

Redefining Health & Wellness

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This episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Alex Locust, Erica Smith, Rocky Lane, Sarah Swofford

Shohreh Davoodi: Happy Pride my beautiful unicorn listeners! For episode number 52 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast, I have convened the show's first ever Pride Panel featuring some amazing, queer humans who all happen to be past guests of the show. This episode is a gay old time and features Erica Smith, Alex Locust, Rocky Lane, Sarah Swofford, and your truly.

The five of us chatted about the gayest things in our closets, how to support the baby queers of the world, ways to foster cross movement solidarity, and so much more. Expect rainbows, glitter, piping hot tea, and a whole lot shade. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/52. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/52. You ready for this? You better work bitch!

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

Hello and welcome everyone to the first ever Redefining Health & Wellness Pride Panel. I am going to be playing double duty today as moderator and a panelist for our conversation, but everyone on the panel has been an esteemed guest on the podcast before. So I'm going to let

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everyone introduce themselves briefly, just so you know who all is here.

And we're gonna start with Alex.

Alex Locust:

Hi! My name is Alex Locust. I use he/she/they pronouns. I am your resident neighborhood glamputee. I have the pleasure and privilege of doing disability justice organizing in San Francisco Bay area. I'm a harm reductionist counselor. I'm an unabashed Leo. I like to bring the five C's—curls, crutches, claws, courage, and compassion—to every space that I'm in. And that's me.

Shohreh:

Amazing. Thank you for coming back on the podcast and gracing us with your presence again. And Erica, why don't you introduce yourself next?

Erica Smith:

Hi everyone, I'm Erica. My pronouns are she and her. I am a feminist, queer, femme sex educator who is Philadelphia-based. For most of my career I worked with young LGBTQ people and young women who were housed in Philadelphia's juvenile justice system. I did a lot of comprehensive sex ed and HIV prevention and advocacy with them, and it's still my absolute favorite group of people. And currently a lot of my work focuses on helping adults who were raised in purity culture to have access to all of the queer-inclusive, medically accurate, trauma-informed, shame-free sex education that they can. In my spare time, I'm usually surrounded by a bunch of my pets, and that's about it.

Shohreh:

Erica—you were one of the first podcast episodes that I ever did, and it's still one of the most listened to episodes ever, so thank you for coming back again.

Erica:

Ooh, thank you for sharing that tidbit. I didn't realize that [laughs].

Shohreh:

Yes, it's exciting. Alright, and then lastly, but certainly not least, we have lovely Rocky and Sarah. Please introduce yourselves.

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Rocky Lane: Hi!

Sarah Swofford: Hi!

Rocky: I'm Rocky, and my pronouns are he/him/his. I am the board chair for Transgender Education Network of Texas. I am a local leader, a creative, and I am also proudly the husband of Sarah. And we run a YouTube channel called SwirlBaby TV.

Sarah: And I am Sarah Swofford. My pronouns are she/her/hers, and I am a fat, queer, femme, business owner and creator. I am the other half of SwirlBaby TV. And later this year I will be a sex, love, and relationship coach [laughs]. So yeah, thank you so much for having us.

Rocky: Yay.

Shohreh: Yay, so exciting, and the listeners will know y'all because you were just on the podcast very recently. And they love you so much, so we're bringing you back. And yeah, so we're gonna kick off this panel! This is gonna be a mix of fun, and serious, and silly, and important issues that are going on in the queer community, and we're just gonna have a really great time.

We're just gonna start this off with a delightful gay lightning round, and the first thing we're gonna start with is we're gonna do a little queer squad drafting and I asked everyone to pick some people that they would like to draft onto their personal queer squad. Everyone is allowed to pick three people, and you cannot pick somebody that another person has already said. So, most of us have some backups in the draft. And I was nominated to go first, which is awesome, 'cause I get to pick the people that I want the most, and then everyone else just has to deal with it.

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So, on my queer squad I draft Megan Rapinoe and Sue Bird, obviously, and Kate McKinnon.

Sarah: I'm super jealous of your Kate McKinnon. That was on my original draft.

Shohreh: Sorry.

Sarah: So, good thing you told us to get backups [laughs]. I would choose Janelle Monáe, Samira Wiley, and Jesse Tyler Ferguson.

Shohreh: Okay, Janelle and Samira were definitely next on my list if I didn't get the first three, so we're on the same brain wavelength here.

Sarah: I love it.

Alex: Yeah, I had Janelle too, so I guess I'll go next so I don't have any of mine taken [laughter]. The movement needs music, so I'm jealous of those picks. I'd say Indya Moore from Pose and many other amazing organizing efforts. Aaron Phillips is a very fabulous black, trans, disabled model. And Patty Berne. I feel like I reference her in all of my work because she pioneered the Disability Justice principles, so I've got to give a shout-out to the queer elders.

Shohreh: I love that Patty is on your squad. Alright—Erica, Rocky, who are you drafting?

Erica: I was going to draft Indya Moore [laughter], so my number one, the first person that popped in my head when I even saw this was a question, was Queen Latifah. Everything in my heart is in the 90s pretty much, and [laughs] so I was like, Queen Latifah, number one, has to be on my squad. The next person, you know what, I want Dominique Jackson also from Pose on my squad.

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- Shohreh:** Nice!
- Erica:** And I want the third person to be someone I know in Philadelphia, who is Celena Morrison, and she is the head of the Office of LGBTQ Affairs in Philadelphia. And she's an incredible advocate, and activist, and I would like to have her.
- Shohreh:** I love that. Personal touch. Alright, Rocky. Bring us home with your squad.
- Rocky:** Oh yeah. You know I've got a million people that I love dearly that do this work, and all of them are great, but I am going to draft from the Hollywood. So Lena Waithe,—
- Shohreh:** Yes!
- Rocky:** —James Baldwin, and Laverne Cox. Those are mine.
- Shohreh:** Those are incredible. I'm feeling great about everyone's squads right now.
- Alex:** Yes, so much black excellence in there, I love it.
- Shohreh:** Yes! Awesome! Alright, so, next question in our lightning round is what could make you lose your queer card?
- Erica:** Oh, I do not like glitter. I know glitter is a Pride staple, and glitter makeup is a Pride staple, and I love makeup. But I do not fuck with glitter. I also don't enjoy musicals, and I almost feel guilty saying that out loud 'cause I know it provides so much joy to so many other folks in our community. But I'm always like, why are they singing when they could be talking? So those two things. That means I never watched Glee. I never cared about Glee. Those are some things that I think definitely put my queer card under suspicion.

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- Shohreh:** I just know Alex is over there cringing about the glitter. He and I have similar feelings about glitter [laughs].
- Alex:** There are so many times where people will be like, “Alex, you have glitter on you,” and I’m like, I don’t know from where!
- Sarah:** Alex, that is like mine and Rocky’s everyday life. We’re constantly like, oh, there’s glitter on your face, there’s glitter in your hair. Where did it come from? We don’t know [laughter].
- Alex:** I think the real answer is, you’re welcome.
- Sarah:** Yeah, exactly. I always like forget what time of day I was born, so I don’t know my moon sign or my sun sign. I know my star sign. I know I’m a Pisces. That’s it. I wish I knew more about astrology, but I don’t. I feel like I’m doing a disservice to queer femmes everywhere [laughs].
- Erica:** Like how do you even understand memes if you don’t know all of your signs [laughter].
- Shohreh:** I’m confused by memes all the time for this exact reason, because I’m the same way. I know I’m a Sagittarius, and that’s where it ends.
- Sarah:** Yeah, like I wanna know more, but I don’t yet, so [laughs].
- Rocky:** I’m just confused by memes because I’m 37, I think [laughter]. I think my card will get taken away because most of my friends are non-black, cisgender, masculine people that might also be known as the dreaded cishet white male [laughter].
- Erica:** I have this cishet white male friend!
- Rocky:** I mean, like I do. I mean, many of them are my best friends, and I think people are shocked to find out that like one of my best friends is Jake

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Raven Photography, and that he's like always the whitest person ever in the universe, and that people don't even understand how we get along, but we do. We connected, and so, through music man, you know? Anyway.

Alex: I also relate to the astrology piece in that coming to the Bay everybody is like, what's your sign? Mercury's in lemonade. It's all sorts of things like that.

Shohreh: Did you say lemonade? [laughs]

Alex: I did. I was just kidding. But yeah, I've done my homework around astrology. I can help anybody out if you need help with your chart. I feel like tarot is something that I, like, all of the woo crystal stuff in the Bay I was hesitant about, but I've been indoctrinated. I'm holding tightly to my card, I got it returned somehow, I think.

Sarah: Please, please help us with our charts.

Shohreh: Amazing. I was thinking about this, and I decided that the thing that would make me lose my queer card right now is that I only own one flannel. Just a single flannel. It's very embarrassing [laughter].

Alex: Gay gasp!

