

Redefining Health & Wellness

#43

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Alex Locust

Shohreh Davoodi: You are listening to episode number 43 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast featuring the oh so fabulous Alex Locust, your resident “glamputee.” Alex is dedicated to disability justice, has an active voice in the community, and teaches workshops on the topic. We talked about the need for an intersectional approach to disability justice, issues of access, and dismantling ableism in health and wellness spaces.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/43. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/43. This episode is part of the Health & Wellness Changemakers series, sponsored by Superfit Hero. The series runs from episode number 37 to episode number 48 if you want to catch them all. The goal of this series is to highlight people making waves in the health and wellness industry and taking it in a new direction. I am so grateful to be collaborating with the body-positive brand, Superfit Hero, to introduce you to these changemakers.

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

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

Now let's go “Spill the Disabili-Tea” with Alex.

[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.

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

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health and wellness are not moral obligations. Are you ready? Let's fuck some shit up.

Alex, I am super excited to have you on the show today. Thank you for taking some time out of your busy quarantine schedule to be here.

Alex Locust: Thank you, I'm so grateful to break open all of this illustrious space I have. I'm really excited for today's conversation.

Shohreh: Yeah! So I wanna hear all about you. Who are you? What do you do? What are you passionate about?

Alex: I identify as a bi-racial, queer, glamputee. I am passionate about disability justice, activism, community organizing. I live in San Francisco, from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, so we've gotten a big culture shock, it's a big transition!

Shohreh: Yeah.

Alex: I spend my life here as a counselor and doing workshops around disability justice. So I'm involved in harm reduction in San Francisco. I do lots of conversations with people about how to promote access in spaces, how to consider disability culture, you know, when they're trying to build community. And also, really, my north star in all of this is trying to empower and liberate disabled people, right? Help them feel not included, but like, in the driver's seat of their lives.

Shohreh: I wanna talk about your "glamputee" term because one, I'm obsessed with it, but two [laughs], I wanna know more about your inspiration for that and, kind of, the intersections of your queer and disabled identities.

Alex: Yeah. One of the things I appreciated, I was looking at your website, and just, there was such a celebration of authenticity. And "glamputee" came about—I'm obviously a cheese ball, I love a good pun—and one of the things that disability justice and the movements around disability have taught me is a sense of disability pride. So it's kind of that unabashed, like, identity first, like, hashtag say the word. How do I own my disability in every aspect of my life? And you mentioned that the intersection of queerness then to me, my disability informs who I am, my queerness

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informs who I am. They like come together in this very fabulous cocktail that probably has like a flamingo [laughter] of fruit and tequila in it.

Glamputee just felt like this way of saying, “I’m an amputee. I’m queer. Add glam.” I’m trying to add this like camp and flamboyance into the way that I organize and to the way that I present in the world. And I wanna be in front of people in a way where you can’t turn away from those things. You’re not saying, “Oh, well, you know, I got to know Alex in spite of his disability,” or “Alex has really overcome this thing.” I’m like coming in hot. I’m like, “I’m a glamputee. Let’s have a conversation. I’ve got my nails painted [laughs]. I’ve got some dangly earrings. You know, I’m trying to wear some nice pattern prints.”

Exploring the facets of these identities and to really model for people that these things can make your life better, right? And provide more of a space to explore all of the facets of your identity rather than hiding them or trying to sweep them under the rug to be more palatable.

Shohreh:

I love that so much because you’ve really stated in, again, having this glamputee sort of name and identity that being an amputee is a part of who you are, and it’s not something that you need to be ashamed of. And I think so often, and especially in the past, as a culture and as the United States in general, disability is seen as this shameful thing that we don’t want to talk about it. Like, if you have it, you need to, you know, overcome it, because people see this as a thing that’s like a mountain that you have to climb and get over instead of, like, this is a piece of who you are. Like we all have different pieces of who we are.

Alex:

Yeah. To that point, disability is one of the most universal experiences, particularly within marginalized identities, because it can happen to anybody, you know. Or, anybody can be welcomed to the family in that way. And so, rather than viewing disability as an othered experience, or like, “Well, I’m non-disabled, and I can’t relate to that,” if you have the privilege of growing old enough, like, you will likely experience disability in some fashion.

