

Redefining Health & Wellness

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Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Anna Chapman

Shohreh Davoodi: Hi y'all, welcome to episode number 45 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I have an interview for you today with Anna Chapman, who is a fat-positive yoga and meditation teacher, brand strategist, podcaster, and genuinely lovely person. We covered so much territory in our conversation, including how fashion brands can do better by fat people, Anna's work with Joyn, a company that puts out online movement classes, Anna's mindful minute series on social media, reclaiming the word "fat," and more. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/45. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/45.

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

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

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

Let's go have some fun with Anna.

[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.

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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.

Anna! I am so excited you're on the podcast today!

Anna Chapman: I'm so excited to be here!

Shohreh: Thank you so much, this is gonna be awesome. So, I just wanna start by having you tell me more about you—who you are, what you do—all the good stuff.

Anna: Yeah. My name is Anna Chapman. I live in Portland, Oregon; have lived here for the past eight or nine years. It's pretty chill. Could be ready for a change soon, though.

Shohreh: Ooh!

Anna: I know. Hot exclusive! Also, I think in pandemic times everybody is ready for any kind of change.

Shohreh: Oh my god, so true [laughter].

Anna: I'm kind of one of those Jills of all trades, so I do a lot of different things. But right now, what I've been mostly focused on is, I'm a community builder. So I really love to bring community events to life, and activations and things like that, and classes, because I'm a yoga teacher and a meditation facilitator. And so I love to mix community building with fat-liberated community and embodied movement, and do things together there.

Right now in this pandemic time I've been doing a lot of online teaching, which has been actually pretty nice, because it's a way to slow down and think about everything that I'm doing.

But yeah, I really am a big fan of how we feel freedom in our bodies and how we move in a way that feels good for us. And I've sort of noticed that I get this huge surge of energy when I advocate for, especially fat bodies in

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movement. And being able to just be in your body and move in a way that feels good and also not have to deal with weight stigma while doing it is kind of my jam.

Shohreh: And you just recently started your own podcast, right? Congrats on that by the way!

Anna: Oh, thank you, thank you, I'm not even good at talking about it yet, but I'm so excited about it. Yes, I just started this podcast called where you belong, and it's truly an exploration in spaces, places, and experiences where we allow ourselves to be. So I wanna hear, like, where people have either found immense space of belonging or had to create it for themselves because it didn't exist.

And what I love about it is in my work that I've been doing with, sort of, mixing community building and my deep love of fashion, I've started to do this sort of like brand strategy work to help brands really understand how to make good product that fits fat bodies. But also how to market it and share it in a way that's like, really honoring of those bodies rather than using like smarmy [laughter] bait and switch sort of techniques to sell products.

Or also just making people feel like they need the product to be whole or complete, or anything like that. Because I think that's like a really unnecessary marketing tool that has sort of taken a toll on our self-esteem and how we feel about ourselves. So I really try to help brands steer clear of that.

Shohreh: I love that. That's such necessary work to have people out there doing, especially for fat communities. And, actually, I'd love to dive into that a little bit deeper. Maybe we could talk a little bit about some of the ways that you've seen brands making mistakes in their outreach to fat communities and some of the things that, based on your experience, you think they could be doing better.

Anna: Yeah, one of the major things I think that's hard, and I understand from a brand perspective, but I also understand from the consumer side, and that's right now there's this real push on the market to create more inclusive offerings for sizes. So currently the plus, sort of deemed plus-size

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is a 3XL, and that's just not a size-inclusive limit offering. So, I'm really trying to work with brands to push their extended sizes into the 5, 6, 7X range.

Because what we've done in saying that we have extended sizing and it goes to 3X is that we've pushed so many super fat people out of the space of where they can access clothing, that then we're already, as fat people, faced with not having a lot of brick and mortar stores where we can access clothing, try it on, make sure it fits how we want, and walk out of the store with it.

So what I'm noticing is that a lot of brands think that plus consumers want to use online methods to buy their clothing, and that's just what's available and the way that we can get our bodies clothed. It's not actually the preferred method.

Shohreh: Right.

Anna: People wanna be able to go into a store, wanna feel the fabric, wanna see the color, wanna make sure it looks good on their skin, feels right, fits the way they want it to fit. And the problem with having so few options is that everyone is gonna flock to those options, which right now we have like Torrid, Lane Bryant, and then there's some smaller shops, there's like Universal Standard, which you can go into a one-to-one store, but like it's a very minimal option kind of experience.

