

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Shohreh Davoodi:** You are tuning into episode number 42 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. Today's episode features Melissa A. Fabello, a writer and educator whose work explores the politics of bodies, beauty, and wellness. Melissa and I dug deep into an important aspect of social health, which is relationships. From family to friends to romantic partners, we discussed societal relationship norms, our ability to reevaluate and restructure our relationships as needed. The concept of relationship anarchy, and more.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/42](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/42). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/42](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/42).

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](http://www.superfithero.com).

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

Now let's go chat about relationships with Melissa.

[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

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

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.

Welcome to the pod, Melissa! Thank you so much for being here.

**Melissa A. Fabello:** I am so happy to be here. Thank you for having me.

**Shohreh:** Absolutely. I feel like I've followed you on Twitter and Instagram for a while now, and I know that you are a woman of many interests and talents. So, why don't you start just by telling me more about who you are, what you do, and maybe a little bit about how you got there.

**Melissa:** Yeah, totally. I am a writer and an educator who focuses a lot of my work on looking at the politics of bodies and wellness, and that includes sexual and relational wellness. I have a PhD in human sexuality studies where for my dissertation research I focused really heavily on women with anorexia and their relationship to sensual touch. The question of like how I get to where I am is so interesting to me because it was never something that I did on purpose.

I got to a place actually, oh, maybe around 10 years ago, where I realized that kind of pushing myself to always have like a five or a 10-year plan was actually giving me a lot of anxiety, but also stopping me from being able to see things that popped up on the peripheral. I just would get really focused on things and be like, "I'm gonna accomplish this thing even if I don't want it anymore because I said I was gonna do it." [laughter]

So I stopped doing that. And so, things, in some ways, have kind of come to me in ways that are sort of unexpected. Obviously there's a lot of privilege that goes along with, like, having opportunities come your way. But I think the "how I got to where I am now" thing is really just like day by day kind of going with the flow of what feels good and what makes sense to talk about. And do I want to write? Do I want to do this as a workshop? And I like living that way. I feel like there's a lot more fluidity in life that way.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Shohreh:** There's definitely something nice about having the freedom to make a lot more of your own decisions

**Melissa:** Yeah, definitely, yeah. Being able to be like, "I have a short-term plan" [laughs], you know, and like that's great versus yeah, like I can see a year in advance. That's good [laughter].

**Shohreh:** So, today I really wanna focus our attention on an important and often overlooked aspect of overall health and well-being, and that is social health. And some of my favorite work that you've done is around relationships. So I wanna dive in there. And I think maybe let's start by talking about some of the relationship norms and scripts that are socialized into us from a young age that can feel really inflexible and like we have to fit into those boxes.

**Melissa:** Yeah, relationships are so interesting, because we all engage in relationships all the time, whether those are familial relationships, or platonic relationships, or romantic and sexual relationships. Like we're engaging in relationships our whole lives, and yet we actually don't spend a whole lot of time thinking about them. And in particular, we don't spend a whole lot of time thinking about friendships.

The thing that I think is most interesting about how we're socialized into relationships actually is around hierarchy of relationships and the idea that some relationships are somehow worth more than other relationships. Something that I've thought a lot about in my adult life, kind of looking back on my life, is that honestly, some of the most powerful, and important, and transformative relationships that I've had in my life were friendships. Were like best friendships. My middle school best friend and my college best friend are two of the most important figures in my life, honestly.

It's interesting because as you get older, people tend not to put as much effort, or thought, or value into their friendships and start to move toward this need for wanting to engage in romantic relationships, and particularly, romantic relationships that will lead to the creation of your own family. And so we become very, kind of like narrowly focused on this very specific type of relationship that we hope to find and grow. And then, therefore, we kind of devalue all other relationships.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

And I think that that's so wild. And I realized a few years ago, I went through a period of time where I didn't have a best friend. And, I had friends, but I didn't have anyone that I was like, if I have a problem at 2:00 AM I can call this person sort of thing. Or like, you know, the person who knew *everything* about my life, or like whatever. I had, like, this period of time where I didn't have a relationship like that, and I realized that it made me really, really sad.

And I was like, wait, where's the app for that? [Laughter] Where's Tinder for friends? And of course there are some apps that do do that, but like yeah, I've been thinking a lot about the fact that the ways in which we engage in friendships is so, so different from how we engage in other relationships, and why is that?

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and for me that brings to mind the fact that so many mainstream movies, TV shows, everything else put romance as the ultimate goal, right? Like the goal is to find your one—monogamous, of course—partner...

**Melissa:** Yes, totally.

**Shohreh:** ...who is your soulmate and is your everything and completes you and you're going to spend the rest of your life with them, and then fuck everything else. We don't care about our other friends, we don't care about the rest of our life, as long as we have that one person. And I've realized as an adult, having to unpack the layers and layers of that messaging to bring more value to other relationships in my life, it's not easy to do when you've been told that for as long as you can remember.

**Melissa:** Absolutely. And because other people aren't thinking about it. You know? Like it's hard to engage in deep friendships, for example, unless you find people who also want to engage in deep friendships and want to prioritize that.

And the monogamy issue is also so interesting because there's obviously nothing wrong with monogamy. But I don't think that folks realize that if they're engaging in monogamy that that is a choice that they're making. It's the socialized choice, right? It's in some ways like a passive choice that a lot of people are making, but it *is* a choice and there are other options.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

And that kind of messaging around what you were saying, like “the one” and like this person completes me, and this person is my everything, and this person fulfills all of my needs. In what other world, as far as relationships, do we expect that?

Like we only expect that in romantic relationships, and that’s actually absurd because it is impossible for one person to meet all of your needs. It’s actually, arguably, really unhealthy to depend solely on one person. So, I think we can learn a lot, even folks who want to practice monogamy, I think could learn a lot from looking at the values and the practices that are happening in non-monogamy or in polyamory. Because that kind of de-programming of the values of monogamy, I think, is actually really important to help us recognize the ways in which people can’t be our everything.

And that having support systems of multiple people is really, really important and healthy. And that while there’s nothing wrong with craving romantic or sexual relationships, those relationships also don’t have to be the most important of our lives. That there are other relationships that we can engage in that are satisfying.

**Shohreh:** Definitely, and I wanna jump deeper into non-monogamy a little bit later when we move more into relationships specifically. But that was also making me think about how all of these scripts in general, whether it’s about romantic relationships, or family, or anything like that, it essentially leads to this idea in our heads of what a relationship “should” look like. And when we formulate ideas about what a marriage should be, what a friendship should be, then we have so much hurt when our relationships don’t seem to match up to that.