And so when we lead with disability pride, we talk about a universal experience more as a collective. And we can learn what to benefit from

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that. You mentioned the quarantine earlier, and there's been such amazing organizing by disabled people in this time because they've spent their whole lives learning how to organize remotely, right? Or because spaces are inaccessible, they've figured out workarounds, or these really fabulous ways of bringing people together, of keeping movements forward, holding politicians accountable.

And so, disability is not something to overcome, it's something to learn from. And that's why, you know, I think this pride helps not only challenge the stigma, but inform people that access just benefits everybody, and when we turn to disabled people, we can learn how to organize better. We can learn how to build community better.

Shohreh: Right, and that's a big message that I'm hearing right now coming out of the disability community during the quarantine and the pandemic is this idea that disabled people have been asking for many of the things that companies and communities are just now starting to offer because it's affecting everybody instead of just disabled folks.

Alex: Yeah, shout out to Alice Wong. She's a disabled woman of color in the Bay area, and she has referred really beautifully to disabled people as oracles. Instead of viewing disabled people as like, our fate, right, or this like negative framing of like, "That will be you some day." You know, reframing that from a strength-based perspective in saying, if we turn to the insight, to the expertise of disabled people as these like future tellers, we could actually set ourselves up for a better future for all of us.

And it's really disheartening to see that for so many years people have been advocating for, like you said, the ability to work from home, the ability to work remotely, different access features. And it's just been defenses and resistance left and right, and then all of a sudden when everybody has to face this, the doors are blown open and all of a sudden everybody can work from home. So where was that disconnect? Why wasn't that available beforehand?

Shohreh: Yeah, absolutely. And I know something that you talk about a lot as well is this idea that when we have more access for disabled folks, it's actually better for everybody. Ultimately everybody benefits. And I think you've

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given some great examples of that, and I'm curious if there are any other ones that come to mind for you. Because I think this is something that people need to wrap their heads around.

Alex: Yeah, I mean, we can think about, in general, right, in public spaces, people aren't complaining about, "Oh, there's too many elevators in that building," [laughter] or, you know, you think about curb cuts, right, if you have groceries, if you have a stroller, if you're rolling something around, like you don't have to deal with sidewalks. I think about closed captioning on Netflix, I know -

Shohreh: Oh yeah, I use it all the time.

Alex: Right, exactly. And it's like, we're not shaking our fists at the deaf or hard of hearing community [laughs], like, "How could you!" You know, "I understood what was going on on the screen better!"

And then even, you know, we're talking in this conversation about health and wellness, and in the gym, for me I'm thinking specifically like there are certain pieces of equipment that assume a certain type of body. And if I'm on a bench that's pretty thin, for me as an amputee it's hard to balance, you know, if I'm laying down, I only have one leg. And it's kind of like, I feel like I'm gonna fall off.

What would it be like if there were different sized benches, you know? And then it's not just about if you're an amputee, you could be a fat person or somebody who just needs a bigger space to balance on. And that's not going to detract or take away from other people's experiences.

And I think that's what's really frustrating about access features is most people just look at the bottom line of, "That's going to cost more money. We didn't prioritize that at the beginning. We didn't consider disabled people's needs ahead of time, and so now you're asking for something that we haven't accounted for." When really, if people at the front, before creating space out of these things, you'd be able to see how that would actually benefit everybody and it wouldn't be this added cost.

Shohreh: Right, and like we just said, with everything going on with the pandemic right now, people magically have the money, and the resources, and

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whatever to make these things happen when they have to do it because it's a necessity. So it's like, I always feel like that's sort of this thinly veiled excuse because clearly it can be done when it needs to be done.

Alex: Oh, oh, oh yeah, That's like, the most, I don't know, a rainy day jar that is just like trillions of dollars big. [laughs]

Shohreh: I mean, for me money just like grows on trees, I don't understand it at all, I think it's all fake. But yes, exactly that!

Alex: Yeah. [Laughter]

Shohreh: So, your work is based in disability justice, and I'm sure there are some people listening who are unfamiliar with this concept and framework, so can you talk a little bit more about that?