Rocky: Wow, Oh wow. Yeah, that is, wow.

Shohreh: I'm sorry to disappoint y'all. Okay, for our last lightning ground question, we are asking, what is the gayest thing in your closet right now?

Sarah: Okay, I was really excited about this question! The gayest thing in my closet right now is my rainbow unicorn vibrator, and she is amazing [laughs].

Shohreh: Why is she in the closet?

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- Sarah:** Well, you know, she takes up a lot of real estate. [laughter] She's a classic model. She's a Hitachi-type model. She's a buxom babe, so, you know, she needs extra space. There's not a lot of space in my bedside drawer for her.
- Shohreh:** I know Erica wants to get in on this conversation.
- Erica:** I mean, I'm impressed. I love the Hitachi classic model, and I didn't know there was a rainbow one, so that's fun to know.
- Sarah:** Well, to be fair, it's not actually Hitachi brand. It's like a, tokidoki actually did a collab with some sex toy company. I think Lovehoney maybe.
- Erica:** I just love knowing it exists, and I'm going to Google for that.
- Sarah:** Yes, you should!
- Erica:** I can answer this question next. The gayest thing in my closet are clothes belonging to my ex-girlfriend, who we broke up ten years ago.
- Shohreh:** [Laughs] That's amazing.
- Erica:** They're really good clothes. They're really great, so, you know, no reason to get rid of something that's still useful.
- Shohreh:** I agree with that.
- Rocky:** I had top surgery like a year and a half ago, so now my new thing is tank tops. And at first it was just one tank top, a glitter rainbow tank top, and now I have a problem. I think there's four.
- Sarah:** Yeah!
- Erica:** Four all glitter rainbow?
- Rocky:** Two of them are glitter rainbow. One of them has a rainbow, right?

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- Sarah:** Yeah, and then you have a couple that are just like queer related, like, organizations, or charity events, or galas or whatever [laughs].
- Rocky:** Yeah, exactly.
- Shohreh:** I will round us out with the gayest thing in my closet, which I have a lot of gay things in my closet because if y'all know anything about me, you know I'm obsessed with glitter and rainbows. Outside of the fact that I'm queer, I just really like glitter and rainbows. And so, I decided on my glitter rainbow Doc Martens. Those felt pretty gay.
- Erica:** Ooh!
- Sarah:** Yeah, ooh, good choice!
- Alex:** Yes.
- Shohreh:** Love 'em. Love 'em so much.
- Alex:** I like to joke that my favorite color is sheer [laughter], so I'd say the gayest thing in my closet, I have like one of those shift, kind of like chrome—like it's like purple if you look at it one way and green if you look at it another way—it's like a sheer crop top. It's my favorite.
- Sarah:** Oooh!
- Erica:** Nice.
- Alex:** You get to like, have a titties out moment while you're still wearing a shirt.
- Rocky:** Not the titties!
- Alex:** The titties!

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Shohreh: Oh, that's awesome. I wanna combine all of our closets together into a super closet that we can all choose things out of.

Erica: That would be amazing.

Sarah: Ooh yeah! I'm here for it.

Shohreh: Alright. Thank you for participating in that lightning round of joy that brought many smiles to my face. And we will move forward to some other questions.

So, next up, I wanna talk about how not everyone in the queer community has a coming out story per se, and I think that's a common misconception. And certainly there are people who also really resonate with the "born this way" type narrative. But I think there are a lot of us who can look back after starting to live our queer truth and see some of the things that we maybe missed that could have helped clue us into our identities even though we couldn't understand them at the time. So, my question is, are there any hindsight "aha!" moments about your queer identity that you'd like to share that you've now realized happened?

Erica: So, I identify as queer, and I've dated many cis men, and that's been something that was, I feel like made it more difficult to come into my queerness and realize it, because I was also like, you know, doing something that was societally approved. And that kind of made it easy for me to fly under the radar while I figured things out. And I would say that some of my moments really had to do with like pop culture.

So when I was, let's see, I'm 40, I guess I was probably like middle school age, there was a cover of Vanity Fair that featured Cindy Crawford and k.d. lang and it was the first, like, butch/femme representation I ever saw, but I wouldn't have known that when I was 12 years old. And I just remember

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being, like, so interested in that cover. Like looking at it, staring at it in the grocery store, why are people upset about this, and I couldn't tear my eyes away from it. And when I was older, in my twenties, all of those pieces fell into place. But that was one of the pop culture moments that stuck out for me.

Alex:

I think for me, in terms of, like, identifying moments, I relate to the pop culture piece, right, of going to a Spice Girls concert with my mom and her girlfriends was my first concert. Really identifying with Marco on Degrassi and not knowing why [laughter]. Definitely those things.

And I think maybe to be more kind of abstract about the question, I think queerness to me, one of the beauties of it, is like moving away from a binary and exploring the spectrums of life. And I think being disabled almost, in a way, like, taught me how to be queer in that growing up, like, environments weren't made for my body, and to have to adapt and learn how my body was kind of queering a lot of the expectations that were put on me or around our culture.

And so, I don't think that it was that explicit moment where I was like, "Oh, disability taught me queerness," but reflecting back really opened my mind to like, some people identify in different ways. People look certain ways, but may identify differently, or, I think, a lot of the things that queerness really offers us. And moving to the Bay was really my first opportunity in a consistent way to be around a lot of queer people, a lot of trans folx, a lot of non-binary people, and to understand and see the beauty and the babes, right? And understand that like, I used to identify as gay, and it's like, well, that's such a limiting label for me coming into that and realizing there are a lot more people and bodies to be attracted to.

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And so, queerness just felt like more expansive. It offered more opportunities to kind of love and be loved as opposed to just sticking with gay, which is, at the time for me, that kind of felt like the only option, right? I didn't have a lot of examples or possibility models of queer men.

Shohreh: Yeah, I love that.

Sarah: Thank y'all so much for sharing these things.

Rocky: Yeah, thank you. I think my "aha!" moment was definitely learning about my transness that was a big "aha!" moment. I also had pop culture to lead me, but I think it scared me in the closet because my first experience of seeing somebody kind of like me was Boys Don't Cry. It was like a little bit Set It Off and then a little bit Boys Don't Cry, right. And like, Set It Off I was like, yeah!

Erica: Oh, I'm so glad you brought that up, because that's another early representation that I saw too.

Rocky: Yeah, it's like you don't know what you're looking at, but especially in black culture, being a masc person that might otherwise be like assigned differently is not as looked down upon, I guess, in some circles. And so it was easy for me to be, like, that, fill that, but there was something missing for a long time, and Boys Don't Cry really filled in the gaps, but also scared the crap out of me.

Like, the end of that movie, I just would bawl, and then I'd watch it again, so I definitely knew very early, but I was pushing it back down. But that was the first time I realized that I was pushing it down. And then from there, it just was like, kind of a wild ride to where I am now.

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I know people have a hard time with non-trans people playing trans roles, but I'm really grateful that somebody had the gall, the audacity to put that movie out [laughter] because it changed my damn life. It really did.

And then, of course, you know, Sarah changed my life by giving me books and language, which I thought was really cool. But yeah, just had a couple of defining moments that helped me along the way, for sure.

Sarah:

Yeah, I had a lot of like little memories that came up. But I think the one that was most present was when I was just like five years old, I had my first romantic dream. It was definitely not sexual in any way, but just like a romantic dream about my female best friend at the time. I just remember being like, I don't know why, but I can't tell my mom [laughs]. Like, I have to keep this to myself. I can't tell anyone. I can't tell my friends. I had this weird dream that we were like hugging each other for a really long time, and I was like really happy about it, but in kind of a romantic way. I don't know.

So yeah, that was a moment that stood out for a long time, and it wasn't until I was much, much older that I was like, oh, okay, yeah, like, I had romantic feelings for lots of different types of people at a very young age. But I was also a very strange kid. I also had weird obsessions. I would get strangely obsessed with certain male characters. Like Indiana Jones I became weirdly obsessed with. And I think that was also because part of me was like, "Oh, yeah, Indi, you're so cute," but then also part of me was like [laughs], "I wanna be you." Like, I too want to be a superhero that can attract all of the ladies in glittery showgirl outfits, you know?

Shohreh:

I love that, but it also breaks my heart that even at five, having that dream, you had the thought to yourself that you needed to hide that.