**Melissa:** Yeah, absolutely. There is actually this concept that I really, really like, within relationship anarchy. So relationship anarchy is sort of this broader, philosophical ideology around relationships wherein you’re flattening that hierarchy and not necessarily considering certain relationships more important than other relationships. And engaging in relationships in ways that are not necessarily built based on, “Okay, this person is my partner, and therefore this relationship includes XYZ.” And “This person is my

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

friend, which means that this relationship inherently looks different from a partnered relationship.”

And within relationship anarchy there’s this idea of buckets, and I’m like obsessed with this idea. And the idea is that each relationship, if you take away labels, right? Now you have to reconsider what a relationship looks like.

Because we assume that a friend means something. Like a friend is generally not someone you have sex with, for example. Unless now it’s a friend with benefits, so it gets like a new name [laughter]. Which is interesting, because in truth we should be having conversations about what our expectations are within relationships anyway. Like there shouldn’t be necessarily like a, “You are my romantic partner, therefore, these things are on the table.” We shouldn’t assume those things.

But, when you take the labels away and folks don’t know, it’s like pandemonium, like what is this relationship? There’s this idea that each relationship is a bucket, and that you and the other person get to decide what aspects of a relationship go in that bucket. And you can revisit that and take things out of the bucket or put new things in.

So, for example, with another person you could say, “Hey, do we want sex to be a part of our relationship? Do we want emotional intimacy to be a part of our relationship? Do we want a co-working relationship? Like do we think that we could have some kind of a professional relationship?” And you co-create what the relationship expectations are, what shows up in that relationship, and I think that that’s a really beautiful and cool way to think about and to negotiate within relationships what we want and how we want to show up there. Rather than assuming that relationships look a certain way based on what we call them.

**Shohreh:**

So, I absolutely love this concept, and it reminds me of something I was talking with one of my friends about recently. I think there’s this idea that our only options are to either have someone be a close friend or to cut them completely out of our lives. Whereas the way that I’ve been thinking about it lately is that I can expect different things from different friendships.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

And maybe not every friendship is a friendship where I can spill my guts at 2:00 AM, like you were saying with a best friend. Maybe it's someone who's really fun to go out with to a bar and just catch up with, like, once every few months or once a year or something like that.

**Melissa:** Totally.

**Shohreh:** And that if we don't put the same expectations on every relationship, then we're much less likely to be disappointed by what happens in those relationships.

**Melissa:** Yeah, or if we believe that relationships are things that are co-created and relationships are things that can shift, it creates a lot of avenues for conversation, communication around the relationship and takes a lot of pressure off the relationship and allows that relationship to evolve as time goes on. Because that's what relationships do. And so, it's not, "We are now married," for example, or "We're in a long-term monogamous relationship," and so "therefore, this is what the rest of our lives have to look like."

But rather being able to say, like, "Actually, this relationship could end. That is one of the outcomes here. And if we continue to be communicative about the shifts that we're experiencing in the relationship, that maybe that doesn't have to be a surprise." Of course there's a grieving process when a relationship ends—any kind of relationship—but maybe it's not going to be like a shock that we're breaking up, or whatnot. Maybe we could have shifted into that space, into a change and what this relationship looks like together rather than making it kind of feel like a you versus me thing.

And I just think that we don't get a whole lot of teaching around what it looks like to communicate in relationships and what it looks like to communicate in relationships in ways that are healthy, and ways that are safe, and ways that are non-violent. And so I think that causes more problems than anything.

**Shohreh:** Oh yeah, communication, I know, has been a driver of issues in so many of my own relationships, like, having grown up in a family where we didn't talk about emotions. My mom would literally—she's gonna kill me if she

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

ever listens to this podcast [laughter]—like, my mom would go cry in a closet because she believed that she shouldn't be crying in front of us.

**Melissa:** Oh wow!

**Shohreh:** Now, as an adult with lots of wonderful therapists, I've been able to work through a lot of that and learn emotional intimacy in my own life. But we learn so much of this stuff from, again, our parents and media. And there's not a lot of great examples out there, at least there weren't when I was growing up, that were accessible for learning this stuff.

**Melissa:** No, not at all. And I think it's so interesting. I look at my parents' relationship now, and I can see now, as an adult who's had some education in this, and some practice in this, and some thinking around this, that like, their communication is terrible. It is terrible, and it's actually like, it's almost frighteningly terrible [laughter].

**Shohreh:** Oh no!

**Melissa:** Yeah, and it's like, wow, now I see why I learned to communicate the way that I am kind of more oriented to communicate. Like, I tend to take a lot of processing time. If you bring conflict to me in a relationship, if you say, "Hey, you did this thing, it was harmful to me," and if it's something I haven't already thought about, I often will have to take a lot of space, like a few days, to actually think about what's being said and what's being brought to my attention.

Because if I don't, I recognize immediately the feeling that I get inside, like the visceral reaction of like defensiveness, and I know that if I get into a conversation at a time that I'm not ready to have a conversation, that I will revert to communication styles that I was brought up to believe were normal. Like yelling, for example. There is never a reason to yell. You know, unless you're being chased down the street or something [laughter].

**Shohreh:** Right.

**Melissa:** Any communication, there's really no reason ever to yell at someone. And I know that that might sound like it's not super violent, but it's not a non-violent way to communicate either. And I think, when I look at my parents

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

and I'm like, "Oh, that's why that's my kind of go-to style of communication and why that is something that I've had to really, really work on unlearning," because yeah, we learn through our family systems how to communicate. And if those people aren't communicating well, which most people aren't, then we learn ways to communicate that aren't really helpful.

And it actually takes a lot of work to unlearn and relearn what communication can look like. And then the fun part is then you have to convince everyone around you that that's a good idea too [laughter]. So, it's a process.

**Shohreh:** Definitely a process. A lifelong one, probably, figuring all of this out. And I know it can feel for people like it's really hard to change. Maybe it can even feel impossible. But I know that you are a big advocate for reevaluating as necessary, restructuring as necessary, the relationships that we have in our lives, even though that can be scary and go against these cultural norms.

So, I'd love to talk about what this might look like across some specific relational categories. So, specifically, family, friends, romantic partners, and communities. And I'm sure there's going to be some overlap here, but I figure we'll just kind of tackle them in turn and see where that takes us, if that's cool with you?