Alex: Absolutely. So, I say disability justice really intentionally because this is a framework that was proposed by Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, Leroy Moore, Stacey Park, Eli Clare, Sebastian Margaret. Like these disabled, queer, predominantly people of color who evolved the conversation from disability civil rights.

The disability civil rights movement that exploded in the U.S. in 1977 because of sit-ins in San Francisco, because of protests led by disabled people, eventually led to the American's With Disabilities Act in 1990. We would not have this anti-discrimination legislation, we would not have these access features without those heroes. *And* the framing of those conversations were fairly single issue. Disability civil rights was about getting disabled people rights, and as we've seen with other movements, when you're single issue, you can flatten the nuances of the community that you're advocating for.

So there have been conversations within Black Lives Matter or Me Too or the Women's March that say, if you just say we're fighting for women, who does that mean, right? Are we talking about trans women? Are we talking about non-binary women? You know, if we're talking about Me Too, like how does privilege play out within that? How do other identities contribute to or facilitate more oppressive experiences?

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And so disability justice is saying there are queer, disabled, people of color; there are queer, black, disabled people; people with disabilities experiencing homelessness; sex workers with disabilities.

We need to attend to their liberation in a way that doesn't just say, "Let's focus on disability." So disability justice is intersectional. It's led by the most impacted, right, so it's led by black and brown, queer, disabled people. It has tenants in cross-movement solidarity, right? How do we work with Black Lives Matter to support each other? There's cross-disability solidarity.

Disability justice isn't me as an amputee trying to liberate myself and then clock out [laughter]. I have to look out for people with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities, chronic illness, people with psychiatric disabilities, right, who might not have the privilege of being on a podcast like this or speaking in public spaces, facilitating workshops. Like, I have to consider all of those needs.

These really beautiful tenants that come together. Patty has a quote, a larger quote, but ultimately ends with, "No body is left behind," and I love that kind of word play where it's really, disability justice benefits all of us. It's not just for disabled people. And so when we approach liberation and community organizing with this framework, I think it adds to how we do this work rather than, you know, has to be this, kind of, separate way of thinking.

Shohreh: I think it's so important how you mentioned this idea that it's obviously not one size fits all. Because like you said, even across the disability community there are so many people with different kinds of disabilities and then you have people with all these other intersectional identities that play into how they're treated in the world, what they can have access to, etc. So that's super important to mention.

Then I also feel like this is a good time to shout out Crip Camp because you were talking about the history, and I just watched it over the weekend and it was awesome.

Alex: Oh my gosh, how much did you cry?

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Shohreh: So many tears! [laughter]

Alex: I cried a lot.

Shohreh: For those who don't know, this is a Netflix documentary that just dropped, and I'll link to it in the show notes because you definitely should watch it.

Alex: Yeah and those folx are the heroes that I was referencing in those 504 protests. I think they embody everything that has inspired me, you know, where they lead with disability. Their disability helped them be ingenious in those spaces.

That scene of deaf people inside signing to deaf people outside to help communicate, like, just the way that disability made that movement last, right? And other examples of like that disability justice at the time. Bradley Lomax was a Black Panther and a wheelchair rider, right? And so, as one of the protestors, he got the Black Panthers involved and they helped bring in hot meals and keep the protestors fed and that movement sustained.

And so, it's like, you know, what can we learn from those disabled heroes then and take that to now, right, with everything that we're trying to navigate, both like with a global pandemic, but also just like in general.

Shohreh: I actually think it's worth for a second to talk about the ADA because I do think there's this common misconception among non-disabled people that like, "Oh, but you have the ADA, so you're legally protected and everything is fine and you're great!" And I feel like that is not true!

Alex: [Laughs] It's not. I really appreciate that you get that, and also, that you do the high tone that I do.

Shohreh: Of course. [laughter]

Alex: I don't think that's it. Here we are, it's April 2020, July of this year will be the 30th anniversary of the ADA. One of the fun parts about the ADA is that it was signed like days after I was born. So I'm like, "How old is the ADA?" Then I'm like, "How old am I?" [laughter] So even just using that as a silly example, it's like, I have been around days longer than the ADA as a

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human, and here I am still finding the task of these workshops is necessary.