And then once you get into the store, the experience isn't really supportive for fat consumers. If there's nowhere to sit or nowhere to lie, kind of spread out and slow down a little, it's not gonna be fun to have that experience. So I think what I have really been noticing and putting into my work is like, how do we be more thoughtful of the experience that we're putting people through? Because that's really gonna create the access that we're wanting, and then we're gonna be able to see the numbers of like, oh, there's actually this need for these larger sizes.

But because there's so little access to getting, even in front of the product, and then beyond that, it's like most of the brands that we see, they go up to a 3X which is, I see, as kind of halfway through the plus sizing spectrum, not the end of it.

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Shohreh: Mmhmm.

Anna: So what I notice about brands is that they're like, oh, there's not enough need and it's also too hard to get product. And to that I say, we've gotta slow down. We've gotta see how we can think differently about how we're getting these products together. So maybe we're not putting out these full lines, but we're at least bringing it into our awareness that this is where plus people aren't being served.

And I think the fear of that, I don't know how to do it, stops so many brands from like pushing into the discomfort of like, yeah, you might have to work with the manufacturers. You might have to work with your product developers. You might have to do more fit testing. But all of that has to be worth it, because we're gonna serve people who need to be clothed and need access.

Shohreh: And it's interesting this idea that there's not enough need, right? Because when you think about it, like 90% of clothing retailers are serving a very small percentage of the population.

Anna: Yeah. I think the thing that is also at play here is that even the most liberated fat people are still born into this culture and still have internalized fatphobia that they have to kind of tread through. And so, it's not only in the products we're making, it's like, we're not seeing bodies that look fat in these products, so people don't know that they're even available for them. So it is where people are seeing numbers because no one even knows it's for them.

And that's like, we can start with representation. And like, if all of the brands who offered a plus line were to make one shift and to feature either the middle or the largest size of their plus line on their fit models and on their models on their websites where people could be like, "Oh, I'm looking at the largest size of this garment on a person, and I see, oh, fat people can wear these clothes."

So I'm like a 5X, 6X sometimes, so then I see something, and I'm like, I work a lot in the fashion world and I know that that garment is a size 18, and yet it goes up to my size. But I have no idea how it looks. So one brand that's doing this really well is Universal Standard, because they've

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shown what every single garment looks in every single size. And then I can see like oh, this oversized thing might not actually be oversized on me, because I can see it on the body that is a size that I am.

And that's like, for the consumer, the most helpful thing because it gives a sense of security that that piece is gonna fit me, because there's so much confusion around sizing schematics. Because there's not a clear, sort of, guideline for all sizing and all products. It's kind of the Wild West and you can do whatever you want, and say like, "That's a 5X, and that's a 6X," and it could truly be a 16/18 for the general standard.

So it's important that we are also, as brands, looking outside of where we might find our information, because if we're looking for sizing schematics based on something that doesn't exist beyond that size, but we wanna create for beyond that size, we have to then go to who is doing it well in the plus world, how do we really showcase that, or how do we innovate in a whole new way.

And that's what I'm like really waiting for. I haven't seen a lot of innovation for the plus world because I believe there's still so much stigma.

Shohreh: Yeah, there absolutely is still so much stigma out there. And what you're saying about the internalized feelings of like, "Oh, I can't wear this thing," or, you know, "Someone my size shouldn't be wearing something like this." Because that's so blatant in society, it makes sense that that stops people from looking into even getting some of these different pieces that they maybe would like. And then like you said, you go to the website, and maybe it goes up to your size, but the model is a size two, so that shows you have no idea what it's gonna look like on you [laughs].

Anna: Completely. And I even dare say that it goes a step further because we're just, as a society, so obsessed with this idea of flattering.

Shohreh: Ugh. The worst word!

Anna: I know! And even like lovely shows like Queer Eye where it's so beautiful and everybody is supporting people to be their best selves, we're still selling this idea. And I love Tan France. Like [laughs], it might be fatphobic. I don't care. I love Tan France [laughter].

