

Redefining Health & Wellness

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Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Carolina Guízar

Shohreh Davoodi: Welcome to episode number 41 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. Today's interview is with Carolina Guízar, a registered dietitian based in New York City. Carolina noticed a lack of Latinx voices in the intuitive eating space and worked with a colleague to develop an intuitive eating and body image course specifically for Latinos. We discussed intuitive eating barriers and considerations for people in Latinx communities, the ways in which body image pressures differ from the ones many white people experience, and more.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/41. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/41.

This episode is part of the Health and 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.

And with that, let's catch up with Carolina.

[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

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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.

Carolina, I am so excited to have you on the podcast today. Thank you for making time to be here, especially amongst the general life uncertainty that is happening out in the world right now [laughs].

Carolina Guízar: Thank you for having me. I am basically hunkered down in my apartment for the next several weeks, and this is actually a nice, welcome distraction from whatever is going on outside my house.

Shohreh: Yeah, I mean the one nice thing about the podcast is that we get to continue to talk and connect, and we don't have to be physically in the same space as each other.

Carolina: [Laughs] That's true. It's very sanitary in that sense.

Shohreh: Yes, yes it is. So we're following all the guidelines, in case anyone is wondering. [Laughter]

But yeah, so why don't we first just start by having you tell me a little bit more about you, and about your journey to becoming a registered dietitian, and then specifically what led you to creating the Latinx Health Collective.

Carolina: Very simply put, I think one of the reasons I became a dietitian was to help people. That's always been something I wanted to do in a career. At first I thought I wanted to be a doctor—that was way too intense for me. And I sort of just stumbled on nutrition. And interestingly, I stumbled on nutrition in a way that was fairly disordered. It started out as a journey towards finding things I was sensitive to, because I was having these really interesting sneezing fits that would happen after I would eat.

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And they would happen like once in a while, and then they started happening every day, and then they started happening after every meal. And a friend of mine was like starting to get into wellness culture. This was about, I want to say 2008, and so we're thinking, like, Michael Pollan is around back then -

Shohreh: Oh yeah.

Carolina: And this friend of mine who was into wellness culture was like, "Well, have you ever kept a food diary to see if you can find the source of your sneezing?" And this wasn't, like, just a couple of sneezes, it was like a 10-minute-long sneeze fest.

Shohreh: Wow!

Carolina: Yeah, it was intense! And it turned out that the one common thing was gluten in all the meals. And I went down this path of like cutting it out, and the sneezing stopped, which was really weird. But that was sort of the beginning of the rabbit hole of me falling into wellness culture. It started with that, then the raw foods diet, and then that led me to Paleo diet. And it was just the beginning of a very disordered relationship with food for what wasn't a long time.

What really messed me up was the food rules that I developed and the food fears that I developed around things. For a long time, I had a very fractured relationship, particularly with gluten, because I tied it back to these sneezing fits. And it wasn't until the last couple of years that I started to sort of more freely eat things like gluten and dairy—things that Paleo culture had taught me were bad.

That was how I got into dietetics. It was like, I literally, I woke up one day and I said, "I wanna be a nutritionist. I wanna be a dietitian." And I Googled "nutrition program NYC," NYU popped up, and I was like, "I wanna do this!" [laughs]. And that was a Thursday. The application deadline was on the Sunday—

Shohreh: Oh my gosh!

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- Carolina:** —and by Sunday I had my transcripts overnighted, letters of recommendation, an essay, and that was it. I sort of have that...a bit of an impulsive personality that way [laughs], but it worked out in this case.
- Shohreh:** Yeah, you committed to that real fast!
- Carolina:** Yeah and it was something, I don't know, it's like this felt sense. It's intuition. If something feels right for you...not that dietetics is an easy path, but yeah, it just, I have that intuition inside of me that's like pretty well-formed. And it's spot on when it tells me that something is either right or wrong for me.
- Shohreh:** Right, and at that time you probably couldn't have realized, like, ultimately where you would end up, since you were coming to it from such a diet and wellness culture kind of place. And then now you're like on the completely other side of the spectrum.
- Carolina:** You're 100% right. I mean, I had McDonald's the other night [laughs], and oh my god, I'm on this double cheeseburger kick right now. And it was one of my favorite things growing up.
- Growing up we had access to all sorts of foods. Not a lot of candy or "junk food" in the house because that wasn't really part of the foods that my parents brought into the house. My parents are from Mexico, and it's not that they thought they were bad for us, it just wasn't food that was part of our culture, so it wasn't really there.
- But we lived in the suburbs in the '80s and '90s, so my brothers and I played a lot of sports. And so we had access to a lot of fast foods like pizza and McDonald's, and my parents never shamed us for eating those things. So I have a lot of fond memories around those foods, and those are things I still gravitate towards now.
- And, you know, for years I was scared of eating them. And now I'm just much more casual about my relationship towards them. And I'm able to be like, "Wow, I have a really intense craving for a cheeseburger right now," and there's a McDonald's across the street from my apartment and I just

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pop in and grab one and that's it. There's no mulling over it, like it would have been maybe a few years ago.