Because as many people can attest to, right, just because civil rights legislation is in writing doesn't mean that our culture has changed. It doesn't mean that people's perception of that identity has changed. And if anything, sometimes it can be wielded against people, right? Where, you know, a space will say, "Well, we are ADA compliant," right?

And that might be true on paper, they can check all the boxes. So does that mean that they're providing service with a smile? [Laughter] Does that mean when somebody asks for accommodations that they'll be provided to them? Does it mean that it's easy to find the access information?

Dr. Karen Nakamura in Berkley really brought up an amazing point at a conference once that the ADA doesn't have any enforcing body, right? And so, even if a disabled person identifies that a space isn't accessible, it's not like there's the ADA police that you can call and be like, "Bring-bring! Like, I can't get in here, please help me out!" [Laughs]

That person then has to go through the litigious process of suing a space, and like, think about what access and privilege you have to have to navigate the legal system, to pay the court fees. Also, if you're in a small community, right, you can essentially be the reason that a small business closes because you put them out of business because you're suing them for something that they've had 30 years to like save up money or prioritize.

And so it pits disabled people against their community as opposed to really like having the teeth be enacted 30 years after this was put into action.

Shohreh:

Right, and as a former attorney I can confirm that it is fucking difficult to get anything through the legal system. It's very expensive. It's not accessible. Like, people think "Oh, you can just sue!" and that is years of work, thousands of dollars. Like, if you're lucky, maybe you can get the ACLU or someone to represent you if it's a huge case. But that's not the case for the average, everyday instances of not having access.

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So a lot of people just get screwed. Like you said, there is no protection that's necessarily out there, even though the ADA is on the books. So, while it is fantastic, and a huge improvement from what we had before, it also isn't a slam dunk that I think people tend to think it is if they don't know that much about it.

Alex: Yeah, absolutely.

Shohreh: So, I work in the health and wellness space and this podcast is, of course, related to health and wellness. And I think one of the biggest problems with this industry as a whole, and it's a large industry, is rampant ableism. So, I would love to have you talk about, just ableism in general, for anyone who maybe is unfamiliar with that term, and then let's chat about some of the ways that you see this showing up, specifically in this industry.

Alex: Yeah, I mean [laughs], I need to steal "rampant ableism" because it just has such a ring to it. So resonant [laughs] with so many things I see. Ableism, to put it in very short terms, is kind of that idea that by default, disabled people are inferior. And just like other systems of oppression, right? Other isms, whether it's racism, classism, sexism, ageism, sizeism, it's saying that one group of people is more important, is "normal." You know, this set of looks, behaviors, presentations, this is what everybody is expected to have and should behave like. And if you are outside of that, then you are less than. You're marginalized, you're discriminated, you're treated differently.

And so, this is an assumption within ableism that there's an "able body." And so that means that you have four limbs, and they all work, and your brain does the brain thing when it's supposed to.

Shohreh: The brain thing! [Laughter]

Alex: Yeah, brain stuff.

Shohreh: I can tell you my ADHD brain does not do the "brain thing."

Alex: The brain thing, yeah. There's a protest on the brain thing today. And so, you know, ableism is communicating that if, in any way, you differ from that able body, right, that able body/mind, then you're disabled, right? And that it's okay to treat disabled people badly because they're not able-bodied,

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you know? Or as many people, as we've already said, referred to as non-disabled. And that ableism is really insidious because it can happen institutionally, right? If we're thinking about health and wellness, it could be a brand, a company, a gym, right, a wellness space that has ableist rhetoric or policies, right, where either it's inaccessible or they don't provide equity and support for disabled people.

It can happen interpersonally, with microaggressions, that's a whole conversation that I'm sure you and I could have a lot of fun talking about where—

Shohreh: So much.

Alex: So much fun! It's like capital F, Fun. People are saying, doing, right, have those kind of like verbal and non-verbal cues that your disability makes me uncomfortable. Or, I'm burdened by your experience. Your body, your privacy is invalid because you're different and I'm just going to ask you invasive questions.