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But I think that if we can really steer ourselves away from this idea of flattering and really go into a place internally of like, “Does this make me feel empowered and strong?” Or sexy, or beautiful, or seductive, or whatever I’m going for. I wanna be the one who decides how it feels, and I wanna go out in the world with that. I don’t want to go out in the world hoping that it’s flattering for someone else’s vision of what I should look like.

And I think there’s something super liberatory about fat people who have reclaimed their sense of fashion, and I love seeing it. Because it’s like crop tops, short shorts, it’s like, everything we were told we weren’t allowed to wear. And then it becomes this expression of style of like, how do I want to be? And it’s beautiful, because it might be like crop tops one day and then like turtlenecks and chains the next, and that’s just like what your vibe is. But we get to move from a place of how do I want to feel rather than how should I look. And I think that how should I look question is really toxifying our fashion industry and our world.

Shohreh: Do you have any advice for how a person could practically move from that question of, is this flattering, will other people think this is flattering, to turning inward and trying to figure out what they actually like?

Anna: Yeah! I think it starts with, like, we have to clarify and cleanse what we’re seeing every day. So if you have a social media feed that’s full of people glorifying diet industry mentality, then you’re going to continue to kind of feel like that’s something you should do. So what I would do is I would start by getting my social feed super liberated. So finding people that make me feel really good, finding fashion that might be a little like, “Ooh, that makes me a little nervous, but I would love to grow into that,” or, “I don’t know why, but I love that.” And to just see things that make you excited instead of feel like you have to do something different or that you’re bad in some way. So I would start by doing that.

And then secondly is I would go through your wardrobe and kind of Marie Kondo it, but from a place of like, does this feel good? And maybe you take the mirror aspect away and don’t even look at how you physically look, but you use your other senses of how does it feel on my skin? How does it feel on my belly? Do I like the amount of give this has, or do I feel

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kind of restricted? Do I like the flow of this? Do I want to wear a zipper or a drawstring?

Like, using your other senses to kind of navigate how you dress can help move away from dressing for someone else and really into this idea of like, “I put this on intentionally because of how it felt, the colors made me feel good, and I like the pattern.” Or “I like the cut, not because the cut is flattering, but because I feel strong in this cut.” Or “I feel whatever in this cut,” and like, really kind of dialing it back into this more sensual experience of dressing rather than this, like, almost sexual experience of, “I’m doing this for you, look at me.” And bringing it into this more ritualistic place of, “How does it feel to adorn *my* body?”

And it also brings more reverence to our bodies when we can dress or act in that way.

Shohreh: Oh, I love that idea of reverence to the body, ‘cause that’s so true and that’s something we don’t talk about in society, right? It’s all about what our bodies can get us, like from a resource perspective, instead of seeing our bodies for the wonderful thing that they are for *us*.

Anna: Totally! I love, in my yoga classes, there’s this time between, like at the end of Cat and Cow, before we come into a Child’s Pose, I’ll have people just kind of in that tabletop, just sort of undulate or move in a way that feels really good. And I realize how little we let ourselves just move or act or be in a place of pleasure. Pleasure can be felt and experienced everywhere.

I really love adrienne maree brown’s book, *Pleasure Activism*, because it just sort of talks about how life can be this pleasurable experience, but we have to practice.

Shohreh: Yeah, her book has come up in a lot of episodes of the podcast, because it’s having such an impact on people and realizing the importance of pleasure. Because we do live in this very puritanical world that has demonized pleasure and made it be seen as a bad thing, not just in sex, but in food, in everything.

Anna: Yeah. Well, and I think as fat people, I’ve definitely been given the messaging that I’m not supposed to feel good, and I should always be in

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the pursuit of a thinner, smaller experience. And I think that innately robs us of just the pleasure of being and existing.

Shohreh: Right, because we have this cultural messaging that, like, you're supposed to restrict your food and be hungry, which is painful and not pleasurable. And you're supposed to work your body to the point of pain and exercise in this pursuit of thinness. And yeah, there's certainly no pleasure in those things.

Anna: Yeah, and just hating yourself doesn't feel good.

Shohreh: Yeah.

Anna: Like hating yourself is so uncomfortable. And yet it's like the most amazing sales tool because if you hate yourself, you will continue to do whatever it takes to not. And so if we're constantly selling you products, movement, ideas, systems that are going to make you love yourself, when they don't actually address any of the reasons we hate ourselves because we're being like perpetually thrown into this cycle, then we're just living in this suffering again and again. And we don't have a way to even see that it's not the way it has to be, because it's so normal. It's like, such the, like, "Everybody goes through that."