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- Sarah:** Yeah, yeah. It's very weird. It just goes to show you how many subliminal kind of understated messages and messaging we get as young kids, you know, from our parents, and teachers, and stuff about their feelings about certain kinds of relationships. Because I had no idea what gay or queer or any of those things meant when I was that little. I grew up in a very religious and sheltered environment, so yeah. It's just like all that subliminal kind of messaging that people are giving kids. Yeah, I think it really impacts us more than we realize.
- Rocky:** I heard Erica, I think I heard you call it "purity" or some of this called "purity culture."
- Sarah:** Yeah, purity culture.
- Erica:** Yeah.
- Rocky:** I love that term.
- Sarah:** Me too.
- Rocky:** That's a really good term.
- Erica:** Yeah, I did not coin that term, just to be clear, but it is something that I use heavily in my work. Usually it's an idea from people with religious backgrounds. It's, you know, very rooted in Christian patriarchy that sex is something to be controlled, your sexuality is something to be controlled, and certainly it sounds like what Sarah's describing could be one of the many tenants of purity culture.
- Shohreh:** I also had a lot of purity culture in my life growing up as Erica and I have talked about on the podcast before. And I didn't know that I was queer and come out until my late twenties, so I have years of material to choose from in terms of aha moments that have happened. Because there have been a

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lot that I've really only started to unpack over the last few years because I did grow up in a household where I got the conflicting message of like, it's okay for other people to be gay, but if you're gay, you'll get kicked out of the house.

Sarah: Oh yeah. That's something super important to talk about, I think, yeah. Thank you for touching on that, Shohreh.

Shohreh: Yeah, like, that's really fucked up, you know? [Laughs] Just at its core, that's super fucked up that I received that messaging, and there's a lot of reasons that it took me a while to realize and recognize that I was bi, including just lack of representation, but also because being a bi person and also being attracted to heterosexual men meant that I had internalized that this was the right thing to do, so I should just like really lean into that and ignore the other pieces of me. Which is no longer the case.

But I was just thinking back about some moments that I had, including that I had a best friend growing up, and we were super close. We would hold hands, we would sit in each other's laps, and we'd sleep in the same bed. Yeah, and she's still a really close friend of mine. In fact I have an episode coming out with her in a few weeks.

Sarah: Yay!

Shohreh: But her dad always used to make jokes about us being lesbians, which he thought was hilarious. [laughs] But, you know, now I'm like, "Oh, that's telling." [laughter]

Sarah: He might have known something!

Erica: So, one of the things I do is I run support groups for queer people that were raised in purity culture, and it's kind of been universally agreed upon

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that, like, are you even queer if you didn't have a weird best friend
[laughter] relation?

Sarah: Yeah! [Laughter]

Shohreh: Exactly! Exactly! So that was like a big one for me. And then, honestly, one of the places I noticed it most, and maybe this is weird, maybe it's not, was in my own academic study. So in college I really, really wanted to take our LGBT studies, is what it was called at the time, class, and I took that and I really enjoyed it. And when I was in law school, we had a journal—it's called Law Review, which you have to compete to get on. And if you get on it, the reward is that you have to write a student note for publication, and try to submit it to get published. So basically, the reward for doing work is doing more fucking work! [Laughter] Which is just all of law school and all of being a lawyer.

But anyway, so I chose to write about the right of same-sex parents to have both of their names on a birth certificate when they adopt a kid 'cause there were a lot of legal battles happening around this at the time. And the professor I chose to supervise me was the most queer-presenting professor at the school. So I'm like, hello? At the time I just thought I was being the best damn ally ever, you know what I mean? But no, there's a reason I was very attracted to this [laughs].

Erica: You were drawn to your people.

Shohreh: I was. I really was! I can see that so much as the thread, especially through my twenties, of just wanting to be a part of the community and just feeling like "Oh well, you're not *really* a part of the community." And it's like, yes, you were, you just didn't know it.

Sarah: Yeah.

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Alex: Yeah.

Rocky: I kind of experienced a weird point in my life where I was really actually striving to be in a cishet relationship, but from a very queer position in life, station in life. And I don't know if anybody else is out there that may have had that, but Sarah helped me realize that that might have been the patriarchy? [laughs] And so—

Erica: It's always the patriarchy [laughter].

Rocky: That's what I'm learning. I'm learning that everything I thought that I knew is probably just the patriarchy, and I need to reconsider. But it was always like I was afraid to be, like, a queer person, but I aspired very much to live like what my life is now, even though we're super queer humans. It's just like, kind of a weird thing. Like, I felt like I was in danger if I started talking about my queerness, where that feels like different for other communities.

Alex: Yeah, I feel like I also relate to the, kind of that draw towards a more cis-normative relationship. Looking back on, especially high school and college when I was very conscious of my physical attraction to men, I really emphasized or led with my romantic attraction to women. I would feel crushes on women, or felt like flirty, or kind of those, like, butterfly moments. And so, because I just feel like there weren't a lot of healthy and diverse representation of, I mean, even gay at time. It was like Will & Grace, and pretty asexual or like specifically flamboyant gay men who weren't in happy relationships.

So pop culture, I think, just has so much power and a lot of us are talking about, again, these possibility models, and I just didn't have that for gayness or queerness, and I think if I'd had that I would have been less afraid to explore the complexity of my identity, and I really just tried to

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snuff out my attraction to men. I don't think consciously, because I was like, if I do this, I will be unhappy, but it just seemed kind of like, well I'm a romantic, and I wanna do gestures, and men do that for women, and so I should pursue dating a woman because my life will be easier that way. And it's just unfortunate that it seems like maybe kind of a common thread.

Rocky: Yeah, I don't think there's enough people talking about this stuff, you know, how this changes for you. Like, me loving women when people thought that I was a woman is a whole different experience than me loving woman as a trans man—

Sarah: With cis-passing privilege.

Rocky: —with cis-passing privilege. But the experience was always the same for me, but other people didn't see it, and it was like a lot of pressure. It's just kind of a weird thing. So it would have been cool to see all the diversity that does exist and has existed forever in our community.

People used to make fun of people for being in butch relationships, I don't know what they call it now, but like, masc-presenting person/masc-presenting person relationships or something like that. And then they would like, "Ooh, I think that's sexy" for femme on femme stuff or whatever. But there's always been this weirdness around that, and it would have been cool for that not to have been there [laughs].

Sarah: To add to what a lot of you guys have said, has anyone noticed too, I feel like if I'm being really honest, lettin' it all hang out, there's even times since I have considered myself an out and proud, confident person, that I still think I've used like my own heteronormative-passing privilege or mine and Rocky's cishet-passing privilege to shield myself from potential weirdness, or pain, or suffering, or whatever—like judgment from others.

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Even since we've been in a relationship, there's definitely, I think, been a couple of times, like, with our own very conservative families that we'll play into certain kind of dynamics a little bit without even being fully aware or conscious of it.

Just because we're so used to having a certain kind of relationship with them, that even though we live our lives very out and proud and honest about who we are, when we get around them, we kind of fall back into old patterns. Self-protection, I think, and we kind of diminish a little bit of who we really are and hide behind this kind of safety net of cis heteronormativity. Does anyone else find that that has come up for them at all maybe?

Alex:

Yeah, definitely! It's interesting with everything going on in terms of people really encouraging anti-racist conversations in their family, like processing why might you be having a difficult time talking to your family about Black Lives Matter or some of these really vital conversations. I also have been processing, like, I have family on the East Coast where they express unconditional love for me, we talk on the phone on weekends, like at least once a month. They have shown me throughout my whole life, like love that I'm very privileged to have, and I'm not out to them.

You know, and it's just like so strange to feel this weird tension between if they say that's the kind of love that they have, but the people I'm referencing are in their late seventies, late eighties, so it's kind of like, we don't talk about queerness, we don't talk about those things. And it's kind of scary to feel like opening up about that when I don't live close, when I can't be there, when we can't process it easily. And so, just to think that people in my family could pass and not know that this an essential and very authentic aspect of my life. It kind of enters this loop, right, where it's

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like, if they don't care, then does it matter? But if it doesn't matter, then why not tell them?

Sarah: Yes, oh my god! Snaps! Yes!

Shohreh: Mmhmm.

Rocky: Come on with that, come on with that truth now, Alex!

Sarah: Oh my god, you're like, yes. So many people, I think, right now, are probably getting chill bumps with relating to you right now.

Shohreh: I think the other side of it too is that sometimes that kind of identification is thrust upon you versus even you wanting to take it on. Because for myself, I'm in a straight-passing relationship. Because I am a queer person, I am in a queer relationship, just to clarify for the masses out there.

Rocky: That's right!

Shohreh: But I totally get the sense, particularly from my mom, that her acceptance of my queerness is conditional upon the fact that I am married to man. And if anything happened to this relationship and all of a sudden that I started dating women or anybody else, that it would be a totally different conversation. And I'm sure there's other family members who feel the same way. I'm sure that when I came out publicly that that was a conversation that my mom had with people of like, "Oh, well yeah, she's bi, but she's married to a man, don't worry." Like, you know?

Alex: Mmhmm.

Sarah: Mmhmm.

Shohreh: And it's super invalidating. Just because I'm married to a man doesn't mean that I'm not queer, and you have to accept it always, under all

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circumstances. It's not just okay because I'm married to a man. It's fucked up.

Alex: Yeah.