**Melissa:** Yeah, totally.

**Shohreh:** So why don't we start by talking about family because ooh, family is such a tough thing. I mean, the first thing that comes to mind for me is my mom would always say when we were growing up, like, I don't even think this is the right phrase, but she would like "blood is thicker than water."

**Melissa:** Yeah, right.

**Shohreh:** I'm pretty sure that's one of those phrases that has been miscommunicated and interpreted and doesn't mean what she thinks it means. But, she has this true belief to this day that family is the most important thing, and you need to treat your family a certain way—well, if it's the way that she wants you to treat the family [laughs].

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Melissa:** Sure, right, totally, yes.

**Shohreh:** It has to fit into certain parameters. But, you know, that has struck me, especially as I've gotten older and I've gotten really important friendships and other things in my life, as just kind of like a shortsighted societal trope that we have.

**Melissa:** And I get where that comes from, you know. And I understand that what it's trying to suggest is that you have a community, hopefully that community is healthy and that community is taking care of you, and so, in turn, you take care of the community. And I also know that taking a more kind of like "western" or like colonized or white perspective, there's a lot more value on the individual in those kinds of systems and less value on the community.

You know, take what I'm saying with a grain of salt, 'cause I've been indoctrinated in all of those things. But I think that this idea that your community raises you and takes care of you and so therefore you have a responsibility to then take care of your community, I think that that's a nice idea. That's a very, very nice idea, and I'm into it. *And* the way that it gets kind of, I think, messy, is when instead of thinking of this as community and thinking of it as people who take care of you, you take care of them, it becomes sort of like no matter what the relationship is, you stick by your family no matter what. No matter what happens. No matter how that goes against your values. In a way that becomes, I think, really dangerous and unhealthy.

I had an experience in my own family a few years ago where one of my cousins is a serial abuser and has committed domestic violence against several partners. And I take the side—if I'm taking "sides"—of the partners [laughs] and not my cousin who is the one who is wrong in this situation. I don't disown my cousin. I don't hate my cousin. I just know that he's wrong.

But, I remember having a conversation about this at Christmas one year and saying exactly that, and one of my other cousins being like "No, you're supposed to stick by your family no matter what." And I was like, that's fucking absurd. That's ridiculous. Like the idea that you are supposed to

## Redefining Health & Wellness #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

stick by someone and believe their side of the story just because you're related to them, how is that helpful?

I don't think that, "Oh yeah, I'll just believe you, no questions asked. I'm not going to, you know, bring to your attention the ways in which you're causing harm," I don't think that's a helpful way to go about things. And I think that that kind of idea about what family is can be really dangerous.

Or, I have conversations with my mom, bless her, she is a great mom, and, she also really seems to hate boundaries. And no matter how many times I state a boundary, she just immediately walks over it. And when I try to call that to her attention, she feels really strongly, kind of like, "I brought you into this world, so I can do and say whatever I want." Like, that is really her kind of understanding of what our relationship is, and I don't think that that's helpful either.

So, I think it's really difficult to communicate in familial relationships when there's a really big difference between how people conceptualize family within that family.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, because you can, of course, love a person and still disagree with them and still recognize that there are parts of them, or their life, or their decisions that don't align with your personal values. But we treat it as a culture, like, you have to take it all. And, I mean, I don't think that's true in any relationship.

**Melissa:** Right.

**Shohreh:** We always have to be willing to push back and tell people when we think that they're doing something that is wrong and that we don't agree with.

And again, I don't think this always has to rise to the level of cutting people completely out of your life. I think it can. I don't think it's that simple. But, like, there are intermediate steps in between there as well as far as like you said, at least trying to draw boundaries where you can. Having communication limits or whatever it is that you need to do to be able to take care of yourself.

## Redefining Health & Wellness #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

But again, the culture says, “No, you can’t do that. That’s rude to your parents. That’s rude to your siblings.” Or whatever it is.

**Melissa:** Yeah, right. Absolutely. And I don’t know how we find this perfect, magical balance between, kind of like, that community care and self-care. Like how do you find the balance between that? And I think that things can get kind of sticky there and can be difficult. And we can all only do the best that we can, really [laughs].

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and that’s a very good point. Like, this is so individual. I don’t think there can be any kind of a blanket recommendation. And that’s when I see people quipping in these tweets about, like, “If someone hurts you, cut ‘em off!” or whatever.

**Melissa:** Yeah, right. Like wow, that’s easy to say in 280 characters, yeah, like...

**Shohreh:** Yeah, [laughs] like there’s so many more circumstances and things to consider. And like you said at the beginning, the cultural circumstances. My dad’s side of the family is Iranian, and it’s definitely more of that collectivist culture. And so there’s different expectations and different needs there. And so I think to a certain extent we all have to figure this out for ourselves, and, hopefully, if we need it, with the help of a therapist or someone like that.

**Melissa:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Shohreh:** So, I wanna shift then to friends. Friends, the family we choose. That’s what people say, right? [laughs]

**Melissa:** Yes, yes.

**Shohreh:** Because I think you’ve already talked about this a little bit, and this has been an area that has expanded so much for me in adulthood in realizing the value of my friends, and the intimacy of having friendships. And even a little bit, I like to say, kind of like the romance of having friendships.

**Melissa:** Totally!

**Shohreh:** Like I know we totally celebrate Valentine’s Day as just like the holiday for romantic relationships and stuff like that. And for every year for me that

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

brings up, you know what, I have romance, and flirtation, and all these things with friends as well. It's not something that is just reserved for romantic relationships in my life.

**Melissa:** Mhmm. Yeah, absolutely. I think it's interesting the way that we kind of conceptualize romance, because really when you get down to it, romance is just love [laughs].

**Shohreh:** Yeah, it is.

**Melissa:** It's just love. And I think that we absolutely can consider our friendships romantic. There *are* romantic friendships. It's interesting because I can also, like, tell the difference, and it's kind of hard to put into words, but just this kind of feeling of the difference between a romantic friendship and a platonic friendship. Like my best friend, I talk to her every single day. The only other people I talk to every single day are my, you know, romantic sexual partners [laughs]. It's like that is actually unique friendship that is different from my other friendships.

But I think that re-conceptualizing romance and seeing romance as intimacy, and connection, and love, rather than conflating romance and sex, which are actually two different things. I think it does really well, actually, in understanding our friendships in a much, much deeper way.