Shohreh: Yeah, and that fondness too, that brought back memories for me because that was very much the case in my family as well where at home we ate a lot of traditional Persian foods. And we ate other stuff too because my mom was the one doing the cooking, and my mom is white.

But my parents tended to work late, especially my dad because he's a doctor, and so at least one night a week we would probably have something fast food, like Taco Bell, McDonald's. And then every single Sunday we would have it after we went to Sunday school. Like, we would go out as a family after and we would grab some fast food, because then we had to go back and do Farsi lessons 'cause that was my childhood [laughs]. And my parents being like "Here, you need to learn Farsi" and, you know, it being taught to us by this sweet elderly woman who English was her second language and she had no idea how to teach Farsi to people where English was their first language. So let's just say that my Farsi is very bad [laughter].

But, definitely yeah, I had years and years where I didn't think anything about eating fast food. And then similar to you, like, reached a point where I got really into "clean eating" and I was like "all fast food is bad, I can't eat it" and whatever, and then have worked my way back.

Carolina: Sorry for the digression [laughs]. I think I'm hungry [laughter].

Shohreh: Aren't we all? It is lunch time right now, so that's fair [laughter]. So now, like you said, you're at a point where you can eat fast food and you can feel good about it, and you're working on intuitive eating with clients. So was there something specific that kind of made you flip that switch and start going in the direction of intuitive eating, Health At Every Size?

Carolina: Yeah, it was a couple different things. So, the 2016 election, I think I was just disgusted, appalled, not entirely surprised by the racism, the misogyny that was in the election. The xenophobia. My parents were undocumented when they came to this country. So as somebody who is the daughter of

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formerly undocumented immigrants, there definitely is this sense of fear. Even though they're "safe," I don't know. Your mind goes to really dark places sometimes.

Like I was born here, so I'm technically an anchor baby. Could that be taken away from me under some extreme circumstances that I think are unlikely, but you never really know anymore. Again, your mind kind of goes to dark places. So I think the election was a big turning point for me. It was sort of a wake-up call.

I talk about this a lot. I have a lot of privilege in my life. I'm a fairly light-skinned Latina; I have like a mixed heritage. So my parents are both from Mexico. My mom's side of the family is a little bit more indigenous than my dad's side of the family, but he has some indigenous roots. And just the way that I look, I don't have a lot of indigenous features. And I think that has given me a lot of passes in life. Like I can just move through this world a little bit more easier than somebody else would. I'm also in a thinner body, so that also comes into play.

So I think it was just this sort of waking up to a lot of the injustices that are out there. And that speaks to my privilege that I can kind of shut myself off from that. And the election itself was a big wake-up call for me. And I think the seed started to get planted of, "Aright, there's things out there that are bigger than me."

And at that time, I was probably a year and a half into my private practice. And it was going really well. I was very busy. And I was focused almost exclusively on weight loss, and at that point, I think I had started to see some clients like longer term. And kind of going into 2017, a lot of them started to plateau in their weight loss and even regain.

And I didn't really know how to explain that to them. And I wasn't the type of dietitian who was very, very strict.

Shohreh: Yeah, so it was more of a "balanced" type approach, quote, unquote.

Carolina: A "balanced diet" diet, you know [laughter]. Yeah. And people would ask me, "I've stopped losing weight, should I cut more calories?" And I just was

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like, “No!” Like any more, and this, /even knew, that’s unsustainable. No way.

And yeah, I think just having a combination of the election, the Me Too Movement, these clients that I was seeing that were plateauing and regaining and I didn’t know how to explain it, and just this sense of like, are we putting such an emphasis on bodies and looks, and what is this actually doing for us long-term? Is this actually helping people feel better about themselves? Because what I was seeing and what I was feeling in my own body, was “I’m not actually helping people.” This is a distraction from something deeper. And it took me a while to sort of tune into that.

Shohreh: Yeah, I actually think that was something that happened for a lot of people. Maybe not in the specific context of dietetics, but the year 2016 comes around, most of us are like, “Oh, Trump probably won’t be elected. This is a joke,” and then were shocked, dismayed, whatever feelings you were feeling.