Erica: 'Cause your queerness has nothing to do with who you're partnered with. I mean, I know I'm preaching to the choir, [laughs] but just for anyone else who's listening.

Shohreh: Yes, thank you! Amen to that!

Rocky: Yeah, I used to be really just awful to bisexuals, and I know that came from me feeling very not welcomed by my community. And there's a couple of things that Sarah and I don't talk a lot about but happen all the time in our lives. One is kind of the ridiculous behavior of some members of our community in kind of judging us a little bit too harshly, kinda coming after us, trying to cancel us on random things sometimes. And the other one is the overwhelming loneliness that it is when your family decides not to speak to you, not to come to your special events, just because of who you love, and how we experience that.

We don't talk about it because we know that our families are in a state of healing and we're trying to have grace around it, but it feels incredibly isolating. It's like I always tell people, "You think that your family is cool, try to bring home a black trans man. Try to bring home a double, triple whammy and see how they handle it." Because I'm gonna tell you, not well. And it's not just Sarah's family. I've dated a lot of people, and it doesn't go well. And doesn't feel good, and it doesn't get a relationship off on the right foot.

And like, both of our families do it. My family has made my partners, and Sarah, and people, feel less than welcome for some situation. It cuts deep

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to the bone, you know, when it's like, there's nothing I can change about myself. I love my wife deeply. I think I take being a husband extremely seriously, and anyone in her family, I think, would agree that I'm an excellent match for her. But the initial stuff was really painful.

Erica:

I hope that it's okay to share a family story that's pretty positive. I know we're talking about some of the difficulties about our identities, but I feel really, really grateful to my parents. I want to note that they are white, working class folks from rural Pennsylvania who were not given the space to know about queer identity and understand queer identity. They're just like open-minded, kind-hearted folx.

And I have brought many different people home of different genders, and I was never ever given the message from my family that they liked it better when I was with a cis male partner than when I was with a woman. Or that they liked it better when I was with a white person as opposed to a person of color. And so, when I brought home a trans person, who I'm married to now, they were just like, "Okay."

And I just want to point that out, like as something that I am continually grateful for. And the older I get, the more grateful I am. And when I hear other stories from the things other folx deal with, I'm kind of in awe of the fact that my parents just never seemed...you know, if they had things to process, they didn't process it with me, which I think is really great.

But yeah, I didn't have that experience, and in a way, that's almost like, when conversations like this come up, I'm like, yeah, it's not something I can bond over in the way that folx that have had these family problems can bond over. And it's great, but it's also a little strange.

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- Sarah:** It's nice to hear, though, somebody telling those nice stories, because I think it really gives hope. It's not always scary, or traumatic, or bad for so many people, like coming out or living their honest truth as who they are, and I just think it's really encouraging. It makes me feel all kinds of warm fuzzies when I hear good stories.
- Erica:** Yeah, thank you. And that's part of why I shared it 'cause I'm like, well, you know, baby queers might be listening and thinking about what it's gonna be like if and when they come out to their families. I do wish for all young queer people that they could feel that kind of acceptance, because I know it's made a huge difference in my life.
- Alex:** Yeah.
- Shohreh:** And in this conversation, just so everyone knows, we range in age from, Alex is 29—almost 30, so close—to 40, and so that's kind of the generation that's represented here. And I do think that a lot of things are changing, especially for, I'm thinking of people right now who are in middle school or high school who are coming up.
- And actually, let's just pivot and go there because we're already on this topic. So, let's show some love to the baby queers out in the world and talk about how can our community make sure that they grow up more supported and empowered. And also I think too, how can those seeking to be allies to the queer community play a part in that too.
- Erica:** So, I love young people. I work with teenagers and tweens. Actually, I work with even younger. Part of my work is at a gender clinic in a major East Coast children's hospital, and I work with young trans folx and their families, and some of the kids we have coming to clinic are as young as

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four. They're like out trans children supported by their families. And it is just such a beautiful thing to be part of and to see.

So I do know, just from the things that I am privileged to be a part of, that young people now are growing up by and large after a major societal shift when it comes to queer and trans issues, which does not mean that there's perfection, by far, especially if you have other marginalized identities. But things are so different. It used to be that folk didn't come out until they went to college—people around our generation. And now people come out at 10 or 11. I have parents who contact me and say, "My nine-year-old came out as gay, how do I react in a positive way," or, "What do I do to support them?"

And it's just beautiful to see, but I think getting through to parents' hearts is one thing, but also pushing for more systemic change is important. Making sure that our schools are safe for young people who don't ascribe to the gender binary and who are queer, and making sure schools and communities are safe, and that they see thriving queer adults around them to go to. I could talk forever about this, but I would love to hear from other folk [laughs].

Shohreh:

I just wanna say yes to the thriving queer adults part of that, because I do think that's a big piece of it. Both in pop culture, because I think representation is like night and day different.

Like Alex, you were talking about how basically all there was was Will & Grace. Now that is not the case. Now the vast majority of the major TV shows have at least one queer character, if not several queer characters, which is a big deal. And for me, like I saw like almost no bisexual representation growing up, like I don't think I even knew that was a thing for a really long time. And now, you know, we have an out, bisexual

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congresswoman and things like that. So that representation, I think, is a big piece of it and just getting even more queer people out into the spotlight so that people can see that, hi, yes, we do exist, and we're wonderful.

And then also, I think mentorship where it can exist is a big part of it too. I recently tried to sign up for the Bible Belt Queers Big Sibling Penpal Program that they're running, and amazingly they got so many applications in like 24 hours that they closed down applications.

Erica: Aww that's amazing!

Shohreh: I know! It's so cute.

Erica: It's like bittersweet. I wish you could have done that, but also, amazing.

Shohreh: I know! So they think they're gonna reopen it, but basically they said they got so many that they wanted to first focus on getting those people hooked up with the mentors and mentees, which is awesome, and then they would focus on opening up some more. So I'll be sure to apply when they reopen it, but that's just like so exciting that so many people wanted to participate, wanted to make sure that there are people who have someone to talk to in their lives, and that's the kind of program that I'm just living for 'cause that would have been amazing to have when I was a little queer baby.

Sarah: A friend of mine from high school actually, in North West Arkansas, wrote a piece for Bible Belt Queers, for the book.

Shohreh: That's awesome. I'll also link it in the show notes for all of you out there.

Sarah: Yeah, on the topic of baby queers [laughs], Rocky and I were actually talking about this, how we both kind of went through some periods of time where we felt not really queer enough to be queer, or not really trans

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enough to be trans. And I think for both of us it was really life-changing when we had people in our lives that were like, yeah, you don't have to worry about that. There's no blueprint on how to be queer, how to be trans, how to be pansexual, how to be any of those things.

So yeah, that's just something that I definitely wanna remind young, queer babies of. You don't have to be any certain kind of way. You don't have to fit any certain kind of stereotype, or box, or label, or style, or whatever to be who you are and love who you love. I really think it's important for allies to remember that too, because I think it's really easy, again, I know with myself at times, when I didn't consider myself necessarily a part of the community as much as I did just an ally to the community, and I definitely would make judgments on people. Kind of like Rocky mentioned earlier, "Oh, I wasn't always very nice to bisexual people" or whatever. I think we all have moments of our own, like internalized—

Erica: Absolutely.

Sarah: —queerphobia and stuff and that kind of coming out. So yeah, just listen to them, listen to queer people, listen to their stories. Don't try to put them in a box, don't assume things about them, and just love them.

Rocky: I recommend gay TikTok [laughter]. I think that is a lovely sociology. I think it's a great way to get to know our community and be—

Erica: Wait a minute! I'm impressed you're 37, and you're like fully understanding of gay TikTok, 'cause I feel a little bit out of the loop!

Shohreh: And uses gay TikTok! Rocky has a TikTok!

Erica: That's awesome.

Sarah: Rocky's got a following, a growing following on TikTok [laughter].

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- Erica:** I just downloaded TikTok recently 'cause I was like, I need to understand what's happening in the world.
- Sarah:** Your feed is gonna be trash until you find where people—
- Rocky:** Gar-bage!
- Sarah:** —you have to watch and like more things and share things.
- Rocky:** Gay things.
- Sarah:** Yeah.
- Erica:** Mmhmm. Gay things and probably dogs and cats [laughs].
- Rocky:** Be obsessively gay about it and you will get to what they call, “the correct side of TikTok.” Otherwise you’ll end up in a vast wasteland of MAGA hats, so. So, you know, we’ll help you; just follow us [laughter].
- Erica:** I love it, thank you.
- Shohreh:** Please help me make my TikTok gayer! I need this in my life [laughter].
- Alex:** Oh my god. Rocky just starts offering “make your TikTok gayer” workshops [laughter].
- Shohreh:** I will pay for that. I will throw cash money at that!
- Sarah:** He’s writing it down right now. You guys have, you’ve wakened the beast. You don’t understand, my husband is an entrepreneur, okay? Like, this is a new business idea. Now we’re gonna be up until 4:00 in the morning figuring out how to make TikTok gayer.
- Erica:** I love it!