**Shohreh:** I'm thinking about how in adulthood it's so common that, you know, we have our own families, and jobs, and things like that, and friendships often go by the wayside. So I'm wondering if there are strategies or things that have been helpful for you in making sure that your friends feel like they have your attention, they have your love, and what that may look like across different friendships.

**Melissa:** I think that it starts with values. Like I really think that it starts with clarifying what your values are around relationships. And if you value friendships and you realize that that is something that you value and wanna prioritize in your life, kind of sitting with, "Well, how do I show up in my friendships?"

It actually takes a lot of thinking, and it's the kind of thinking that we do when...you know, when you sit down and write a dating app profile, you have to think about what you want. Not that everyone does. I've definitely

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

had lots of conversations on dating apps where people are like, “Just goin’ with the flow.” And I’m like, “So you don’t know why you signed up for this?” [Laughter] Like, I don’t understand what inspired you. So, in any case, when you’re sitting down and writing a dating app profile, you’re thinking about, like what is it that I’m looking for here? Like what am I trying to accomplish by swiping right now?

And we don’t really do the same thing with friendship, and I do think it’s important to sit down—and we also, with family, I find, is more what comes up is, like in adulthood, is realizing, “Oh, my childhood was fucked up.” [laughter] And “How do I heal from that?” do you know what I mean? And like, now it’s like, “Let me find a therapist.” We put a lot of thought into our familial relationships also, I think, as we reflect.

But our friendships we don’t really put a lot of thought into. We kind of think of friendships as things that are supposed to just be like really flowy, and easy, but there’s a reason why you’re friends with certain people. Or maybe, let me take that a step back, as an introvert, there’s a reason why I let certain people into my life. Because I am not the kind of person that wants a huge social group, personally.

So I pick and choose. Like there are certain people that I meet and I can’t really describe it, except that it’s just a feeling. It’s like a feeling like this person feels like sunshine to me. Like this person—

**Shohreh:** Yeeees.

**Melissa:** —I feel seen by this person. I feel like I can be myself with this person. This person reflects back to me, like, the self that I wanna be. This person can inspire and nurture growth in me. This person’s going to hold me accountable.

There’s just this feeling that you can get around certain people. And it’s like, those are people that I’m going to put into my—let’s say I have 10 slots or whatever—like people who I am going to put effort into to make sure that our relationships grow.

And once you kind of sit and think about it and are actually thinking about “How do I want these friendships to look?” and, of course, you’re hopefully

## Redefining Health & Wellness #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

co-creating that with that person, like what do you want out of this relationship? I find that putting the effort in is not actually that hard.

Something that I had to realize, and I know it sounds ridiculous in retrospect, but something that I realized, because, like I said, I'm really introverted, I really like my alone time, and I like being at home, I often, like if someone invited me to their birthday party and it's at 8:00 PM, and with people I don't know, I would just not go.

**Shohreh:** Yeah.

**Melissa:** Like I would just be like, "Why would they expect me to go to this?" Like I would just not go. And it took many, many years for me to suddenly realize, like about two years ago, that like that's actually unacceptable [laughter]. Unless you have a really good reason, when someone is inviting you to a celebration of themselves and you want to be close friends with them, you're supposed to show up [laughs]. Like you can't just not acknowledge someone's birthday, for example.

Like you would never do that to your mom, you know what I mean? If you have a great relationship with your mom. You wouldn't just be like, "Eh, it's your birthday. Fuck that," you know what I mean? [laughter] And you wouldn't do that to your partner, right? "Oh, well, it's our anniversary, but I just don't care!"

Like, you remember things like that and you do certain things. So, when I have—I'm being kind of facetious, I don't actually have literally 10 slots that I fit friends into, but for the metaphor—if I have those 10 slots, I have to know when are those people's birthdays? For example.

**Shohreh:** Yes.

**Melissa:** And I have to remember to get them a gift, because that for me is like a way of showing love. Yeah, when they have a party, I have to go. If they have a baby shower, even though I don't really care about babies or strangers, I have to go.

**Shohreh:** Amen to that last one! [Laughter]

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Melissa:**

Do you know what I mean? Like I have to show up to those, for those people. And it sounds ridiculous, but how often do we really sit down and realize how we're showing up in friendships and thinking about how we wanna show up differently.

And I think if you want people to feel valued, showing up for them, or even yeah, like you said, we're in the middle of coronavirus right now as we're recording this, and a lot of my friends work in art, or theater, or music, or sex work, and like aren't working right now. And realizing I'm working. This has not interrupted my ability to work. I have more money right now. How do I redistribute those resources to my friends who are really in need? Because that's what community looks like. It's showing up for people. If my brother needed money, I would give it to him, you know? So like why wouldn't I give money to my friends? Like I should.

I think there's really something about sitting down and thinking about what does community look like and how do I actually foster community? How do I create the community I want around me? And a lot of that has to do with actually putting in effort.

**Shohreh:**

I love this idea of showing up, and I also want to say that there's not only one way to show up for the people in your life. Like I was thinking about things like the birthday party or whatever, where it's like yeah, ideally you're gonna be there and you're gonna be there with bells on, even if it's not your perfect situation. Let's say you're in like a horrible depressive episode, it's something that you just can't be there. Then how are you gonna make it up to that person? How are you gonna let them know that without just like ghosting on them and not showing up?

Like I think these things are really important too because like we can't always show up 100% the way that we would like to, but just like we would for family or for our romantic partners, you're gonna have a conversation about that. And you're gonna explain that, and you're gonna say, "How can I make this up to you? What else can I do?"

And you're right; I think oftentimes we just don't think about that in friendships. Or we think, "Oh well, they have other friends, so—"

## Redefining Health & Wellness #42

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Melissa:** Right, exactly. “They won’t miss me.” “They won’t notice.” Yeah, absolutely. And I think if you’re creating the kind of community that you want, and hopefully you’re able to show up as your authentic self, and so something like mental health is something that people are gonna know. And even hopefully something I’ve been trying to practice with my friends, which again, it sounds kind of silly, but something I’ve been trying to practice with my friends is being honest when I don’t wanna do something.