And so many of us suddenly became overnight aware of really important social justice issues that maybe we didn’t have to worry about before. And maybe we had certain areas that we had cared about and were important to us, but we didn’t see the bigger picture. So I definitely can relate to kind of that experience.

And then also, I’m similar to you in that in many contexts I’m white-passing, and that, of course, awards a certain amount of privilege out in the world. Or I joke that I’m white-passing like six months of the year, because in Texas we get a lot of sun [laughter]. I’m always like, “Ah ha! People can tell I’m not white!” [laughter]

Carolina: Like, come winter...

Shohreh: Exactly. Of course that awards certain privileges, and then on my end, like I am actually mixed and that makes it even weirder where you’re like, “Okay, am I Persian enough, am I white enough?” Sometimes you pass, sometimes you don’t. Like I definitely don’t pass on paper.

Carolina: Nope [laughs].

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Shohreh: But it definitely did give some passes on social justice before where now I'm so much more channeled into it. It's become such a big part of not just my business, but my personal life, and who I'm looking out for, and where I'm trying to help and everything like that.

And I think you're right—if you are in dietetics, if you're in this wellness space in general and your eyes were opened to all these social justice issues, I think it's really hard to not be on the intuitive eating, HAES side of things. Because to do so is just like major cognitive dissonance.

Carolina: Oh, it hurt my brain [laughs] thinking about some of these things. Because also, this path is not easy. Intuitive eating, Health At Every Size, is a difficult path to go down, because so many times you feel really powerless or hopeless about certain situations. Or you have clients that are just really struggling because of body oppression and weight discrimination, weight stigma. And, you know, it's not easy, but it's one of those things, you cannot unsee it once you've seen it.

Sometimes I've had to kind of become a hermit and take a little bit of time out from things like Instagram and things like that. But there's no turning away from it now that I have seen what I have seen. And I feel a sense of, I can't turn away from this stuff because there are other people out there struggling way more than I am. I have a ton of privilege in my life, and I need to be using that to advocate for people who can't advocate for themselves.

Shohreh: So I know as you kind of made this change and going into intuitive eating and HAES, you kind of reassessed your business and everything like that. And eventually that led you to creating the Latinx Health Collective and the intuitive eating course that you've created specifically for Latinx individuals. So, just talk to me a little bit about what made you decide you wanted to serve that community specifically.

Carolina: Yeah. 2018 was when I officially made the transition to intuitive eating, Health At Every Size, and I struggled a long time to find my footing because I was trying to do more work on Instagram and I was just struggling with my message. And at the time I was doing a lot of restaurant

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reviews, which is super privileged [laughs] in and of itself, because a lot of my clients that I see in person, they live in Manhattan. They live around Manhattan. They eat out a lot. There's not a lot of people that do a lot of cooking here.

And so, I had this account that was geared towards restaurants and what was actually yummy to eat there. And I remember, Maria Paredes, who is @with_this_body on Instagram, had posted about donuts on her Instagram. And she was like, if you are a person who is posting about intuitive eating and Health At Every Size and all you're talking about is donuts, you're missing the message.

And I had literally just posted a picture of a donut that day [laughter] and it was like, fuck! [laughter] I am missing the message here! And so I just had to kind of pause and take a step back and be like, "Well, what is it that I'm doing with this?"

And I had a lot of conversations with some people. And I think what's really interesting about people's journey's towards intuitive eating is that you have to baby step this stuff. It has to start with challenging your own beliefs, learning new beliefs. Then you learn skills around counseling in intuitive eating and body image. Then, you know, you're learning the science at the same time. And *then* you get to the social justice stuff, because it is a lot to take in. And I've been in that space and I'm getting much more comfortable around my messaging.

But I think it sort of dawned at me, at some point I realized, wow, most of the people in this space are thin. I mean, I am thin too. Most of them are white. I am white-passing, but I am not white. I've never felt white. My experience is very much Mexican. I spoke Spanish in my house, ate beans and rice and cheese every day, and lots of tortillas.

Shohreh: You're making me hungry again!

Carolina: I know, sorry [laughter]. I have a quesadilla I'm gonna make later. So, I realized that nobody was talking to Latinos. And I think you can be a white practitioner and teach or guide someone through their intuitive eating

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journey who is not white, but I think there's certain subtleties that people miss out on, or maybe things that the client might not be comfortable bringing up with somebody who had a different sort of upbringing. Or the practitioner might not know how to navigate those conversations.