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- Shohreh:** I also wanna go back to what you said Sarah about just the not gatekeeping, which I don't think was a term that came up, but that's the term I'm gonna throw out there.
- Sarah:** Thank you, yes.
- Shohreh:** Gatekeeping the community doesn't help anybody, and I think one of the reasons that people have that desire to do it is again, because of that internalized homophobia, and then also, just this like...this feeling that you finally found your community, and you wanna protect it. I think the problem is we're trying to protect it from something that isn't a threat when we gatekeep.
- Alex:** Mmm.
- Sarah:** Is it like that pie thing, I think sometimes? Like, love isn't like pie. There's plenty of love to go around. Just because somebody gets a piece doesn't mean you get less.
- Shohreh:** Yes!
- Sarah:** I think it's kind of like that with being nice to each other in general [laughs]. Like, if you're nice to other members of our rainbow family, it doesn't take anything away from you either. But I totally understand. I think a lot of us, like you said Shohreh, can relate to that fear.
- Alex:** Yes, house of abundance!
- All:** Yes! [Laughter]
- Sarah:** Yes Alex, yes [laughter].
- Alex:** I'll just add, I mean, I really love what everybody shared, and I think with, especially I believe, Erica talking about working with youth, I've had

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opportunities to volunteer with Gender Spectrum in the Bay, which is a really amazing organization. Just meeting those gender expansive youth, I think to the question you asked Shohreh about how can allies help or even other queers in the community, like just get out of their way.

Shohreh: Ooh, yes!

Alex: Just let the kids rule, You know, like, going to that Gender Spectrum conference, those kids were global citizens. They knew about intersectionality, and power and privilege, and just concepts that adults with very big titles and very big paychecks still cannot wrap their heads around.

Erica: Ooh. This is the truest.

Alex: Yes. I just say, like, the baby queers are feeling like people are in their way. Just don't stand for that. Don't allow it, and really just trust that voice. Because I feel like there's such a hunger for information that they actually access and act upon, and I think that's how we're seeing that, that really beautiful proliferation of more expansive thought, and queerness, and identity.

I think the other thing along with that in terms of exploring identity and growing, there was a period of my life where I felt like a deep sense of regret and frustration that I didn't come out earlier, or that, you know, I wasn't given the tools or the environment to feel safe or ushered in, right? I didn't have like a queer doula to help me [laughter] figure out how to do all of this.

Shohreh: Is that a job? Can we have that job?

Alex: Right, we've got TikTok workshops and queer doulas.

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Erica: Great.

Sarah: Alex, get on that business plan, let's do it!

Alex: I just wanna really invite baby queers to just relish the process, relish the journey. Like don't rush it. Because I feel like I am the person I am today because of the journey I've had, and if I had the opportunity to come out earlier, like I wouldn't be in the same position, I wouldn't be as passionate about the same issues, because I would have had a different life. And so, rather than trying to get to a finish line, or speed up a process, or even have regret about your journey, I think just really being grateful that we have a journey to be on and just enjoying it.

And for me, I think, turning to elders and ancestors has really taught me that there's so many different stories and experiences to really show this constellation of opportunities of queerness. And so, if we don't focus on just a few stories of what we see and what pop culture avails to us, and more of like, who came before us, who paved the way, whose shoulders we're standing on, I think that, for me, kind of unburdened a lot of the pain that I was feeling about my own personal journey.

Rocky: Mmhmm. Yeah, like an overwhelming gratefulness washes over me when I think of the people who have not been able to live in this authentic place. I totally agree. Yeah, I think it's so important for the kids to see what people had to go through before. I love the energy the kids are bringing. Like I love that they will not stand for it [laughter]. But I do see a small amount of, like, they are a little impatient sometimes, especially like my baby trans out there. I kind of feel like they are very quick to wanna do something or the other, and they very quickly will get upset about it and kind of lose all hope if they can't get access.

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And I understand barriers suck, but I think perspective is very useful. And learning about my elders helped me to build in my gratefulness, which helped me get through the long process of transition that I'm still in today. So I love that. Thank you so much for that.

Shohreh:

Yeah Alex, you just blew my mind a little bit, because I have seriously felt, and I think this makes sense, I have felt grief about the life that I didn't live because I didn't come out sooner, right? And in the paths that I didn't take. And I think that's fine, but what you just said made me think about that maybe coming out later is just what my story is. And it's not any less beautiful because it wasn't sooner, and that's really powerful, so thank you.

Erica:

Shohreh and Alex, and everyone, that's something that a lot of folx that I work with share with me, having been raised in extreme religious environments or what they call charismatic religions or high-demand religions. A lot of folx didn't come out until well into adulthood, and there is so much grief with that. And I think it's important to honor the grief, but also I always tell them, like, it is never too late to be your queerest, most authentic self.

So even if you were telling me this story when you were 70, I would be like, well, cool, you've got as much time as you have left on earth to be your best queer self, and we don't all have the privilege of knowing ourselves that well and/or being in a safe place where we can be out. And I love knowing that we're all on different queer journeys and that queer journeys all look very different from each other.

Someone mentioned earlier, I think it was you Shohreh, the common narrative, born knowing, like I just knew, but most of us don't. And that is also beautiful

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Sarah: Yeah.

Rocky: Yeah.

Erica: Can I tell another story that I think is very sweet and that you'll appreciate? I have a great uncle who is a gay man, and he is in his eighties. He was kicked out of the navy in the, probably late 50s for being gay and dishonorably discharged, and he left my hometown and moved far away. So I did not know him when I was a kid. I did not meet him in person until I was in my mid-twenties, and he's my grandfather's younger brother, and I met him at my grandfather's funeral. And I came out to him at the funeral 'cause I knew that he was like my secret, gay, great uncle.

Sarah: Wow!

Shohreh: Aww!

Erica: And I talk to him all the time on the phone. We were on the phone today for like an hour and 10 minutes ,and he was telling me gay history. He was me telling about, like, he spent most of his life in bars, because that's where working class, white gay men in Upstate New York hung out. And he was telling me stories about worrying about the police, and who paid off the cops.

I just feel so privileged that I have a family member that's a queer elder. And I also have a young cousin that's transmasculine. And it's like, ooh, there's like this lineage that I get to carry that I never expected in a million years when I first started coming to terms with my own queerness. Like I didn't know [laughs] that all this time I had other people in my family that were part of "the fam." [Laughter]

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Sarah: That's like a way better scenario than like AncestryDNA or something, you know? [Laughs] This is great.

Shohreh: Okay, so now our third business idea is that we create the queer database that tells you which of your extended family members are part of the community.

Alex: Yes!

Sarah: Yes! [Laughter]

Rocky: The results are just glitter; they just come in a box [laughter].

Erica: You open it and it glitter bombs or it doesn't [laughter].

Sarah: That's your nightmare, Erica.

Erica: It is! I'll let someone else open that for me!

Shohreh: That is delightful, delightful. All right, deep breaths, we're gonna shift topics.

So, right now we are living through a very impactful time for civil rights in terms of Black Lives Matter, and I think it's really important for us to talk about Cross Movement solidarity and how we can weave queer liberation into liberation for all marginalized groups. So thinking about what do we envision in terms of that, and maybe even what needs to change or be improved upon for collective liberation to be achieved.

Alex: Yes, this is very exciting to me because cross-movement solidarity is just like one of the key principles of Disability Justice, and I just think about it a lot. I love conversations like this, because I feel like we get to weave, even our movements together, you know?

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For me cultural humility as a concept is something that I certainly use as a guiding force in the way that I do work, and I feel like that cultural humility is basically saying rather than cultural competence of like, I've read, I've read a book, I've read the articles, I get it now. It's like saying, okay, let me turn to the community and learn from them what I need to know and know that I will always not know because I'm not from that community. So cross-movement solidarity, I think, starts outright with turning to what the communities are asking for. You mentioned Black Lives Matter, and I just see so many well-intentioned people posting, and I think, that fucking Gaga tweet where she was like, "Please help me Black community, like how do I be not racist?" And it's like, I adore her, and I'm like, just google it, Gaga! [Laughter] You're tweeting from your smart phone.

Sarah: Or pay someone to google it for you on your staff!

Alex: Exactly! Yeah, exactly. I posted a very sassy Instagram story where I had like done a screen record of me googling like "anti-racism resource guide" and just like scrolling.

Shohreh: It was so sassy. I loved it [laughter].