**Shohreh:** Yes!

**Melissa:** Or saying like “Hey, you know, it turns out, I know that we’re supposed to go to dinner, but I actually just really wanna be alone [laughs]. Like can we move this?” Can we reschedule this instead of being like, “I don’t feel well” or you know, being like, you know, making up some kind of lie. Just like being honest and knowing that if people are really there for you and who you are, they understand that maybe sometimes you need some kind of space, or maybe, yeah, if you’re in like a depressive episode, like you said, or if you have some kind of other physical health issue. There are times when you can and cannot go out and that is totally, absolutely acceptable.

And kind of like a good example of this is, so I never have parties. I just, I’m too old [laughs]. I just, you get into your 30s and it’s just like, what is the point? So I generally don’t like throw myself a birthday party or whatever. But this year I turned 35, and I was like, “You know what, that feels like a good age to have a birthday party. It’s like halfway to 40. Like, let’s go for it.”

**Shohreh:** Yeah!

**Melissa:** And so, actually my partner reminded me that when I said I was like, “Well, I’m halfway to 40,” he said, “Actually, you’re halfway to 70.” I was like, “Okay, okay, let’s get real technical here” [laughter] but you know what I mean. So, in any case, I was like, “Okay, 35 sounds like a good time to have a party, so I’m gonna have a party.” And I was like, “And I really wanna do karaoke!” And I don’t ever do karaoke. But I was like, that’s just the kind of party I wanna have. And *so* many people RSVP’d to this party and literally said, “I hate karaoke, but I will be there.”

**Shohreh:** Aww!

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Melissa:** Yeah! I was like, that to me was friendship. These are people who love me, that they're like, "I would rather die than do this, and I will be there."  
[laughs] So I think that's kind of the community you wanna build [laughs], I feel like, so.

**Shohreh:** Absolutely.

[Music plays]

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.

**Betsy Archer:** Hi, this is Betsy Archer. I am the owner and head coach at PlayFit AVL in Asheville, North Carolina. My wellness tip is to remember to cut yourself some slack. It can be overwhelming to ride the wellness train. All the supplements, the gym sessions, acupuncture, therapists, meditation. It's hard to know what's going to help you feel better in your own body. So, sometimes we try to do it all at once.

This is a reminder that you don't have to try everything. And if you decide to try it all, missing your supplements a few days in a row, or feeling defeated because it's hard to remember exactly how to meditate, doesn't make you a failure or mean you will never reach your goals. It just means you are human. Remember this as you take a deep breath in, reminding yourself, you are enough already.

**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](http://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.

In talking about friends too, I feel like we have to talk about your now, I guess infamous is the right word, Twitter thread?

**Melissa:** Yeah, absolutely.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Shohreh:**

About asking friends for permission to vent. And I'll link it in the show notes, but maybe we just can kind of give the CliffsNotes version of that and talk about some of the backlash.

Because for me personally, it resonated with me a lot, and it's something that I do with my very close friendships that has made our friendships much stronger. So, I was pretty surprised to see the angst coming at you on Twitter for that thread.

**Melissa:**

Yeah, you and me both. Yeah, you know, sometimes it's funny, I feel like the things that go viral are the things that you were like, "I didn't even realize I was saying anything interesting" [laughter] and then you're like, "Shit!"

So, long story short, I had an interaction with a friend of mine a few months ago where she had had a negative experience at the doctor's office with weight stigma. And because I do a lot of work around body image and like pro-fat kind of activism, she wanted to talk to someone about it who was gonna understand.

But she also knew that I had a lot on my plate in my personal life, emotionally, and that I'm in eating disorder recovery so these conversations can be triggering or difficult depending on like where I'm at in my recovery at any given moment. So she had texted me and she said, "Hey, I had an experience," you know, basically just naming that. "I had an experience with weight issues at the doctor's office; I would love to talk to you about it, if you have the space for it."

And we ended up having this back and forth around, if I had time, because I was like about to walk into a store. And I was like, "Can I text you when I get out of here? Do you need me right now?" "I can give you 10 minutes." Like we had a good back and forth so that we both knew exactly the conversation that we were about to get into. And I found that that was really nice and it had stuck with me for a few days. So I unfortunately tweeted about it. [laughter]

And just, really the basis of what I was saying was that in all of our relationships we put in emotional energy. That is what relationships are. We put in energy for people. And hopefully that energy is being

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

replenished. And often in relationships there is a mismatch in energy, and it's important that what we are giving, we are also receiving, so that our kind of, like, gas tank of emotional energy stays full. Or at least isn't emptied.

And I was saying that one way to do that, one way to make sure that that is happening is to check in with your friends before you vent. And I specifically was talking about a venting kind of situation, not like an emergency, like if someone was like, "I just found out I'm getting divorced"

**Shohreh:** Right.

**Melissa:** Or "My mother just died," or "I'm in the hospital." That's a crisis; that's really different. That is something that I think, for the most part, in relationships, in community with people, you should show up, insofar as you can, when someone is in crisis.

But I was talking about sort of where people are just like, "Oh, this annoying thing happened to me at work," or yeah, "I had this bad experience at the doctor's office." Something that *could* wait. I was saying it's nice to check in, and to just be like, "Hey, this is what I wanna talk to you about. Do you have time? Do you have emotional energy for this right now?" That's really all I was saying.

But for some reason it made people really, really angry. And some of the criticism was totally valid, but most of the criticism was essentially folks saying that you have no right to set a boundary like that. That you cannot tell someone that you don't have the space, basically. That that's not what friendship is.

And I was stunned. I was stunned because I was like, wow, like how many people here are just having horrible relationships? Like if you don't have any sense of boundaries, if you don't believe that you can set a boundary or that you should respect someone else's boundaries, how deeply unhealthy are your relationships? Like I can't even imagine!

So yeah, the backlash was really, really, really interesting to me. I mean it was so bad that I couldn't work [laughs]. I work online, you know, and I was like, I can't go online right now. I can't check my email because it's just

## Redefining Health & Wellness #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

death threats, like I can't work. So I would just, I was just holed up in my apartment for like three days and ate cake. I was just like, this is so bad. And to me I was just like, what did I say that set people off so strongly just by stating that boundaries are something that are healthy? So it was a wild time.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and I know for a lot of people, like reading replies and things like that, they took just issue with specific language. Which it's like, if this isn't the way that you would say it, like say it in a different way [laughter].

**Melissa:** Like I don't understand, that was the thing is like toward the end, you know, someone was like, "Wow, I find this really helpful. What would it look like to tell someone that you actually don't have the space?" And I was like, "Oh, here's a little template for that." And, you know, a template works the way a template works, which is that you fill in the blanks, you know?