I had this light bulb moment, and I was like "Well, I'm Latina. Like why I don't talk about intuitive eating in the context of being a first-generation Latin American in this country?" And specifically Mexican American. And that was the idea for my new account. So my previous account was @eathority and I really, really liked the name. And I love puns. So, you know, my weight loss days I was the authority on eating. So I was the "eathority." And then as I transitioned to intuitive eating, I was like "No, you're actually your own 'eathority,' and I'm just here to sort of like guide you through that."

Shohreh: Yeah.

Carolina: Yeah, cause I was like, I don't wanna lose this name. And then I was like, "Wait! I don't have to." And for this new account I became @la_eathority. So I think that sort of -

Shohreh: Yeah.

Carolina: Everyone says L.A. eathority, but it's not. It's @la_eathority. And I think that sort of bridges all of this together. Bridges together my American upbringing. I threw in a little bit of spice for the Mexican side of the name. And that's where I am now, at least in an online space.

In person I still see people with different backgrounds, I see people in person, I see people virtually. But where I'm focusing my attention online is to bring that message to Latin Americans in this country, because there's a whole lot of BS out there about what bodies should look like, what eating should look like, and it's really confusing and harming people.

Shohreh: Yeah and I wanna dive into all of that.

[Music plays]

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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.

Meg Hopkins:

Hi! My name is Meg Hopkins. I am a coach in New York City with the Thrive Together Movement. And my wellness tip is when you're having a real good day, you're feeling real good about yourself, make a list of everything you appreciate about yourself. Every little thing. Put it up somewhere that you pass by in your house every single day, so that when you're having maybe not so great a day, you can pass by it, look at it, and be like, "Oh yeah—I'm great!"

I know, personally, I struggle with mental health, and I tend to have some bad days where I'm thinking, "I'm not doing so well in life," and this has really helped me with my mental health. Remind myself that there are definitely things to appreciate about myself, and I should go outside with my head held high.

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, in episode 21, I talked to Alejandra Spector about the term 'Latinx' and how the Latinx community is complex and it's not a monolith. So I just want to remind people of that since we'll be using that term for simplicity here, but obviously that encompasses many different cultures, and countries, and people.

Carolina:

Languages.

Shohreh:

Exactly, so I don't want to feed into the idea that everybody is the same, but that being said, I know that you've seen some similarities in Latinx communities in general. So, why don't we first talk about some of the ways in which you've noticed that intuitive eating can look different for people in Latinx communities. And maybe some of the considerations that might get

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overlooked by white practitioners or practitioners who just aren't Latinx themselves.

Carolina: Intuitive eating is gonna look different for every person, right? And a lot is going to depend on their resources, their time, their food upbringing, whatever they heard about bodies growing up. So it's hard to say, you know, "It will look like this in Latinx communities" because it's so different. But if I were to generalize, I think about principles of intuitive eating. And the one that is hard, I think for everybody, but in particular for Latinos is rejecting the diet mentality.

I was shielded a lot from this growing up, but I grew up around other people who were in diet culture, and I still hear it now as an adult [laughs]. But very much "this is good, this is bad." There's a lot of fearmongering around a lot of cultural foods. So things like rice, tortillas, even beans, you know, some people have some hesitation about eating those.

Shohreh: The lectin crew out there [laughs].

Carolina: Yeah, it's like—god, it's so sad [laughter].

Shohreh: I know!

Carolina: And dairy, there's a lot of fearmongering around dairy. So I think rejecting the diet mentality, the way I kind of think about it in my head is rejecting the diet mentality and the food police principles, they kind of live together for a lot of Latinos. So rejecting one means having to reject the other. And sometimes you don't know which to attack first [laughs] with somebody. So this is where you really have to individualize it.

But I think those are sort of the two hardest principles for Latinos. And then, depending on somebody's upbringing, if somebody grew up in a food insecure environment, I would say making peace with food is probably then the hardest principle. It depends on their current situation, their current economic situation. So are they food secure now? And let's assume they are.

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I do a lot of talking to that inner child [laughs]. And I have clients sort of talk to that scared part of them that experienced hunger or scarcity growing up. And to sort of reassure that part that hey, things are different now. We will always have access to foods. I will do my best to get you foods that you love. And I think talking to that scared part is really, really important for people to make progress towards making peace towards food.

Where it gets a little complicated is if the person is not food secure in the here and now. And so making peace with food looks like we just need you to have enough food. I don't care what that is. You just need calories, and sufficient amounts of them coming in.

Shohreh: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I know in your course too that you cover some specific barriers to intuitive eating, and so I wanted to cover some of those and see if there's anything specific that comes up for you. For instance, around religion or around political concerns like we were talking about earlier.