Alex: I just kept scrolling 'cause I was like, there's so much out there. So, I think just to start and say, like, rather than asking the community what they need outright, do your own research, right? I guarantee you somebody's written something, or gathered resources, or I really thought it was so beautiful when people really amplifying so many voices around the series of deaths the past couple of weeks, of just kind of sharing all of this information. So, I think we have to hold ourselves accountable and not say, "well I don't know what that community needs," because they probably have already said what they need in a very articulate, well-organized way.

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And I think in terms of queer liberation, just remembering the expansiveness of our community and the diversity within it. And so to hold ourselves accountable too, whether it's gatherings, or clubs, or protests and demonstrations, potlucks, right, all of these different spaces. Like how do we consider all of the different identities that may or may not be present. I usually think, you know, if you're looking around a space and it's pretty homogenous, that means that somebody is probably not a part of that space and for different reasons. So kind of asking yourself how can we always be more inclusive, how can we be more expansive in the spaces that we show up.

And I think the last thing I'll say about this is, doing cross-movement solidarity, it can be hard if you're like, "Okay, well for me, Alex, I don't identify as a fat person, that's not my experience," so it might be hard to put myself in someone else's shoes or to outright adapt fat liberation to Disability Justice. 'Cause it can feel like this abstract concept that I have to learn first.

And so almost kind of reverse engineering and saying, what about Disability Justice really speaks to me, or what am I really passionate about? And then how can I bridge that to fat liberation as opposed to kind of trying to recalibrate my brain to something that I'm still learning about. If you lead with your strengths, if sex worker rights are something that you're really passionate about, or trans justice, like what about that movement really speaks to you and how can you find connections? And just having explicit conversations I think really helps.

There's that podcast, She's All Fat, and one of the things that I loved about it, in the first couple of seasons, was they would end with a section called It's Okay, You Can Ask. And so it's like two best friends talking about hard

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stuff, particularly a lot of the times about race. And so, to just find relationships across movements where you have the safety, and trust, and rapport that learning is reciprocal and generative, and it's not like extracting and one-directional. I feel like I've learned so much about my identity as a disabled person, because I've had conversations with trans friends about how they feel dysphoria in their body, or how fat friends experience microaggressions, and then kind of like doing that compare and contrast.

I think just having the space to be open and curious rather than having to come to the table knowing all the right answers, I think really offers people a space to bridge movements. Going in with perfection can kind of stop things before they start, because it's like, well, I don't know enough, so I don't want to make a fool of myself, I don't want to upset somebody. So just make relationships across movements, I think is really key to all that.

Sarah: Snaps to that, I love that!

Shohreh: I'll highlight two things that you just said too, Alex, 'cause I wanna make sure they get the air time that they deserve, which was, towards the beginning of what you said, you mentioned "know that you will always not know." Which I think is an important lesson that anybody who is endeavoring to do activism really needs to take heart and realize that there's no A+ you can get on the activism test. That's not how that fucking works.

Alex: Yeah.

Shohreh: So instead of striving to get the grade, just be okay with the fact that like, yeah, you're gonna fuck some shit up, you're gonna say some really harmful stuff, but you've gotta keep going forward. You need to listen

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when people call you out and tell you that you're being harmful. You need to learn how to apologize like a damn grown-up and right your wrongs. And I think that's really, really scary for people.

And the other thing that you said was lead with your strengths, which is a conversation I've been having with a lot of people over the last few weeks, because understandably, with everything that's going on, a lot of people are feeling burnt out and like, oh my god, I can't possibly keep up at this pace. But a lot of people are also trying to do things that aren't the right things for them to be doing. Like, they haven't actually considered what are your skills, and what is going on in your life, and what are you amazing at, and maybe if you're not great at some things, like those aren't the things that you need to be doing.

We want you giving the parts of you that are gonna be the most impactful for these different movements, so I wanted to highlight that too, because I think those are both really important points.

Alex: Thank you.

Rocky: I think people need to know that if you can't even get on board with Black Lives Matter, you are already maybe 20 years behind what actually needs to happen. And there's a huge movement now to talk about every single black life. If we're talking about Black Lives Matter, do we mean that *all* black lives matter? Do we mean that black trans women matter when they're murdered? Do we mean that black trans men matter when they're murdered by police the day after George Floyd? Do we care about Tony McDade? Do we care about Nina Pop? Do we care about these people that we're losing to police violence or to anti-trans violence? Are we really bringing the same energy to this movement that we should for the 2020 conversation?

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So, that's kind of something that I'd like people to know, is that it's more than just George Floyd, it's more than just protesting. It's active work to support us when people are in crisis, and I really appreciate all of the stuff you said Alex. Because Sarah and I try to position ourselves as references in the community, but we get a lot of questions of what to do, and I agree a Google search is great. We try to be a resource, but we have to work on these problems that everybody else is still slow to understand. That is really, really frustrating as I'm sure everybody feels as people that have been in this work for a long time.

Sarah: Yeah, I think it's really important to bring up too that we need to be listening more to especially black trans women in this particular moment in time, especially with it being Pride month. Like we wouldn't have Pride if it wasn't for black trans women as we know.

Shohreh: Amen!

Sarah: But I think too, just kind of piggybacking on some of what Rocky said about that, and also what you said Alex about relationships across these movements, in combination with the Black Lives Matter movement, I wish there was the same sense of urgency from all of our communities for black trans people, specifically black trans women. But I think a big part of that that we have to acknowledge is that there are multiple systems at play here. There's the systemic racism, but patriarchy, toxic masculinity, anti-feminism, those ideas, those systems have enabled racism to grow, I think, to spread, it's fostered that kind of an environment. And I think that until we stop demonizing and degrading anything that we perceive as femme or feminine or just not even the right kind of masculine, I think we're gonna have trouble making the ultimate progress that we need to make.

Alex: Yes!

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Shohreh: I do think there's this misconception that the queer community is just automatically, by virtue of us being the queer community, that we get all of this stuff, and that we are intersectional in thought, and deed, and everything. And that's not the case for the community as a whole. And I think Sarah, what you were saying about patriarchy and toxic masculinity, you wouldn't think that those things have infiltrated their way into queer spaces, but of course they have because everyone who is a queer individual grew up in those same systems. And so we really have to do the work, and just being queer doesn't give you a pass and be like, oh well, you can't possibly be problematic, right? Like there's many, many ways you can be problematic and still be queer.

Rocky: Yep. Yep.

Alex: It's funny you say that, pass, because I always use the metaphor of like, I think coming out as gay, coming out as queer, it's almost this golden ticket, right, where you have been granted the perspective or the ability to see, like, heteronormativity was prescribed to all of us, and you are opting out. You're saying, I don't wanna ride this ride anymore. [laughter]

Sarah: Get me off!

Shohreh: I'm nauseous.

Alex: I wanna go home! You know? And so it's so disheartening to see queer people perpetuate systems of oppression like you're saying of like racism, and ableism, and fatphobia, and femmephobia, and all of these things. Because it's like, well you understand what it means to be oppressed, and you also understand that we don't have to do that to other people.

So the fact that people can't extrapolate that beyond their queerness to other identities and to understand how they're also complicit, you're not

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just like marginalized and then you stop. Like, you can be marginalized and oppressed at the same time. It shouldn't be shocking to me, but I'm just surprised some people are like proudly queer and then also like racist. And I'm like what? [laughter]

Sarah: Yeah, it's pretty shocking!

Shohreh: They skipped a few chapters in their "how to queer" book, unfortunately.

Sarah: Yeah, did we not send them the right pamphlets when they got their card? I mean, we must be falling behind administratively [laughter].

Rocky: I just wanna say that liberation will be built by Black leaders of all experiences, full stop and periodt!

Alex: Yes!

Sarah: Yes, yes, snaps.

Shohreh: Yes, and in general, an important thread that was running through that whole conversation is that it's very necessary for us to look to the most marginalized in terms of what do they need, how can we help, and whose voices that we're elevating. So I wanna make that clear to everybody that that's where we need to put our attention.

Rocky: Come talk to me baby, transtexas.org. [Laughter]

Shohreh: Exactly. So in terms of activism and movement building, how do we make it sustainable for the long-term, right? 'Cause I think, as I mentioned, a lot of people are feeling pretty burnt out, especially over these last few weeks. And of course there are gonna be times where our activism needs to be turned to our highest levels, and then there are times when we maybe turn that dial down a little bit. But I think it's important to think about how can

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we make it pleasurable, like adrienne maree brown discusses in her book, *Pleasure Activism*. And just thinking about how can we make this something that isn't always a drag to do, right? That we can find enjoyment, and it can be sustainable for us so that we wanna keep doing it and showing up.

Erica: I think this is one of the important times to remember that we don't have to all occupy all jobs and all lanes at the same time. And that there are folk that are the fundraisers, and there are folk that are the "call your senator" people, and folk that are literally in the streets putting their bodies on the line. And I think burnout can happen easily if we try to do too many of those things. Finding what feels like it really fits your skills and abilities, and sticking with those things, and not trying to do everything at once. I think trying to do everything at once and things that maybe you're not even that capable of can lead to burnout.