And I think it's interesting when we see people living this other, sort of, more liberated experience, and maybe they exist in bodies that make us uncomfortable, we really wanna demonize that or say, "You're lazy," or, "You don't care," when really, like, someone might just be living their best life.

Shohreh: Yeah, and that goes back to what you were talking about with the marketing too. Because marketing so often with these messages, it's an individualistic message, right?

Anna: Yeah.

Shohreh: *You* need to take care of this thing. This problem is yours and yours alone to fix. And it ignores all of the systemic things that are going on that create many of these problems that don't belong to us and aren't ours to fix by ourselves.

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Anna: Completely.

Shohreh: So, we've mentioned movement and exercise a little bit, and it's funny because one of my favorite online fitness resources to refer people to is Joyn, and your face and body are all up on there, which is amazing. So I'd love for you to talk about Joyn, and the project that that is, and your experiences being a part of that.

Anna: Yes! I love Joyn! Being part of Joyn has been such an amazing experience. I was brought on kind of in the early days to help with some of the content strategy, and getting the instructors together, and just kind of supporting to get it to be really something different and something new where liberation and access were at the forefront. And that's kind of what my class has always been, really, created for. Was to bring more access to having people be able to practice yoga, practice movement in general, and to be really fun and joy-centered.

I think that if we don't have joy in a movement practice, then it feels like why? [Laughs] Movement should be fun, and we can choose what fun looks like for us that day. And sometimes it's fun to push your body and see its limits, but sometimes it's fun to just like, give it space and let it be.

So I loved being part of Joyn, and I love being a teacher on Joyn. It has been so fun to see just like all the different crazy, fun, adventurous styles of movement. And seeing how people were able to find dance for the first time, yoga for the first time, a movement where they weren't shamed for being in a chair for the first time. Every single movement has a chair option and that just has been so cool to see and to get to practice myself with.

I love being able to put a Joyn video on from a teacher that I love and just getting my 15 minutes of body shakin' out. Because I think movement for me is just this really big tool for mental health, mental clarity, and just feeling alive in my body. So, I love Joyn. Big fan!

Shohreh: Yeah, and as someone who works and has worked in the fitness space, it's becoming more common to see diversity of bodies in this space, but it's still definitely not the norm. And so that's something that I love about Joyn is the minute you get to the website you can see that this is a celebration

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of all bodies, and in particular, fat bodies, which is fantastic. We need more of that so that different bodies can feel welcome in this space that has notoriously been really shitty to people who aren't thin.

Anna:

Totally. I think actually joining Joyn is a nice way to get into your body of deciding how you want to operate, because you get to choose who do I wanna practice with, what kind of movement do I wanna do, what length of time do I wanna do, do I wanna be in a chair, do I wanna be standing? Like, I think that we need more options as fat people, as folks with different mobility levels. Like, we need options, and those options don't need to feel like the second rate. They need to feel like a full, complete option.

So I love being able to give options, and I love getting options for myself so that I can choose. And I think that's something I've been really practicing during this COVID-19 thing is, I feel so stifled when I don't have options and being home all the time, there's so few options. So I really have had to focus, like, okay, what do I wanna wear? What do I want to eat of the things that I have here? Do I want water right now? Do I want it cold or hot?

Like [laughs] breaking it down to those options, that sometimes are like, okay, you're kind of making something out of nothing, but it feels nice to get to choose. And so that's something that I think Joyn offers, is just this place to get to sort of play and choose how you want to play, and then you get to come again and again and choose your experience every time.

Shohreh:

And the different lengths in particular is something that I really like, because it really gets to this myth in exercise that you have to work out for 45 minutes to an hour or it doesn't "count," which is bullshit.

Anna:

And that's something that I have had to work within myself a lot, because when I was, I think I was like 10 or 11, I went to a dietitian and first of all, traumatic experience! But she said, "You just need to get 30 minutes of huff and puff exercise every day." And this phrase of 30 minutes of huff and puff, my mom really took to. And I felt traumatized by this idea.

And to this day I still have to remind myself that you do not have to do 30 minutes of anything. And that you don't have to huff and puff to have a

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valid movement experience and to have an experience of being in your body.