Carolina: There is a lot of mental health taboos. So, I remember, I'm like thinking back on my experience, like when I started seeing a therapist my dad was like, "What do you have to be unhappy about? You have everything you need." I remember being on the phone crying, being like, "This is why I'm in therapy!" [laughs]

Shohreh: Oh my god, my family is the same way. My mom will always be like, "Well, what did I do that was so bad that you need to go to therapy?" And I'm like, "Well, we could have a conversation about this, but..." [laughter]

Carolina: Well, and that's the thing. It's like I think so many people, you know, they come to this country because they want something better for their children, and that's well and good. You're still bringing on your emotional baggage—

Shohreh: Yeeeeeep.

Carolina: —into how you raise your children. And that's the thing. I think about—oof, this gets deep, like into historical trauma. If you think of generations of, especially for women, but generations of people who, at least on my side

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of the family, like a lot of violence where they grew up. Literal like gun fights and things like that. Like it was like the Wild West where my dad grew up. And so just being around lots of violence. No one talked about emotions. The only outlet was religion. That has oppressive qualities to it in a lot of senses. And this stuff gets passed on to the next generation.

So like my parents, love my parents, you guys did a great job [laughter], you also hit me with shoes and belts and that wasn't probably the best way to communicate your anger or frustration to me. And so, one of the wonderful things, I think, about being in this country is that we have access to, what I call like "white people things." [laughter] So like, things like therapy are socially acceptable here.

And we have an opportunity to do better than our parents did. And they were only doing the best that they could based on their experience, and they did better than their parents, so—

Shohreh: Yeah.

Carolina: —god, I'm scared about what happened 10 generations ago. But there's a lot of mental health taboos. And I think that actually makes the work a lot harder for some people because they're not in tune with emotions in their body. Those emotions have physical manifestations. And so their interoceptive awareness is not fully developed, and so it takes a lot of work.

And this is why intuitive eating is so hard. You start with one principle and you're bouncing to another principle the next week. It's just sort of a fluid process that has to be fluid because different things are going to come up for people at different moments, and you really just have to be flexible with that.

And for Latinos who may not have access to mental health services, the work is a little bit more challenging as a dietitian because they may not have that outlet or that awareness of what emotions are coming up. Or what to do with those emotions too, because I'm also not a therapist. So

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maybe I can help you process a teeny bit, but there's boundaries to my work too, so.

Shohreh: Yeah, and there's just so much there too. Like actually what you were saying about having a household where we don't talk about emotions, like that was very much my experience as well, but we had religion, right? My family was very religious growing up. I'm not currently, but like, that was kind of the outlet. And when you really kind of extrapolate that out and think about like, okay, so in a lot of cultures you turn to God, but you don't deal with the shit in your own life [laughter].

Carolina: Yeah.

Shohreh: 'Cause you're like, "God's got this," right? We have faith or whatever, and that's great for people who are religious and that works for them, that's wonderful. And also, you can still make room to work on yourself, and there are certain things that are within your own control and that you can improve.

And, I say this all the time, this idea that you can simultaneously love your parents and recognize that they did the best that they could and they had your best interests at heart, *and* realize that like, they fucked it up in some ways [laughter]. And like, of course they did. And now we wanna do better. And it's just like you said, like every generation, hopefully, we're breaking some of those cycles. We're realizing some of these things, so that everybody is getting healthier as we move along.

Carolina: Yeah. Well, and I think that speaks a lot to why a Health At Every Size model is important, because health is not just physical health. Health is spiritual, mental, emotional, and if we have these very rigid definitions for what health looks like, we're never gonna be healthy. Because there's so much more to it than just the physical body.

Shohreh: Yeah. And if we rely too heavily on any one area of health, because, you know, a big part of this podcast is we talk about all these different areas and how they intertwine. And this is kind of what I was saying about religion, right? If your spiritual component of your health is the biggest part

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and you rely on it for everything, then you may miss out in other areas like your emotional health, your mental health, and whatever it may be.

Carolina: Yeah.

Shohreh: So exploring all these different areas and how they contribute to your health is so important. And it's so different from the mainstream way of how we look at health, which is why I love Health At Every Size so much.

Carolina: It's very flexible, and that's my favorite part about it [laughs].

Shohreh: Yeah, it is very flexible. And I think it's so important that there are people in different communities doing that work, because like you said, while certainly I'm not Latinx, but I have worked with Latinx clients in the past and that may have worked for them, there are other people who really need to work with someone who looks like them or has had an experience like them for them to get the most out of it.

Everybody's different. And so the more practitioners that we have who are different body sizes, different skin colors, and everything else, the better everyone will be served, which is so important.