And I think one of the most difficult things is internalized ableism, especially in the context of health and wellness where regardless of how you identify or regardless of your ability, we've been reared in this environment, in this culture that teaches us that being disabled is bad, it's ugly, it's unattractive, it's inherently pitiable, right? It's worth avoiding and so then we act in ways where we try to distance ourselves from that identity.

And so sometimes disabled people don't ask for accommodations because they don't want to be perceived as disabled, or people who are non-disabled avoid seeming like they need more help or have to maybe do an exercise differently or like push themselves beyond a safe place because they don't want to be perceived as like less able to. And all of those things come together to create this like fear, and stigma, and, you know, erasure of like the beauty and the generative force that is disability.

Shohreh: When you're saying this idea that, you know, able bodied people are the "default," then what does that mean when we have these very narrow standards of beauty? And how does that affect disabled folx who are maybe trying harder to "pass" as an able-bodied person. Or wear certain

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things or look a certain way to draw less attention to themselves. Like I feel like it adds a lot of extra pressure on disabled folx.

Alex:

Yeah, thinking about like parallels in different movements and different communities. I love on, there's a podcast, She's All Fat, they unpack this idea of like being a "good fat" [laughs], right, or like a "good fattie" where you're like a palatable version of something that people have an aversion to, right? Like, you're not doing the things that make them uncomfortable. And so it's kind of this, like, even the black community, this idea of like respectability politics.

And so, with disability there's sometimes that effort of people to be like, easy breezy right? Like, "I don't need accommodations," right? Like, "I'm fine!" You know, I'll just be here. I won't make you uncomfortable, I won't provide this mirror for you to realize that someday you might also experience something where your body doesn't want you to do what you want it to do.

And that just puts so much pressure on people to conform, and I think even I saw something on your website, right—you're spending all this psychic energy, all this emotional energy censoring yourself, editing yourself, making yourself this like polished thing without any edges. And, you know, what energy do you have left then to do what you've set out to do? As opposed to just being able to be your authentic, imperfect self that has needs and just focusing on what does health and wellness mean to you, you're so focused on what it means to other people and what other people want from you that you can't really prioritize your needs or your wellness.

Shohreh:

Right, because I think anyone who has any marginalization knows what it's like to have to occasionally show up as someone who is not yourself. And how exhausting that is to play that part and not just get to be in your default mode of, "This is who I am." It sucks.

Alex:

Yeah. And on top of that, one of the things that isn't always talked about or is overlooked is that these systems negatively impact everybody. You know, it's not just that ableism negatively impacts disabled people. I mean, you could have a six pack and have very low body fat and do all those

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things. If you're consistently holding yourself to an impossible standard in order to not appear less of that ideal. Then you also aren't focusing on your wellness. You also aren't focusing on your needs. You're killing yourself in order to be this thing that nobody can be, right? The whole point is that it's not real.

And when people don't interrogate that, then, you know, you could kind of seem like you're succeeding because you're like, "Oh well, I'm hitting my weight goals," or, you know, "These are my nutrition needs, and I'm not eating fats this month," or whatever. But really, who is that benefitting? And are you getting what you need or are you presenting as you're getting what you need?

[Music plays]

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

Natalie Dunbar: Hi, I'm Natalie Dunbar, a body-positive, all-inclusive yoga teacher based in Pasadena, California. My wellness tip for you today is to curate content in your social media feeds that reflects who you are and what you stand for. Try curating content that makes you feel good about you. Doing so can be a simple, yet powerful way to bolster your body acceptance practice. Remove anything that is triggering or potentially body shaming, and go live your best life.

[Music plays]

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

I know something that you've talked about as well is this idea that there are a lot of parallels and there's a lot of overlap between fatphobia and ableism, and I'd love to talk a little bit more about that because I know you've mentioned how these movements can really benefit one another,

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and especially from a health and wellness perspective, I can absolutely see that. Because we live in a culture where both disabled folks and fat folks are viewed as, again, not the default, not the norm, and as if they are supposed to conform to this thin ideal.

Alex: Right, the parallels and the overlaps, I think, for me really click into place, again, thinking about She's All Fat or Virgie Tovar's You Have the Right to Remain Fat. Thinking about fat liberation and body positivity started by fat women where I think one of the things that gets obscured or misconstrued is that body positivity is like this idea of being positive about your body [laughter].