And also, it's so important to make sure that you're aware of who's already out there, who has been doing the work so that you don't try to replicate it poorly [laughs] or that you don't jump in where you're not needed. Listen to the folk that have already been doing the work, and figure out where you can fit in.

Sarah: Rocky calls that, Erica, reinventing the wheel [laughs]. And it's something that we commonly discuss in our household. There's so many people already out there that have paved the way, that have started the orgs, that have done the taxes. [laughs] They've done all the hard shit for you! They just want you to join up so you can do the important work together.

Erica: Yea, and this week, you know, and the last couple of weeks I've seen some really embarrassing moments where white folk are like, "Oh my god,

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I totally want to start this anti-racist taskforce,” and it’s like, people have them [laughter].

Sarah: Many, many people.

Erica: People who are far more qualified, so why don’t you just contact them and ask how you can help rather than immediately centering yourself and reinventing the wheel.

Rocky: That’s it. That’s all it is. It’s just a whole mood [laughter].

Sarah: I really appreciated that you took so much time to say there’s many different lanes, like everybody can do different things to help our greater causes. That feels very important to me right now. I’m somebody that deals with chronic illness, so lately I haven’t been able to be as physically present as I might want to, and then that also affects my emotional and mental ability. All that stuff that you said that, you know, leads to burnout.

Personally, I’ve been focusing a lot on napping as a form of activism, which though it sounds kind of funny, but I actually really think is super important, especially for BIPOC people, to take that time to rest. Rest does so much for your body. It not only heals you mentally and physically, but it gives you time to hope again. It gives you time to dream again, and scheme, and all of those things. So nap activism.

Erica: I’m guessing you follow the Nap Ministry on Instagram?

Sarah: Yes, yes!

Erica: Shohreh, put that in the show notes.

Shohreh: I’m going to.

Erica: The Nap Ministry.

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Sarah: Yeah, napping, and then my second favorite form of pleasure activism is definitely masturbation.

Alex: Yes!

Sarah: That's another one that I think is really, really important, like especially tying in so many themes of like toxic purity culture and all these reasons that we've been told for so long that self-pleasure is not a way to contribute to greater society. That's it's hedonistic, or that hedonism is bad, or whatever. I think it's really important to spend time with yourself, loving yourself, and making yourself feeling really good. And I just feel like personally, that reminds me how close I am to so many other people. Like it reminds me of my just connection to general humanity.

So yeah, that's what I'm about. I'm about naps, and masturbation, and fundraising [laughs] from bed. Fundraising from bed when I can.

Rocky: My baby's undefeated fundraising from bed [laughter].

Shohreh: That brings up such a great point too, of this idea that there's different levels to activism, right? It's not all in the same place. So there's like the systemic aspects of activism where we're trying to take down systems, we're trying to take big actions. Then there's the personal level, like you were just talking about Sarah, which is just like our own individual activism and trying to live as our authentic selves and buck these systems. And then there's community activism too, which one of the things that I've been making a big part of my own life lately. And thinking about person-to-person activism and trying to give back to the people that I know here in my own local Austin community.

And just to give two examples of this, and I can give one that involves Rocky and Sarah, which is that—

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Rocky & Sarah: Yay!

Sarah: We were gonna talk about it, but you just, okay, go ahead.

Shohreh: Aww adorable. So I made Rocky and Sarah some cupcakes because they've been doing all the fucking shit lately.

Sarah: Okay, rainbow chip cupcakes with—

Rocky: No, no, trans—

Sarah: —no, the inside was rainbow chip, and then the outside was trans flag homemade frosting.

Alex: Yes!

Erica: Oh my gosh!

Sarah: It was amazing!

Rocky: The yummiest—

Sarah: Gayest!

Rocky: —social justice [laughter] muffins, cupcakes!

Sarah: With a sparkly unicorn card to go with it.

Rocky: So, we loved it, is all we're gonna say, and what was your second thing?

Shohreh: Yeah, so I made the delightful cupcakes 'cause I like to bake, and so that was enjoyable. And then like today my friend Jordan just posted on Instagram that he was looking for someone to help him pick up a table and chairs 'cause his car wasn't big enough, and I was like, you know what? My partner totally has a car big enough to go get that table and chairs, like let me just go fucking get it for you.

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All: Aww!

Shohreh: And then I brought it over to him, and we had a lovely chat. And that might seem like a little small things here and there, but for me that's just how I want to make sure that I'm making sure the people in my own community feel taken care of and supported, because these are the people in my actual day-to-day life. And those are the people that I most wanna make sure are feeling like they're getting their needs met. And so that's just something that I think about too, is how can we bring the activism into our immediate community as well.

Sarah: Yeah.

Rocky: Yeah, I think community care is key, but I also wanna invite your listeners to turn up their volume just a little bit for my final point [laughter]. I'm just gonna take a deep breath, we can all do it together...compensate your leadership!

Alex: Yes!

Shohreh: Oh shit.

Sarah: Absolutely. Pay your people.

Rocky: All your people, pay your people. If you're up there, one of these orgs that is raising a lot of money right now, and y'all got it all taken care of, do not ask for a single dime of free labor for the next three years, and see how well we do with our activism. That's all I'm gonna say on that, thank you, appreciate it [laughter].

Erica: I would love to add one other thing about sustainability. Sarah has shared about self-care, and pleasure, and those things, and I think one thing I

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learned from years of activism and also working in very social justice-oriented jobs is that you have to really not try to go hard 24/7.

So, when I worked inside a juvenile detention center, I would spend my days literally listening to 14-year-old trans girls recount all their trauma to me. So when I left, I wasn't going to be in the streets marching for prison abolition. Somebody else's job was that, you know what I mean? I fully support other movements, but I can't necessarily go from like draining my energy in one way, and then I wouldn't have anything to channel after that.

So my like in-the-streets-marching kind of activism dropped off during those years that I was doing that kind of really hard emotional work, which is also in service of the same end goals. Like in service of the same overarching ideas. But I just had to realize, it's okay if I can't do all of these things. It's because I give all of my energy in this one way, it means that I'm not gonna be the person that's going to a committee meeting at night.

So that was a lesson, and now that I don't do work that is quite as emotionally taxing, I find that I'm much more able to participate in other ways. It all equals out in the end, but you really have to kind of watch your energy and where you're putting it.

Shohreh: Can you talk about your protest mom duty, please? I feel like it applies here.

Erica: Yes! So, I guess I started doing in-the-streets kind of marching and activism when I was in college. And some of the first really big actions that I remember going to were protesting the inauguration of George W. Bush, and I was like a young, dirty punk kid. The kind of people that the media would refer to as Antifa. [laughter]

Sarah: Uh oh! Uh oh!

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Alex: Yes!

Erica: Which you all know is some made up bullshit. I remember being like a 20-year-old, or 21-year-old marching in the streets, and it was hard work. And so now I'm twice that age, and so during some of the bigger marches we had in Philly over the last couple of weeks, I loaded up cases of water and snacks, and I just handed them out and I was like, I was protest mom. And it was really cool.

I was like, I will help you if you get tear gassed. I will give you a drink, I will give you food, I will make sure you're hydrating, I will make sure that you have sunscreen on. And it felt like such a good way to channel my energy now, because I don't really want to run straight into the riot cops [laughter] at this point in my life. So I will fully support and care for the people that do, and so that was really rewarding.

Sarah: I love that.

Rocky: Did you bring orange slices too? [Laughter]

Erica: No, I didn't have orange slices. I had little Kool-Aid packs, little Kool-Aids, and everyone was so excited for the Kool-Aid.

Alex: Yeah.

Rocky: That's amazing.

Sarah: That's so sweet.

Shohreh: Yeah, I was thinking about you doing that because I went to the Austin Justice Coalition march a couple of weeks ago, and it was on like a fucking hot day—I think it was like 101 degrees or something—and there were so many people out in that role. Like, somebody gave me a Gatorade that I

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did not know I needed, and I was like, oh, thank god. And then at the end someone gave me a popsicle, and I was just so grateful. So that role is so needed.

Erica: Yes! Seeing the appreciation on folx' faces was so worth it.

Rocky: And in Disability Justice, like I wanted to say that I wanted to throw a shout-out to the disability community, especially locally for us. I know a lot of them are running point for so many people that couldn't get access to information on updates, and they were running point from their homes. I just wanted to say thank y'all very much for doing that because again, the lanes thing really got me, like everybody has a lane and a part in this, and I just loved seeing that happen.

Sarah: Yeah, they're like our tech squad here in Austin. They're like our tech squad, our news reporters, our journalists. They're our...what do you call somebody that like records history?

Rocky: Archivists?

Sarah: Yeah, archivists! They are, they're doing it all.

Rocky: They really are. Just shout y'all.