Carolina: The best way I can describe finding a therapist is like going to T.J. Maxx [laughter].

Shohreh: I can't wait to hear this!

Carolina: You've got to sort through a lot of crap to find [laughter] the gems.

Shohreh: Amen!

Carolina: I don't know if I've said that on a podcast before—feel free to use that! It's true. And I remember, I was with a therapist, my god, for like a full year who I did not like. But I was struggling, and he was nearby. And I learned some things from him.

But I remember walking into, at the time I was at NYU and I walked into the, whoever was giving me my anxiety medication's office, I think it was a nurse practitioner. And I said to him, I was like, "I need a new therapist."

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And I was like, “I think I need a woman.” And he gave me the list, and it was three names, and one of them was Hispanic-sounding. And I was like, that’s the person.

Shohreh: That’s the one!

Carolina: And I was with her for like seven years! And I referred a ton of people to her too. She’s wonderful. And she wasn’t even particularly like super Latina. She sort of just got some of the subtleties to the culture that I was like “Oh, this other guy just does not get it.” Or it wasn’t important to him.

And that’s when I made the most progress is when I found somebody I connected with. And I think, again, you don’t have to work with somebody who looks like you, but I don’t know, in some contexts I think it does make sense for people’s healing journeys.

Shohreh: Absolutely! I mean my current therapist I specifically found because she specializes in queer individuals, people who have come out late in life, all things that apply to me that I was like, these are the things I really need to work through. And you can’t just walk into any therapist’s office and expect that they can help you with those because they’re very specific needs.

And actually, in episode 38 of the podcast we are talking to the founder of Inclusive Therapists, which is a directory that has been built specifically for this reason, to help people find therapists that are a better cultural match for them, or a topic match for them, or anything like that. So, great resource out there if you guys haven’t listened to that episode.

Carolina: I’ve had several clients who have therapists that aren’t Health At Every Size-aligned. Not that they’re bad therapists, but they’ve said some pretty harmful shit to them, and they’re like in recovery from an eating disorder [laughs]. But that’s the only person they could find in their insurance network who they kind of liked.

This is the problem though, is that it is a privilege to be able to find somebody who is Health At Every Size-aligned. Who does take insurance. I take insurance, for instance. The reimbursement isn’t amazing, but it’s sort

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of one of those things where it helps me have a regular stream of clients. It makes it more accessible to some people. But I understand reimbursement might not be good for other practitioners, and they're free to practice however they want. But there's a lot of barriers for people being able to access properly trained Health At Every Size-aligned practitioners.

Shohreh: Even if you have one, which is amazing—that's a privilege in itself—the chances of all of your practitioners and doctors aligning with that are pretty slim, because we're just not there yet in the world, with that being the mainstream. And I hope that that's the direction that we're moving. That more and more people are gonna get on board and that way we can help even more people.

Thankfully a lot of us have online services, so that does help. But yeah. I mean, sometimes you really wanna go see someone in person, and you don't have that option. And it's hard, for sure.

Carolina: Yeah, it is.

Shohreh: So, I wanna talk a little bit about body image as well. We had Ayana Habtemariam on the podcast—she's the @trillIRD—on episode number 20.

Carolina: Love her!

Shohreh: I know! She's awesome. She talked a lot about intuitive eating and body image in black communities, and she explained how there are some very specific body image concerns that many black people struggle with that white people just don't. It's not a part of the white culture. And so I'd love to hear as well what you've seen as far as Latinx communities go. And again, I know that it's not probably the same for everybody, but some things that are not really so much in white culture, but that are more in Latinx culture as far as body image goes.

Carolina: In general, I would say I think there's a lot of pressure to aspire to look like somebody like Sofía Vergara or Salma Hayek, right? So there's this specific ideal, which is light-skinned, European features, very conventionally attractive. And then having all the curves in the "right

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places.” So there’s that sense that you don’t wanna be so skinny, but you also don’t wanna be so fat.

So it’s this very confusing aesthetic that we’re supposed to aspire to. So for instance, for me, my hips got a little curvier as I’ve gotten older, but I was pretty straight up and down when I was younger and that was like, not okay for people. People were like, “You look ill.” And so, ironically they would like, try to force feed me [laughs].

Shohreh: Yes, because in cultures like yours and mine, people just say that, like, and will literally try and put food in your mouth [laughs].

Carolina: Well, and then they would turn to my cousin who was in a larger body and be like, “You shouldn’t be eating too much.” It’s so fucked up.

Shohreh: Yeah.