Shohreh: Right.

Alex: Right. It's about dismantling these ideas that certain bodies are more worthy based on what they look like, what size you are.

Shohreh: Or their health status.

Alex: Right, or your health status. And so that's where I think fat liberation and disability justice share a lot of overlaps because of, I think, the morality that happens in relation to health and wellness. You know, you were talking about health status, and we hear so much moral rhetoric around fatness where it's treated as if, like, people are choosing to be fat or, like, you are fat because you decided to not take care of yourself, you don't love yourself. Or you should be eating better. If you ate better, then you would be healthier, and you would deserve a better life, right?

And a lot of that becomes parenthetical, right? People start with that well intention of, "I'm just worried about your health," but really what is the underlying message is, "I don't like that you're fat. It makes me uncomfortable."

Shohreh: Exactly.

Alex: With disability, the shocking part for some people, and maybe not for others, is that morality is still applied, just in different ways. Because of that medical model of disability where it's saying, "If your body is different, you

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should apply medicine to make it less different, [laughs] and then you'll be fixed."

And so, medicine could be in the traditional sense of taking medicine. It could be less obvious, like for me the medical model pushes for me to wear a prosthetic, right? People want me to have four limbs, they're saying, "It doesn't make sense that you don't want to wear a prosthetic." You know, the morality of like, this is what you should do, we're telling you that you should do this. If you're not doing it, then it's wrong.

But I think it further extends out, like medicine and this idea of health and wellness of, if you as a disabled person aren't pursuing this, this or this, then you're not taking care of yourself, right? Then you must not want to be well. Or even that idea of like certain activities, prioritizing those things to demonstrate what health and wellness means. All of that could be well intentioned, but what it's not doing is centering the voices of the people experiencing it, right?

So rarely do we ask disabled people, "What does health and wellness mean to you? What do you need to feel those things, and how can we create environments where you have access to that?" As opposed to, "Well, you're not going to the gym, and you're not eating this way, so clearly you don't care about that."

And I think that overlooks that gyms are inaccessible, and expensive programs and things like that are financially inaccessible, right? People might not have access to organic foods or the things that we're proposing as the ways to take care of our body. So how do we open up these conversations to be more accessible to dismantling the morality around who deserves wellness or how you are embodying that?

Shohreh:

I did an episode with Alejandra Spector, who is a co-host of the Latinx Mental Health Podcast, and we talked about disability and we talked about, what I like to call the "have you tried" syndrome which is where [laughs] well-meaning people are like, "Have you tried this? Or this? Or this?" And she was just talking about how it is the absolute most annoying thing that people can do to her. Because she was like, "Probably I have tried it, I've heard of it, and it's none of your fucking business!"

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Alex: Ha! Yes! Yo, if I had a penny for every time somebody asked me if I've thought about wearing a prosthetic, it's like, hmm [laughs]. I don't know how to tell you this, but you're not the first person with that clever idea, and if I wanted to, I would be pursuing that, but I don't. So like, it's good. [laughter]

You know, I don't...it's just very fascinating how people decide to insert themselves and offer that thing. Oftentimes it's not even somebody, that's like, "Oh hey, like how's your day? What are you up to? Are you open to a conversation about something that can be potentially traumatic?" It's like people talk to me as I've never seen or heard of a prosthetic before, and I'm like, "What a...what an idea!"

Shohreh: Yeah, I feel like you'd have enough pennies that you could put all those people in a pool, and fill the pool with pennies, and you'd never have to deal with them again.

Alex: [Laughs] I could just buy them all prosthetics, and then they could just [laughter] give them to people rather than ask if people have heard of them.

Shohreh: Or you could just carry one around and like hit people over the head every time they ask you. That feels like a good use for one.

Alex: Yeah, I love that idea. Maybe I'll just carry the prosthetic that I have and don't wear, like, on a leash, [laughter] like, behind me. That way people won't ask me if I've heard of it, but also won't ask me why I'm not wearing it.

Shohreh: Genius!