**Shohreh:** Yeah.

**Melissa:** And that it's impossible to write the perfect example. So I wrote a template that had brackets for filling in the blank, and people were like, "I would never send this to someone." And I was like, "Yeah, neither would I!" Like, that's not the point [laughs]. It's something that you fill in, you know, like you don't download a resume template and send that to a job application. You fill it in.

And exactly what you were saying too, like if you feel like the language is too, I don't know, whatever you think it is—clinical or cold or whatever people thought—you are more than welcome to change the language.

**Shohreh:** Put a few emojis in there, you know.

**Melissa:** Yeah, like do you, like however you communicate. It's a template, like have you never seen one of these before?

**Shohreh:** Yeah, I can only imagine what it was like on your end of things, because for me, that thread really resonated with me. And, in fact, I sent it to two of my friends. And for me, it's an extension of consent culture.

**Melissa:** Totally.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Shohreh:** It's saying that I love you and care about you enough to ask you where you're at and make sure that you have the space right now for this thing. And again, if it's an emergency, I have no question that they would be there for me in a heartbeat. But if it's not an emergency, and it can wait, or I can talk to somebody else about it, then I see it as the caring and kind thing to do to ask and say, "Hey, do you have the space for this?" And I don't do it every single time, like right, there are sometimes, there are circumstances where—

**Melissa:** Sure.

**Shohreh:** —I feel like it's more important. You have to decide for yourself. But when I do it, it has always been appreciated. And I know when we all do it for each other, we all appreciate it as well. And so, it's just like, again, I was just, felt like people really took it the wrong way, this thing that could be so helpful in friendships.

**Melissa:** They really did! They read what they wanted to read, and that is how Twitter works and I should have known it [laughter] before I wrote what I wrote. But here we are!

**Shohreh:** Oh, so true! So, why don't we shift over to romantic partners? I know that we've already talked about this a little bit.

And I'll kind of start us off by mentioning something I've mentioned on the podcast before, which was that three-ish years into my marriage, which is now four and a half years strong, I realized that I was bisexual and came out to my partner. And that, for us, created a reason to, again, reevaluate and restructure our relationship. Two things that we're talking about and having a lot of conversations around that and around, you know, the expectations when you both get married and you think that your partner is straight, and then it turns out that your partner is not straight, or in my case, you know, that I wasn't straight. Like, that certainly is a reason that a relationship could end, but also it's an opportunity to say, "Alright, what does this mean for us? Where do we wanna go from here? How are we feeling about this?"

And honestly, for us, it has been a really wonderful and beautiful thing, even though it was scary at first, because it's forced us to have

## Redefining Health & Wellness #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

conversations that we would not have otherwise had. It's forced us to consider, like, what do we want out of our relationship. And we're still definitely in process about that, but I am lucky to have a partner who was willing to have those conversations and who wasn't like, "No, this is what I married. And so if not that, it's over." And instead was able to see the situation as something that was flexible and fluid, which I appreciated.

But I can also imagine many situations where that would not have been the case, and, like, it would have ended our relationship. So that's something that comes up for me when I'm thinking about romantic partnerships.

**Melissa:**

Yeah, and like, just the idea that people grow, I mean, should be a given. People grow. People discover things about themselves. People move in certain directions. People's values shift. We're never gonna be the same person that we were 10 years ago. That's very rare. And I think that in a lot of ways in relationships people grow together and grow in the same kind of direction, and then a lot of times that's not what happens. And that's also okay.

So relationships can then shift, and you can say, "You know what, I don't think that our values are in line anymore, and that means that this relationship doesn't make sense to me." Like, if your political values, for example, shift drastically and your partner's doesn't, for me that would be a deal breaker. I would not date someone whose politics were not, you know, at least like 95% aligned with mine. I wouldn't do it.

So if I was dating someone who was suddenly like, "You know what, I am now conservative, and I don't believe in abortion," or "I don't believe in racial equality," I would be like, "Well, bye!" Like that's that! That's the end of that!

So, I think we really, really have to make room for people to be people. And a lot of conversations that I have because I talk a lot about non-monogamy and because I practice non-monogamy is folks who are like, "I am in a monogamous relationship, and I want it to not be monogamous anymore—how do I bring it up to my partner?"

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

You know, “How do I say that?” And because, exactly what you were saying, there’s an expectation. Like, we got into this relationship under these circumstances, and a lot of folks feel like those circumstances then should not be allowed to change. But people change, and so, therefore, relationships can change and should.

I think if you enter relationships already with the value that relationships can shift, then it’s a little bit easier to have those conversations. Not that it’s like ever easy to have conversations where, like, a relationship is ending, for example, or ending as its current form. But, I think that if you enter relationships with the understanding that you are people, and you are gonna grow, and therefore your relationship is gonna change over time, I think it’s a lot easier to then have conversations where it’s like, “Hey, this thing is changing,” without it being like, “Oh, you’re a bad person.”

**Shohreh:** Yes, so true. You know, non-monogamy in particular is always interesting to me, because I feel like people are so quick to jump to “Non-monogamy is not for me. I’m a one-partner kind of person.” Like, “That’s nice for other people, but it won’t work for me.” But it’s like, how can we really know when you consider that monogamy is like the socialized option that we’re given. Well, it’s not even given as option; it’s like the go-to—

**Melissa:** It just is.

**Shohreh:** —in the same way that, like, heterosexuality is the go-to. Like, one of the reasons I didn’t know I was bisexual for so long is because all I saw was heterosexual relationships. And because I did feel attraction towards men, I was like, “Well, I can’t possibly like women. I’m not even gonna explore that.”

**Melissa:** Mhmm. Totally. It is very interesting the way that people kind of react to non-monogamy as just sort of like, “I could never do that!” Why? What values are you holding—and there’s nothing wrong with holding values that then lead you to monogamy—but what values are you holding that make you believe that it is impossible to share romantic love in that way? Because there’s no other relationships in our life where we do that.

## Redefining Health & Wellness #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

You have potentially multiple parents, multiple siblings, multiple friends, multiple coworkers, multiple children, and you don't, you know, love any of them more than another. Or you don't, you're not like only allowed to have one of those. And so, why in romantic relationships do we feel like we are only allowed to have one of those? Especially given what we were talking about earlier, which is that no one person can possibly meet all of your needs, it's impossible.