Carolina: So there’s just a lot of mixed messages that Latinos get about what they should look like, but that’s sort of the beauty aesthetic that I think gets pretty heavily marketed and sold. And when you go to places in Latin America, what you see on the billboards, always light-skinned people, always somebody who is conventionally attractive. Most of the time you just, if you’re not seeing the body, you’re seeing the face, you can tell they’re in a thin body.

And then there’s a lot of advertisements about losing fat with, they call them ‘fajas.’ Oh my god, what’s the word for it? It’s like the thing you put around your waist -

Shohreh: Oh, waist trainer?

Carolina: I guess it’s a waist trainer, it’s like -

Shohreh: It just like squeezes you?

Carolina: Yeah. Yeah. There’s a lot of emphasis on fajas, and skinny teas, and Herbalife type stuff that is out there that takes away fat and things like that. There’s just a lot of mixed messages, and then they, again, they want you to eat all the food that they offer you.

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Where it gets really tricky is for people who identify as being a woman. The reason it's very, very hard to reject the dieting mentality is I think a lot of women, until recently, didn't have any economic power. So your currency was your appearance. The way you looked. Being aesthetically pleasing to men is important for a lot of women, and that's what's been ingrained in their brains—the value that you bring to the world is your outside appearance—and I think this is why it's so, so hard for a lot of people to get to intuitive eating and to get to a comfortable place with their bodies. To heal their body image. Because we've just been told our worth is completely tied into our looks. That's fucked up.

Shohreh: It is fucked up. I mean, I literally believed that my entire childhood, teenage years, even into college. Like it's taken a long time to unpack that. And even, honestly, like some of it was very traumatizing, now that I've worked with a therapist and look back at it and realize like, "Oh my god." Like I truly believed that my value is in how I looked and what I could sexually give to men. Like that is what I thought my value was.

And so many of the decisions I made as a teenager, into college, were because of that. And now I look back and I'm like, "Oh my god, what were you doing?" But, of course, that was the message that was like pounded into my head my entire life.

And yeah, it's so hard to get into adulthood, and unpack that, and do intuitive eating, and do all these things. You really have to commit to unlearning it all and learning new stuff. And I totally understand why people are like, "You know what, I'm not gonna do that." Or people who have other issues going on. Like, if you're a multiply marginalized individual and you've got other bigger things to worry about, like who am I to say that this should be your top priority, right? Like you probably have other shit you need to worry about, and that's not on me to judge you for that.

Carolina: Think about a woman who...if that's been your entire identity, is looking a certain way, right, or aspiring to look a certain way. When you take that away from somebody, when you start to challenge that, a part of them is gonna panic.

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I just had this conversation with a client the other day. She's Latina and we were talking about how our culture, Latinx culture does not help build women up. Not faulting my parents here, and specifically my mother. She didn't know that she had the power in her to build herself up.

You're looking for validation from the outside constantly, right? Whether it's school, whether it's attention from the opposite sex. Nobody is going out of their way to teach you how to validate yourself internally. And I think that's where a lot of this work is so, so hard, because it's like, how do you undo 30-40-50, sometimes 60 years of that ingrained belief that all you have to offer to this world is your appearance and a thinner body?

Shohreh: Yeah.

Carolina: And yeah, that's a lot of work to do for a person, and it's really scary, and it's really sad. There's also a part of you that's deeply, deeply sad about that. That you spent so much time wrapped up in a certain identity.

And I should also point out that you and I have a lot of privilege. It's easy for us to reconcile all the stuff we have. We live in thinner bodies. We move through the world fairly easily. And for other people it might not be so easy, especially if they're in larger bodies. And so I think, sometimes I have to acknowledge I'm like, it's easy for me to like, "Hey, what's on the inside matters," because no one is discriminating against my body in the outside world.

Shohreh: Right. Well, and I think when you think about, even for us with the privileges that we have, obviously this was challenging. It certainly wasn't an easy thing to do. But then when you add in people who do not have those privileges, who have a really hard time moving through the world, of course it's gonna be exponentially more difficult. And I think anyone who is in a thin body in this space, like, you have to come into it knowing that information. And that you can't just be like, "Well here's how I did it, so this is how you should do it." [laughs] That's not gonna work.

Carolina: Nope.

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Shohreh: Everyone is different and has different things. And again, that's something I love about intuitive eating and Health At Every Size is it's very much about, let's figure out what works for you, and your life, and your circumstances, and your experiences. But of course, there are people who aren't practicing it in that way necessarily, and I think some people tend to bring in some of their past diet and wellness culture thinking about, like, "Oh, well the book says this, so we do this."

Carolina: Yes.

