you for all that you do for our communities and just for being a bright ray of sunshine, especially right now in this kind of dark and stormy time.

[Music plays]

Shohreh: Thank you so much!

And that's our show for today. I appreciate you listening to and supporting the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, it would mean so much to me if you would subscribe and leave a review with your podcast provider of choice. It will really help other people who might benefit from the podcast to find it more easily.

I also love chatting with listeners, so feel free to screenshot from your podcast player, post on social media, and tag me. And if you're looking for

Redefining Health & Wellness

#40

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Rocky Lane & Sarah Swofford

more information on what I'm all about and how to work with me, head on over to shohrehdavoodi.com. I hope to see you for the next episode.