So, whether you're a person working in health and wellness or you're just a participant in it, which I feel like we all are in various ways, what would you say are some of the keys to extending inclusivity to disabled folx and addressing ableism that is in this industry?

Alex: Hmm. You know, one of the keys from disability justice is leadership of the most impacted. And so, I would challenge people to ask themselves, how are disabled voices considered in the way that you're instructing a class,

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the way that you're teaching a course, you know, the way that you're creating an environment, right? Or any of these things. If you aren't thinking of disabled people, that's not a good start.

Even if you're considering them, are you consulting, right, and like paying disabled people to participate in the creation of your content or your space? Are you hiring disabled trainers? Are there people with disabilities a part of the conversation as you're developing your business in an ongoing fashion, right? It's not just a one and done conversation, because sometimes a space might be deemed accessible, and then some folk might use it and say, "Well, actually this doesn't work for me." So you need to continually have those conversations.

And also, just consider again that idea of collective access, or Alice Wong, who I mentioned earlier, has a campaign with Mia Mingus and Sandy Ho called Access Is Love where you're showing love to disabled people by creating access and accessible spaces. Not doing it because you're supposed to.

And I've had really amazing experiences in the gym where, instead of, I've had in the past where like I'll go to a class and people aren't ready for a disabled body. And so when I say, you know, "Can you adapt this class for me?" They'll say, "Oh yeah, we'll figure it out." And then what happens is they'll just tell me to sit exercises out or they'll just tell me to do the right side twice, right? And it's not really coming from an informed place.

They're not really asking me how that feels or am I getting the benefit of the workout. The recommendation that I would offer is, like, asking people what they need. And also, I've had instructors offer an exercise where they say, "Here's the base exercise, and then here's a variation. And here's a different variation, and here's another way that you can do it."

And what that shows the class is, you're not saying that here's the way that non-disabled people do it and then here's what Alex is gonna do.

Shohreh: Exactly.

Alex: You're not highlighting or emphasizing that disabled person is different and they're going to do it different than everybody else. It's like, everybody has different needs, and maybe somebody has got a wobbly

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knee in the back or maybe you've had a rough week and your lower back is killing you and you would just benefit from a variation. Presenting it in that normalized way that everybody can do it, I think really offers that sense of like modeling access and not tokenizing or othering disabled people in the process.

Shohreh: Right and what we're not gonna do, everybody, is show up in the DMs of disabled folx and demand free labor. Not gonna do that.

Alex: Also that. Yes, please, no free labor. We're done with that!

Shohreh: Yes. You mentioned payment and that's very important—pay for your education, y'all.

Alex: Yes, free labor is cancelled. [Laughter]

Shohreh: 2020, cancelled forever.

Alex: Yes [laughs].

Shohreh: Honestly, at this point we can just cancel this year, just hop to 2021.

Alex: Just fast forward, we're done [laughter].

Shohreh: Alright. Well for our last question I would like to know how you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

Alex: Yeah, and that is a big question that I'm [laughs] mulling over very often. You know, health and wellness to me, I think, you know, we've talked about the gym and nutrition, right? The gym for me is a very painful place. It certainly is somewhere that reminds me a lot of my body in ways that don't feel good. And so, health and wellness in that sense has been working with trainers who are affirming and really attentive, attuned to my disability, to my experience.

I wanna give a shout-out to Natalie, my friend. Her Instagram handle is @barbellblondie.

Shohreh: I love Natalie.

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Alex:

Yes, okay great. Yeah, Natalie and I got to work together for a long time. And Natalie made the space feel like somewhere that I wanted to be and that, you know, I was getting benefit from being in my body. I never set any weight goals. I never was looking at like how much muscle I'd gained or any, really, like, metrics.

It really, honestly, just the sheer fact that I was going to the gym was a pretty big milestone for me. So I think moving away from that idea that wellness is tied to like numbers or like a specific growth that you can measure, as opposed to more like the felt lived experience of, "This place is a source of trauma for me, and I am around people who are making it manageable, and I'm getting benefit from that."

I would say, you know, we talked about mental health a little bit. That's something that I'm trying to attend to more and certainly could do a better job. Going to therapy, right? Definitely looking at my own life and particularly from that anti-capitalist perspective of not defining my value in my work, right? Or how productive I am.