And that's what movement is—it's getting into your body. And that's why it feels so nice when we can do it in our fat bodies, because a lot of the time when we walk through a weight-stigmatized world we have to, kind of, eject out of our bodies and live in this like floating-head situation [laughs].

And so what I have found with movements like dance, or yoga, or something that I've taken and done a little bit of a free flow with for myself, I'm able to actually feel myself entering my body again, and being grounded, and that's what keeps me coming back to my practices again and again. It's because I now can feel like, "Oh, I'm so disassociated from being fully embodied in my feet right now," because of anything. It's hard living in this world.

So that's one of the reasons I come back to my practice. It truly has nothing to do with changing my body, changing anything physically, and it's all this internal kind of like, I gotta be able to let stuff go. I gotta be able to release extra stagnant energy and to just clear my mind.

And those are some things that I think we really keep ourselves trapped when we put a time limit on that. Like, your movement practice could be three breaths. That is you moving today, and you'll feel better having done that and having acknowledged that that was your movement today, than beating yourself up for not having done a 30-minute X, Y and Z.

Shohreh:

Right, and realizing that there are all these other potential benefits to movement is such a key part of learning to enjoy movement and have it be a part of your life. Because this idea of the huffing and puffing, like for one, just from a biological standpoint, that works on one goal, which is cardiovascular endurance. That's one of, like, hundreds and hundreds of goals that a person could have for themselves. That's not the end-all and be-all of reasons to exercise, even if you're just looking at, you know, biological reasons to exercise.

Which ignores things like you just mentioned, like mental health, embodiment, coming back to yourself, social aspects, like getting to do movement with other people, people that you love. It can be so much

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more than this like, “Oh, we’ve gotta get this cardio benefit.” Those are great, and also that’s one tiny part of the picture.

Anna: Yeah, totally.

[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.

Julie Shiller: Hey everyone! This is Julie Shiller, the owner and head coach over at Tapestry—Mind. Body. Lifestyle. in Long Beach, California. And I wanted to talk to you today about mindset and the power of words when we’re going into our strength session.

So, if we tell ourselves that we’re strong, we’re capable, we’re coordinated, we’re awesome, most likely we’re gonna go ahead and have a really strong session, whatever that is. Whether it’s weight lifting, yoga. Whatever it is that you like to do for movement, it’s going to go well. However, if you tell yourselves that you’re uncoordinated, you can’t do the thing, whatever it is, that you’re weak, most likely it’s not going to go well.

So, I encourage you all before headed into your next movement activity for the day, just take a couple minutes to say to yourselves, maybe even out loud, “I am awesome. I’m strong. I’m gonna do this. Let’s do this,” and I guarantee your session is going to go so much better. Give it a shot, and let me know how it goes. Have a great day.

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 right now just so many people are home alone or maybe you have one or two other people with you, and it does feel so isolating. But I think one of the things that this time could be used for, and certainly not a

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prescription for that—everyone’s gotta do what they need to do—is more time for some mindfulness, and meditation, and getting in touch with yourself. Which is something I love that Joyn also offers is their meditations on there.

And I know that doing mindful minutes is a big part of your social media, and you cover so many topics in those—breathing, decentering whiteness, pain, friendship, like any topic, you’ve probably covered it. So I wanna talk about what inspired you to start doing those and what they mean to you.

Anna:

Yeah. Well, you know, I started the mindful minutes...actually, I was working at a place where they would do this huddle every week where everybody from the company would come together. And a friend of mine at the office and I were trying to get a mindfulness meditation once a week for everybody together, because we were like, “Everybody’s stressed, let’s do something.” And so we were like, oh, we’ll do a mindful minute in this huddle meeting [laughs].

And so it started as this kind of promo thing of like, oh, let’s do this together, if you like that, you can have more. But then I found that I loved having those moments to reflect on usually more uncomfortable parts of my life that were happening, or when I used a tool that I had learned just organically, I kind of wanted to remember that moment for myself.

So I just started recording these mindful minutes because everyone at work was enjoying them, and I was like, oh, maybe it’ll be fun to do these on social media. And it’s been a joy, because I always think that everyone uses the tools or the things that I use, and in sharing them, I realized, like oh, everybody has their own ways of doing things, and I have a particular way that people enjoy and that I really like sharing.