So why does it seem *so* out there that you could have multiple romantic partners and have that be okay? And I think it's only because within a culture that believes in monogamy and is socializing us under monogamy, there is an inherent belief that it is betrayal, or inherently like cheating to have feelings for another person. But like why can't we just do away with that? Like betrayal only exists when the rules of a relationship or whatnot, are betrayed.

So if you change the rules, then betrayal shifts, as a concept. Not that there's not betrayal in non-monogamy or in polyamory, because there is, but the understanding of that can shift. And I think folks don't realize how kind of fluid or changeable their concepts of relationships can be. That you can actually shift those. They can move. [laughs] And there are other options out there.

And obviously it's the safest thing to do, to go with the thing that you have the model for, right? But they *can* change.

**Shohreh:**

Well, and I think it's hard, like we were talking about earlier, when you are socialized with this idea of like, this is what a romantic partner is, this is how much time I'm supposed to give them, if I feel attraction for somebody else, I need to shove that down, and ignore it, and not deal with it. Like again, that messaging is everywhere. So it does feel wrong. It feels guilt-inducing to even think about the idea of being with other people.

And, of course, so often people bring up this idea of like, "Oh, well, I would be jealous. Like that's why I couldn't do this." I feel like that's the number one thing that I hear is jealousy, and that's something that I've done a lot of unpacking around, and I'm still working on, over these past few months of thinking about, what is jealousy? What is jealousy trying to tell us?

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Melissa:**

There is one book on polyamory called *More Than Two* that I generally really like. It's imperfect, but I generally think it's very comprehensive, kind of way of thinking about non-monogamy. But one of the things that it kind of asks when it talks about jealousy is, why is that the emotion that people get so riled up about? People don't say, "I could never be polyamorous, what if I get sad?" You know, like "I could never be polyamorous, what if I get mad?" "I couldn't be polyamorous, what if I feel..."

You know, like, there's never these other kind of difficult emotions that we have to work through that come up, it's always jealousy. And I think that that speaks so deeply to how ingrained monogamy is. That we feel like jealousy is a feeling that we should never feel. That, like, if we feel jealous in a relationship, that that is just unacceptable. When in reality, jealousy is a really healthy emotion. It's a normal emotion that we all have and we all experience.

How we behave around our jealousy matters, and like, you know, there's such a thing as extreme jealousy, whether that's the things that set us off, like moving into possessiveness, or the ways in which we react to jealousy. But jealousy as a feeling is normal. And people who are polyamorous get jealous [laughs]. You know, it's not like you become polyamorous and you never feel the feeling of jealousy ever again [laughter], like that's not what it is.

What do you do when you get jealous in monogamy? You know, like you talk about it. You sit with it. You figure out where the insecurity is coming from. There are ways in which you deal with jealousy that I think actually non-monogamy, at least, gives you more room to talk about jealousy.

And I think, also, a lot of the kind of go-to cultural kind of responses to jealousy is like, you know, because this relationship is the most important relationship in our lives, that we've been socialized to believe, then if I'm jealous because my partner is hanging out with this friend who makes me feel insecure, I'm allowed to tell that person that they can't hang out with their friend anymore. And that's unacceptable. Like you actually can't do that in any situation. Like it is not a healthy reaction to jealousy to say, "In order for my insecurity to get fixed, you have to kick that person out of your life." That's not a healthy response to jealousy.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

And so then people can't imagine polyamory or non-monogamy, because they're like, that isn't on the table anymore. When in reality, that shouldn't be on the table at all as a solution.

So it's like, there's kind of a toxicity around monogamy that has to be unlearned, even for people who wanna practice monogamy. I think there's aspects of monogamy as a cultural kind of idea that are really toxic and harmful, and that we have to undo.

**Shohreh:** Right, and like you were saying earlier, there's so many things that all of us can learn from non-monogamy, including people who are choosing to be monogamous. And one of those most important things for me is this idea that your romantic partner or partners don't belong to you. You don't possess them, right? You are deciding, it is a choice for you to be together, it is not that there is an ownership here and that you get to control them.

And unfortunately, that is such a common cultural narrative that like, when you're in a romantic partnership with somebody else that there's mutual ownership and control. And like you said, that's really toxic.

**Melissa:** Yeah, it's really, really, really toxic, and it shows up in like really small ways. Obviously if you say to a person, "Hey, people don't belong to other people," they'd be like, "Yeah, duh!! But it shows up in so many ways.

I used to work as a domestic violence prevention educator, and so what I would do is I would go into schools and I would talk with middle schoolers and high schoolers mostly, about what healthy relationships look like. And we would talk about all of the different ways in which behaviors that are unhealthy and could even potentially be abusive show up in these really, really small ways all over the place that we just think are really, really normal, but aren't healthy necessarily.

And I think possessiveness is a really scary one. And you know, it comes down to things that can be really sort of simple. Like sometimes people just say, "Oh, well, my boyfriend doesn't let me..." And it's like, doesn't let you do what? Like what do you mean doesn't let you?

**Shohreh:** Yeah.

## Redefining Health & Wellness #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Melissa:** They don't get to decide that. Or, like, "My partner isn't comfortable with me wearing this skirt in public, or whatever, so I don't wear it." They can't control what you wear, because you are your own person.

**Shohreh:** Yep.

**Melissa:** I have a friend who is a sex worker, and we were recently talking about how her partner expressed some concern recently about her job and was like, you know, "I don't like the idea that other men..." you know, blah blah blah. And it's like, you knew that that was her job when you started dating her. You don't get to suddenly feel like because you're her partner, that you have any say in what she does for a living, because you do not.

So, it's like these little things that people can feel like, "Well, you know, I understand why someone would be uncomfortable with that," and it's like, yeah, being uncomfortable with something means you can state that. You can be like, "You know what? I'm sitting with this thing. This thing feels prickly for me. I wanna talk to you about it. Not because I want you to change your behavior, but because I want to talk about my feelings with you," is one thing.

And it's another thing to think that your difficult feelings lead to someone else changing their behavior.

**Shohreh:** Yes, exactly, because the point is never like, oh you can't feel your feelings, you can't deal with these things that are popping up. It's just that, like, you don't control the other person's actions as a result of your feelings. And, in fact, those feelings popping up is like a little sign for you of like, "Hey, there's something I need to deal with here." And trying to figure out where is this coming from, and how can I deal with it?