I think this quarantine specifically has been a really important shock to my system where I was working a full-time job. I am still working a full-time job, but doing this glamputee stuff is on top of that. And so to do community organizing and emotional labor both as a counselor and a workshop facilitator, doing all these emails, like keeping up with the business of everything, I wasn't making space for my wellness in terms of like sleep hygiene, you know, connecting with people that really mattered to me. Like cooking at home, reading, resting, podcasts, all these kinds of things, my wellness has taken a hit because I prioritized work.

And so this has been a really, you know, obviously painful and intense reflective period, and I'm feeling the benefit of kind of, not like spreading myself so thin to a point where I can't attend to my body's needs, my mind's needs.

And I think the last thing I wanna just plug is Adrienne Maree Brown has a book, *Pleasure Activism*, that I just adore. And that's what I'm trying to do a lot of reflection around right now. It's like the idea of how do we make activism and liberation the most pleasurable experience on earth? And so

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how does sex, drugs, pleasurable experiences fit into my framework of liberation? How do I attend to my needs as a pleasure being, as opposed to just work-work-work-work? How do I celebrate those things that make this lifelong work sustainable and I think that's what I've been really working on.

Shohreh: Yeah, and especially the productivity piece really resonates with me, and I'm sure resonates with so many people right now who are in this same boat of not being able to work at the capacity that they're used to and sort of being hit in the face with mental health stuff right now. And, like you said, it's rough, but I think also, it's ultimately a good thing for all of us because it gives us a chance to look at our lives and say, "Was what we were doing before working for us?" Or do we want to make some changes now that we're realizing that oh hey, we deserve to rest as well.

Alex: Yeah. One of the clients that I work with asked me, "Is everything going to go back to normal?" And it's kind of like, do we want to go back? [Laughs] You know, was it all working? And I think for as much as I don't wanna see people die, I don't wanna see people experience all of the ramifications of this experience, it's a global shock to all of these systems to say, it clearly was not working, right?

And how can we radicalize in this moment and come together to say, "What future do we want? What future do we deserve?" How do we cultivate that in this moment of regrouping, right? And how do we foster that as opposed to just trying to go back to where things were, because that was a very vulnerable place that's put us in this precarious position.

Shohreh: Yes, 100%. And I think just always being wary of that word "normal" and who's defining it, and what it means—

Alex: Yes. Yes.

Shohreh: And we can change it whenever we want.

Alex: Yes.

Shohreh: Well, thank you so much for being here, Alex. This was a blast. How can people find you? And also, tell me about how people can participate in your Spill the Disabili-Tea™ workshops.

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Alex: Yes. So on Instagram, pretty much everything, @glamputee, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Venmo -

Shohreh: Hell yeah!

Alex: Hey! I mostly use Instagram to communicate about upcoming workshops. It's also my website, www.glamputee.com. There I have free resource guides, both around my disability justice workshops, Spill the Disabili-Tea™, and I have a Demystifying Microaggressions workshop.

So lots of cool videos, articles, blog posts, podcasts unpacking these things. That's also where other podcast episodes are that I've been on. So if you like this [laughs], check out some other stuff.

And Spill the Disabili-Tea™ is, you know, it's my baby. It's my pride and joy. It's a workshop that I like to host when I can in different spaces and bring people together and do community building around disability justice. So it's not just a lecture, right, it's more like, I hope that you meet somebody cool, and, you know, if you see a disability film festival coming through or you see a speaker, or a conference, or a session, or a video, you have somebody to share that with now. You have somebody to carry that learning beyond just that afternoon.

So feel free to reach out to me through my website to bring that to where you're at, or in this age of remote and digital learning, maybe we'll figure out a new way to host Disabili-Tea, I'd love that.

Shohreh: Fantastic. I will post links to all of that in the show notes. All of y'all, go follow Alex's fabulous self. And thank you so much for being here.

Alex: Aw. Thank you for the time. It's so heartening to see people like yourself out here doing the work. I'm so excited to be in connection with you now.

Shohreh: I love that, thank you.

[Music plays]

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

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