And so it’s become something that I really loved. And I think it was kind of the blueprint, also, to starting where you belong, my new podcast. Because I realized that I loved the conversations that the mindful minute sparked, or I loved getting to process something with someone and then that would turn into a mindful minute.

And so, I realized like, oh, maybe we can kind of combine them all into this one place where it could be shared conversations that I was having with

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people about these really interesting things, like the fashion industry and the plus fashion industry, and the branding world. And I also was like, people should hear these. Like some of these would be really helpful for someone.

So, it's been the best little diving board of a practice into this sort of life practice of, I just get really curious about a lot of things. And I kind of feel like when I share them, it might help someone be a little bit less of a shitty person, or understand me a little better, or understand my community a little bit better. So that's where it started. It's just been really fun.

And it's given me permission to not be a perfect person, which like, duh. No one is a perfect person [laughs]. But in my own head, when I can say, "Oh, that's a great thing to explore," and to sort of be accountable to myself with, then I'm able to show people like, hey, we're all in this together, we're all learning. And even if you may think that I have this great life, or whatever, I still have to pull over and put my feet in some grass and cry or whatever [laughs], whatever thing I'm doing that day. Because I think, especially with social media influencers, there's this idea of perfectionism that is just not reality, and I like to show both sides.

Shohreh: That's one of the things that's so beautiful about them too, is clearly you're coming in with a topic you want to talk about that day, but it's not like you're putting up these super polished, edited videos. It's not like you're reading off a script. Like, you're very much just sharing what's going on in your brain with your followers, which is awesome.

Anna: Yeah, it's not polished, and I am very grateful that I haven't said anything like, super [laughs] off-the-cuff, of like problematic. Because that happens too, as I realized.

During Black History Month I did a decentering whiteness theme for all of the mindful minutes because I realized how much space I take as a white person. So it's like these things that I'm doing are usually in response to something that I've either noticed, wow, I'm doing that a lot and I wanna understand it, and I think there might be some other people who could understand with me, so that we're not all learning, usually by taxing our relationships with marginalized people who actually live that every day. So

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I try to kind of be like your friendly white person who is learning how to decenter my own whiteness and bring you along with me [laughs].

Shohreh:

So, speaking of these mindful minutes that have more serious topics, I know that you had one recently too about reclaiming the word “fat,” which I think can be a very scary thing for many people. So I’d love if you would talk a little bit about your own experience with doing that and maybe some steps that people can take if that’s something they’re interested in doing for themselves, but they’re kind of scared about it.

Anna:

Yeah. So I want to acknowledge that when we use the word “fat,” it can be really scary, especially if you’ve had an experience of being belittled or diminished with that word.

So for me, I was indoctrinated into diet culture from a super young age. I was very obsessed with being small. And I actually had an interesting experience a couple years ago. I did an exchange when I was in high school to Germany, and my friend Saskia came to live with me and then I went to live with her. And she just like, four or five years ago had a son, and so I went to Germany to visit. And I was like fat this, and fat that, and the fat liberation. And she had to like pull me aside and say, “Hey, are we allowed to say that word now?”

Because when I was younger it was such a problematic word. It was just like the word you do not use. And I realized, in starting to do this sort of fat liberation work, I had to first meet this word that had so much power, and I had to inside realize that this is a word. Fat is a word like thin, like brunette, like blonde, like big, or small, or kind. It’s a descriptive term.

And so then, after I started to really just question, hey, why does this word hold so much power and weight? I realized that I was really giving it that power and weight. Because if someone said I was fat, and I didn’t react, and I said, “Oh yeah, that’s true,” it completely diffused the world’s biggest insult to me at the time.

And so I did a lot of soul searching, did a lot of therapy. And I believe it was probably when I started working for Be Nourished, which is, for those of you who don’t know, it’s a collective run by a therapist, Hilary Kinavey and a dietitian who is really like a nutritional therapist, Dana Sturtevant,

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and they started this group called Be Nourished that is rooted in social justice and...

Shohreh: And they're total badassess!

Anna: They're total badassess. And I had landed this great gig of being their business manager, and I can't not use fat at this point. Everyone's using it in that world. And so I kind of was thrown into this world of like, liberation, and then I worked my way back to being comfortable.