Shohreh: And it's definitely intended to be more fluid and more like, "How can we make this work for you as an individual?" And I just think everyone needs to have that as their bottom line in this work.

Carolina: Yeah. That also can be a tough realization for some people because it's uncomfortable. If you sort of have a road map for how you teach people, and diverging off that map can be a little bit awkward. So I think that's where it's important sometimes to have those practitioners that might have your specific background. And I think this is what's wonderful about things like podcasts, is because you can find people whose stories resonate with yours, or who might look a little bit like you, or just have similar traits in their upbringing. And I think that's why this space is so important.

Shohreh: Yeah, because maybe you can't find a HAES practitioner in your space right now, but you can go and listen to the multiple podcast episodes that you've been on, and say, "Okay, well at least I'm learning a few things here and there that maybe I can start to apply and start to understand, and I have this resource." And that's why I think even the Instagram content, Facebook, whatever, it matters. Yes, it's great if everyone could work with a coach to learn this stuff, but that's not financially feasible for everybody.

That doesn't necessarily work for everybody either. Like some people learn really well from listening and applying for themselves compared to working with somebody else. So that's why I really prioritize that content, and I know that you do too, because people are watching. They are reading it, and they're taking it in. And just from messages I've got from my own content, I know that it makes a difference in people's lives.

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Carolina: Yeah and the accessibility is such an issue for a lot of people. And I think it is wonderful how much free stuff is out there. And some people also still need help, like one-on-one help, because this stuff, this work, again, is so complicated. And when people go at it alone, sometimes I have clients that will be like, “Oh, I tried this for a year on my own,” and I’m like “Dang! That is brave!” [Laughs]

Shohreh: So, we have come to our final question, which is how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

Carolina: So, right now I’m in my mid-30s. I’m recovering from multiple injuries, probably from years of over-exercise. I think the most important thing for me is feeling good in my physical body. So that means being pain-free, which means no high heels [laughs], really comfortable shoes, exercise that is not putting a strain on my joints, exercise that actually feels good and feels like it’s within my body’s abilities.

I think that’s probably sort of what’s at the top. And then, my mental health, my emotional health is also very important. I’ve attended to that very, very regularly over the last several years, so that’s why it’s sort of number two. Because right now I’m really prioritizing my physical body. You know, injuries are interesting moments in your life that they reflect a lot of information back to you [laughs].

Shohreh: Yeah.

Carolina: I really, really have to be tuned into what my body is feeling, when to rest, that too. That’s been a big one. And then just finding clothing that’s comfortable. I mean that’s a huge one. My body has changed a lot in the last year, and I have some economic privilege in my life and I’ve been able to buy new clothing in a bigger size that’s just more comfortable and suited to what my body needs right now.

Shohreh: One of the biggest changes in my life in the last like 10 years was the switch from clothes that I thought that other people would like the look of to clothes that I feel most comfortable in. Which means like a lot of things

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that are bigger, and flowier, and stuff like that. And it's like, I'm more comfortable than I've ever been. This was the right choice [laughs].

Carolina: Oh my god, like I went to a wedding and I was in heels, and at the end of the night my knees were killing me. And I'm like, "Why am I doing this? Just so I look taller?" [Laughter] So I'm like no, I just take flats now, I'm okay with that.

Shohreh: Well, thank you so much for being here. So, tell me how can people find you and work with you, and also tell me a little bit about your course that I know is gonna be opening up again pretty soon, right?

Carolina: Yeah, so I'm mostly on Instagram, that's @la_eathority. My private practice website is www.eathority.com. And then I have this shared website with Melissa Carmona who is @the_spanglish_therapist on Instagram. She works a lot with eating disorders, and we have made this online course that is, we're working on round two of it. So we did the first round at the end of the last year. We got some feedback, We're making updates as we speak. Launching, fingers crossed, end of April.

Shohreh: Nice!

Carolina: And it will be 12 weeks' worth of content that walks people through the principles of intuitive eating, healing your body image. And it's geared towards Latinos. So she's Columbian, I'm Mexican-American, and we bring together a lot of our knowledge about the culture and just what you learn in private practice, for people, because it's the most affordable option for a lot of people because seeing us one-on-one is not the cheapest. So, we're trying to make intuitive eating, Health At Every Size as accessible as possible. And it's a self-paced course.

Shohreh: So if you're interested in the course, definitely follow Carolina on Instagram because she will be posting when it's open and available to join it. And, awesome. Well thank you again for being here. This was wonderful. I think it's going to help a lot of people.

Carolina: Thank you for having me. And this might be the most fun I've had on a podcast.

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Shohreh:

Yay! That's such a compliment!

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