**Melissa:** Yeah, feelings are really cool, because feelings let you know that you're feeling something.

**Shohreh:** Oh yeah!

**Melissa:** Yeah, there's something to sit with there, to kind of unpack. And then if you listen to feelings, they're generally very helpful.

## Redefining Health & Wellness #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

**Shohreh:** There's one last area about romantic partnerships I wanna take a minute to unpack, because I know you've done some speaking around this, which is this idea that attraction and desirability are these sort of innate things that can't be changed, right? Where people always say, like, "Oh, I have a type; I can't help it that I'm not attracted to such and such." It's so often the case that we think, "Oh, this is just the way it is, and it's unchanging."

But, again, there are all these culturally mandated, very narrow standards of beauty, weight stigma, all these other things that contribute to that. So, it can be changed, and I think that's something that people don't necessarily realize.

**Melissa:** Totally, because people will just very, very, without any thought, without putting any thought into what they're saying, will actually say things like, "Oh, I'm not attracted to black girls." Like, you don't think that came from somewhere? You don't think it's possible that in a world that is white supremacist, that is racist, that is particularly, you know, deals with anti-black racism, you don't think that that has any role in what you believe is attractive? What kinds of partners you think are desirable? What kinds of partners you think that you can be with?

It shows up so often in any kind of oppression. People, "I don't wanna date someone who is disabled," "I'm not attracted to people who are fat," "I'm not attracted to people who are like XYZ race," "I'm not attracted to people who are poor or working class." It's amazing to me that people don't realize how clearly connected that is to oppression.

And obviously the opposite can't be true because reverse oppression doesn't exist. So, oftentimes, like if a person of color, for example, is like "I don't date white people," that is often a response to white supremacy. Like, that's like, I don't want to have to deal with white supremacy in my relationships, because I'm already dealing with it in the world at large.

I personally do not endeavor to date cis straight men, because I have no interest in dealing with cis straight men in my relationships when I'm already dealing with cis straight men in the world, so.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, it's a lot.

## Redefining Health & Wellness #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

- Melissa:** Yeah, it's too much. It's too much, [laughs] and I just am not in the mood. So in those ways, like, that's a different, that's like I am responding to something that's happening, that is like trauma for me.
- But desirability or the politics of desire, it is something for us to really sit with and to think about, you know, "Who are the people that I tend to be attracted to? Who are the people that I tend to date, or be in relationships with, or have sex with?" or whatnot.
- And in what ways are there commonalities here, and in what ways are those commonalities examples of social power? Am I dating primarily white people? Am I dating primarily thin people, able people, middle to upper class people, etc.? And really kind of sitting with why that might be, and where you may have learned some of these ideas about what is attractive and what is desirable.
- But I think that most folks really feel like it's fixed. I fin, for example, I know this is like a weird one, but I find that I'm like, I've almost, I don't think *ever* dated someone who was blonde or like red-headed. Like I've only ever dated people with dark hair, and that's something that I'm like, I don't know what that's about [laughter]. I don't know. It's not to say that there aren't maybe specific things that you find attractive—
- Shohreh:** Right.
- Melissa:** —you know, or like a style or something, like the way that people dress, or like whatever. There are things that definitely you could be attracted to that isn't necessarily inherently tied to oppression. But I do think that we have to think about that, but we also have to weirdly, this is the hard thing, think about it in the *other* way.
- That if you are only dating, or primarily dating—if you're white and you're primarily dating people of color, if you are able and you're primarily dating people who are disabled, if you are thin and you're primarily dating people who are fat, if you are cis and you're primarily dating people who are trans—like there's also a question about fetishizing that we also have to ask ourselves. Like "Why am I also only dating people who fit into a very, very specific pool?" and is there something there also about power and some kind of like sense of control in those relationships also?

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

It's a lot to sit with and to think about, but there's this concept, desire mapping, where you can sit and look through, exactly what I was saying before, who do you date and why, and figuring that out. And re kind of configuring your understanding of what's attractive, because we are definitely taught that only certain people are attractive and that those people tend to be the ones who fit social standards of beauty, which just so happens, magically, to fit in with systems of power and oppression.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and this is definitely part of that anti-oppression, social justice work, is asking yourself these kinds of questions and getting deep in areas, even like your romantic life, of why you're making the decisions that you're making. Why you have a history of making the decisions that you've made. I think that's so important, and it's one of those everyday ways that we can bring social justice into our lives.

**Melissa:** Mhmm, yes. Absolutely! Yeah, and a really, really important way. These things show up in our everyday lives, and so it's definitely important for us to sit with that and to think about it.

**Shohreh:** For sure. So, for our final question, I would like to ask you, how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

**Melissa:** For me, when I think about health and wellness, I think a lot about kind of a more whole person kind of approach to what health and wellness looks like. So thinking about my physical health, my psychological health, my social health, you know, community health, spiritual health, like all of those things, I think, really, really play a role.

But also understanding that health is fleeting, which again, as we're recording this in the midst of coronavirus, duh. It's becoming very apparent the ways in which health can be very fleeting. And really understanding that, also, there is something my friend, Sonalee Rashatwar, said to me one time about disease being a part of life. Which I think is a really, really important thing for us to think about and definitely comes from, kind of, a disability justice standpoint also. Which is that right now I am able-bodied, and I might not be tomorrow. And understanding that my concept of health has to take that into consideration.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #42

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---

And that the idea of health is something that is fluid, and that there are lots of different ways to be healthy. And that also we don't have to value health necessarily either.

**Shohreh:** Thank you so much for being here, Melissa. This was such a fun conversation. It's sort of ironic that we spent this whole conversation talking about relationships when everybody is scrambling with coronavirus to figure out how to do virtual relationships [laughter] and all these different things. So it's perfect.

How can people find you and work with you?

**Melissa:** The easiest way to find everything that I do is on my website, which is melissafabello.com. That has links to my social, it has links to writing, consulting, speaking, my eBook, a course that I just released. It has everything that you possibly need there. So yeah, melissafabello.com would be the easiest place.

**Shohreh:** Perfect. So I'll put that in the show notes as well as your social media handles, and thank you again. This was wonderful.

**Melissa:** Yeah, thank you.

[Music plays]

**Shohreh:** 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 more information on what I'm all about and how to work with me, head on over to [shohrehdavoodi.com](http://shohrehdavoodi.com). I hope to see you for the next episode.

# **Redefining Health & Wellness**

## **#42**

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Melissa A. Fabello

---