But I also had to come out to my family a little bit because I have had a very tumultuous relationship with my body and my mom, most specifically. And so I basically had to tell her I was fat, [laughs] and that I knew I was fat. We didn't need to talk about it, and I didn't have a problem with being fat. And I definitely think that that's not a step you go right to because it's a tough one.

Shohreh: Right.

Anna: But I think it is a series of steps that you take with just how do you start to unpack a belief you've held for so long? And it starts with seeing people that are running with it confidently, and watching them, and noticing them, and filling your time with seeing *their* bodies.

And then it starts with our inner circles. First telling your friends, "Hey, I don't want to talk about our bodies, our diets, or things like that," if that doesn't make you feel comfortable, and really advocating for yourself. And then I think it starts to be a little easier once we've started unpacking, we've created a safe space for ourselves to sort of start to do that work, then we can get into it.

I also recommend getting a HAES-informed therapist or someone who, maybe even a Body Trust Provider that could help you start to really see, like, well, what does fatness mean to me? Because it's really about unpacking our internalized fatphobia, and reclaiming our value, and reclaiming our bodies. And then words are just words.

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And then it's like kind of cute. Like, I think being fat is cute [laughs]. So, it's like, then you could go beyond and just really have your way with the word [laughs].

Shohreh: I appreciate you describing it as a progression, because I think that's so true that it's not something that you're just gonna happen overnight, for most people. Maybe for some people they're like, "Alright, I'm taking back this word, and it's mine."

Anna: Yeah, you might be on the brink, and you've been doing your work, and today is the day that you're like, "I'm using it," and that's great. But for a lot of us, it's a slow, slow, like a years slow progression. And you might come to a point where you're like, "I like fluffy, [laughs] and that's the word I use. And I don't use fat. And I get why people use it, and I don't like it," and that's allowed.

Shohreh: Yeah, and I think it also would be helpful here to clarify for the non-fat people listening what their role is in this, because I think that can be confusing for people.

Anna: Yeah, so if you're a non-fat person, first of all I wanna remind you that fat isn't a feeling. And if you feel like maybe you're gaining weight or you feel bloated, those are two different experiences than "I feel fat." Because being fat is an experience that is hard and that comes with a lot of stigma that you don't experience, even though you might feel the really hurtful messaging of our culture around the fact that non-thin bodies are not valuable. So you have been impacted by that.

In case that's something that you might do, try to refrain from that, because when you say, "Ugh, I feel so fat," and then you have a fat friend who doesn't ever get to not feel fat because they just are fat, it's really harmful for them. Because it's basically saying, "I'm upset that I feel like you are." [laughs]

So however you can process that not with your fat friends, that's a really important first step. Because no person, especially someone who is female-identified in this world, or women-identified in this world doesn't feel like their body is a problem. 'Cause fatphobia affects every single one of us. It doesn't just affect fat people.

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And then secondly, it is to check in with your friends and support them. If your friends are fat and do not feel ready to be called fat, then that's their prerogative and their call. And you can also let them know that when they're ready, you can honor that, and that the way you see the word fat is as a descriptor and is just as valuable as any other person. And you're gonna have to gauge who your friend is and the way that that conversation can be had, of course.

But, it's really important to let your friend, or your partner, or your family member who is doing the really hard work of unpacking their own bias, and that you do the same. How do I see my friend? Do I ever treat them differently because of their size? How do I clarify that to be me supporting them using my privilege to help further them versus me meeting them with my privilege and wondering why they're not where I'm at, right?

So I think it's a way of holding, and listening and really kind of being attuned to your friends, and that's how you can be a good ally versus needing them to be liberated, needing them to be fine with their bodies. Maybe you think their bodies are sexy as ever. That's great, but they are not there yet. So being really gentle and compassionate, but also opening communication. Because sometimes if you're like, "Hey, I just listened to this really cool podcast about this woman who said that she's liberated herself and now she's reclaimed this word 'fat' and I don't know where you're at with that, but I just wanted you to know if you ever wanted to have a conversation or process, I could definitely be a place for you to do that without having to tell you any of my own opinions at all because it's really about you and I want to support you as a friend."

So I would definitely take that approach as an ally.

Shohreh: Yeah, I think that's so important, especially when it comes to individuals, is finding out how they prefer to refer to themselves, right, and then using the language that they want.

Anna: Completely.

Shohreh: Because just because you're now cool with the word "fat," but you're not fat, doesn't mean you wanna walk around and just throw that word around to anybody. Like, I think there's a big difference between referring to fat

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communities, fat people, like as a larger group disclaimer, than like talking to individuals in that way if you don't know how they describe themselves, so thanks for saying that.

Anna: Yeah, of course. I've had to learn this again and again, that my whiteness will betray me, and I'll make a mistake and say the wrong thing. Your thinness will betray you, or your internalized fatphobia will betray you, and you will accidentally say the wrong thing.

And I think that the best, most helpful thing I can say to you is, take a moment; don't try to help them understand what you were trying to say. Acknowledge, "Hey, I hurt your feelings; I am so sorry. Do you wanna talk about it? Great. If not, I'd love to talk about it later. That was totally my bad." And then don't beat yourself up over it, but be aware, and be careful, and be ready to support your people.

But I think something that happens is we get so scared that we'll make a mistake that we don't say anything. And that can feel just as bad. So, I would say this is all very sensitive and vulnerable, sort of, inner work that however you can support your people in taking their time and slowing down, and not rushing them, is like such a helpful tool as well.

Shohreh: Yes, and also that the communities aren't monoliths, right -

Anna: Yeah.

Shohreh: Not every fat person feels the same way about—

Anna: Completely.

Shohreh: --different phrases and things like that. Just recently I was talking to someone online who was saying to me that a commonly-used phrase, "people in larger bodies," made her feel forgotten as a fat person who has reclaimed the word "fat" And we had a really great conversation about that. Whereas for other people they're like, "Oh, no, that phrase is fine. I feel like that represents me." So just also realizing that even if you feel like you're doing the "right thing," it may not be right for everybody. So it's really important to listen.

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Anna: Yeah and it changes every day. Like, this is something that I remind my students is that I'm never going to ask for consent to modify your body or shift you in a particular way and then think that that's my consent for your whole life. I'm gonna ask you every single time, and you get to check in every single time. And you could be cool with being a fat person on Thursday, and then on Saturday be like, "I actually don't identify with that word anymore," and that's okay. And give yourself permission to be fluid in your own discovery of your body and your identity as well, I think.

Shohreh: I think that's a great just general statement for everybody.

Anna: Yeah.

Shohreh: We're all changing all the time, every day and that by itself is a beautiful, powerful thing.

Anna: For sure. I totally agree.

Shohreh: Alright. We have come to our final question, which is...

Anna: Ooh.

Shohreh: This is one I ask all of my guests.

Anna: Okay, I'm ready.

Shohreh: How do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

Anna: I think currently I would have to put it into four categories. One, can I find stillness in the day, can I meditate? That's really important for me to feel grounded. Two, can I slow down enough to make sure that I am moving from a place of abundance and energy, and not from a place a depletion. Three is that my movement has to have joy. And four is that I have my anxiety in check. And so, I think they all kind of trickle up to the next.

But when those are all aligned, when I'm meditating, when I'm moving with joy, when I'm making choices that feel aligned with myself, and when I have stillness of the mind and I'm not in full-on anxiety, then I am my most optimal health and most optimal wellness space.

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Shohreh: I especially love the emphasis on the stillness and the slowing down, especially because right now with the pandemic going on, everyone being at home, I think a lot of people are having to confront those things where maybe usually they keep so busy that they don't have to.

Anna: Absolutely. And I've even found, I have more time to meditate than ever and I'm like, hmm, maybe in 10 I'll try. But I really have to force myself to get to my chair. And then it's great. And then I love it, and then I remember, oh yeah, this is what it's all about.

Shohreh: Yeah. Well thank you so much for being here, Anna, this was awesome. How can people find you?

Anna: There's a few ways. Instagram is my main steez, so @iamannachapman. And then I would love if anyone was interested to come listen to my podcast, where you belong, because you always belong there. And it's just a really fun, creative project that's giving me life right now. And then my Instagram should have all the other links you need.

Shohreh: Perfect. I'll throw all of that in the show notes. Everyone go follow Anna, she's amazing. Thank you for making time for this today.

Anna: Thank you so much for having me. It's always funny when you start these conversations you think it's gonna go one way, and then it just goes into a really fun, curious conversation, so I appreciate it.

Shohreh: Of course—the magic of podcasts!

[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 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. I hope to see you for the next episode.