Alex: Yeah, I really love kind of the idea of how we're talking about lanes and playing to your strengths, and Rocky celebrating Disability Justice activists and community organizers for their contributions as like equally important. I think we can get really focused on like, you've gotta show up in person, or like Erica said, do everything all the time, every day. And that's just not sustainable. So just finding a way to celebrate what you contribute, you know, being a protest mom or being a behind-the-scenes tech person.

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I just this weekend thought of my metaphorical role in the movement. I really enjoy performing emotional labor. I know friends who have been showing up to a lot of demonstrations, so I like to do check-in calls where I'm like, how are you. You know, like just seeing how people are doing, and I joked, I'm kind of like the bottomless mimosa server? [Laughter]

Shohreh: The best.

Sarah: Vital importance.

Alex: Yes, I'll just come fill up your cup, you know. And it's taken a lot from me to celebrate that and feel like that's equally important. And I think two other shout-outs for pleasure activism. I mean, Sarah already touched on something I like to bring up because of pleasure activism, is just like sex and sexuality as activists. I feel like being a slutty, queer, disabled person of color is like my activism [laughter] that I'm proud to embody. And I feel like even like substance use. Like finding ways to really have that work for you in your life with harm reduction in mind.

I feel like just indulgences, like things that you are able to afford yourself that feel good. So, doing like, I don't know, just like I love cooking, going the extra mile, being the most, like adding some fennel seeds to your pancakes or some tarragon to your ice cream. adrienne maree brown talks a lot about adornment, which I relate to. Of like, how do you feel, like, how do you feel yourself?

If you're doing so much and Erica said, like working 24/7, it's really hard to show up and feel good in your body if like you just have to run in from a meeting to another meeting before you go home and crash and then have to wake up early. Taking the extra time, if it means, I like doing my nails. I love finding cute dangly earrings on Etsy and Depop. Like how do you find

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things that just make you feel good, so when you show up, you're feeling your oats, and you're bringing your best self. It doesn't necessarily have to be this capitalistic, like I'm wearing designer things. It's like, do you feel like you're exuding that aura that you know that you deserve to be showing in the space. And I think adornment, for whatever that means for you, maybe it is plaid, I don't know. [laughter] Like adorn yourself!

Sarah: I'm so glad that you touched on that, Alex. I love this adornment. I've never heard it talked about like that, but I feel like it's kind of a similar or adjacent space to art activism too. Like using your style, and fashion, and creativity as a form of not only just self-love and self-care, but actual activism. I just think that's awesome.

Rocky: Artivism.

Sarah: Artivism, yeah.

Alex: Artivism. Yes.

Shohreh: That made me think of the Met Gala where they had the theme of camp, and a bunch of the Black, queer celebrities like totally went all activist awesomeness in their outfits. 'Cause they were like, fuck you for using camp as your [laughs] theme, we're gonna show you what camp really is. And I was like yes.

Erica: Is that where Lena debuted that cape? The rainbow cape?

Rocky: Or it was the one before it, but that was also the one where Billy Porter did the fringe curtain.

Alex: Yes!

Sarah: That was great!

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- Erica:** I just remember he was carried by a group of young, hard-bodied people
[laughter]
- Alex:** Yes!
- Sarah:** Young hotties!
- Alex:** That is exactly it. Like dripping in gold! I just googled it right now. I'm just like fawning over it all over again.
- Sarah:** And that was the one where Cardi B wore the menstruation dress, right?
Yeah, she wore like a red gown that—
- Alex:** It was huge!
- Sarah:** Yeah, it was huge, and it had like this very interesting bodice and then like a big train. And people were like, "Oh, this gown is weird. It looks like a period" or whatever, and she was like, "It is!"
- Alex:** Correct.
- Sarah:** "It's menstruation. Like that is the camp is that I'm a period." [Laughter] I loved it.
- Shohreh:** Well, I will clearly link to all of *that* in the show notes so that everyone can catch up on their Met Gala knowledge.
- Sarah:** You've got homework, Shohreh [laughter].
- Shohreh:** I love it so much! Okay, well, we have come to our final question of the night, and it's a little different than our usual ending podcast question because y'all have already answered that question before. So today's question, and there's two different flavors you can choose from here, or you can do both, is what does Pride mean to you at this moment in your

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life, and/or what do you envision that Pride could mean, as in, what would it look like to be able to be unabashedly proud?

Rocky: For me, Pride means connection, and what it looks like to be unabashedly proud is that I feel like if I can walk into any state government office, and tell them proudly that I'm a black trans man, and I would like to help, and support, and be civically engaged, they are going to take me seriously. They are going to appreciate me, respect me, listen to me, and help me make the impacts I need.

Alex: Whoo!

Sarah: Love that.

Erica: Just as you finished, a massive firework went off where I'm at, and it was like, perfect punctuation [laughter].

Sarah: Someone's listening to you babe.

Rocky: Finally, finally. Thank you.

Sarah: I think one of the things that we talked about too is how different Pride feels this year for lots of obvious reasons.

Shohreh: Which we should state, this is during the pandemic, just for future listeners.

Sarah: Yes, during the pandemic, but yeah, Pride, it does feel really different this year. I feel a lot of hope in my heart. I'm really excited by all the different types of engagement and activism that I'm seeing. But I do feel like we have a lot of challenges ahead of us. Like as the greater queer community, LGBTQPI+ community, I think that really for me this year Pride means waking up and doing what I can to keep pushing for better life, better state of everything for all of us.

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Alex: I feel like Pride to me means like an authentic celebration of complex identities. I just think that like my dream Pride would be getting to feel like I don't have to choose between which identities I'm celebrating, and just feeling like I can show up as a queer, femme, disabled, bi-racial man, right? And feel like the space is accessible, and that I'm not encountering racism, and that we've been talking about that like the black trans femmes can be at the forefront and celebrated. And just for all of that joy to not be afforded to certain people at disproportionate rates.

I want Pride to feel like it can be a celebration and doesn't have to be a protest, and just to feel like everybody can come and be their whole selves, right? Celebrating wholeness together rather than having to kind of split the community so that people can get what they need in niche spaces rather than the broader community at large.

Shohreh: Yeah, I love what you said about celebration and joy, because I do think this Pride feels different, right? And it definitely does feel heavy, and so I've been trying to find ways to inject joy wherever I can, and coming back to that as my base for this month.

And I think what I envision that Pride could mean is that people don't try to brush off queerness as like just being fine. And what I mean by that is, people will say things like, "Oh, I don't care if you're gay, straight or whatever, like I still love you." And like, that sounds fine in theory, but I want you to care. I want you to see and hold my queerness and my bisexuality and to recognize that that's an essential part of me, and I want people to understand that doesn't matter who my partner is, like I'm still a queer person, and I wanna feel like I'm not erased inside or outside of the community for my identity. So that's kind of my vision for where Pride could go.

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- Rocky:** Yes.
- Sarah:** Yeah, I love that, like don't tolerate me, or like, don't love me because like, oh well, it's okay, I love you. Don't love me in spite of being queer, love me because I'm queer.
- Shohreh:** Yes, exactly.
- Sarah:** Love me because it's like a very huge part of who I am and who I always will be, and if you try to separate and compartmentalize those you're not really loving me anyway.
- Alex:** Yeah.
- Shohreh:** Ooh, yes.
- Erica:** What I would like to add is that this has been a particularly heavy week and a half in Philadelphia, because a black trans woman was murdered here. Her name was Rem'mie Fells, and a lot of folx that I love knew her well. And seeing the amazing ways that community shows up for each other, and seeing the amazing ways that people are capable of supporting and loving black trans femmes while they're alive, and that's what we need.
- The reason my answer is coming out like this is because this is like very acute in Philly in the moment. We all know Pride started with Black trans femmes, and I feel like it's only ever gonna progress if we keep following them and listening to them. And the most powerful speeches and sentiments I've heard in the last week are from black trans women, and most of you have probably heard this thing, like, "Give us our roses while we're still here. Don't just come out for us when we die and say our names after." And I think that we really need to remember that.

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It's just been a very overwhelming emotional week watching our community in Philadelphia really rise up, and watching people nationally rise up in memory of Rem'mie, and seeing her face painted on murals in other parts of the country. And I feel like I couldn't get through this podcast without mentioning her name and just talking a little bit about her and the importance of black trans femmes in general.

And so when I think of Pride, I think of that. And I don't feel like I wanna celebrate in a way that centers white cis men on floats with money. It can be fun to go to that parade sometimes, but that's like not really where the action is at. So yeah, that's [laughs], that's Pride to me.

Rocky: Thank you so much for saying that, and I want you to know that our hearts are with y'all there.

Erica: Yeah.

Rocky: We've been following closely. I know that this is a struggle. I know people feel unheard. Thank you so much for saying that, and I also wanted to add that we also have Riah Milton that we lost within a few days of that as well. And we had another one that came out after that. So thank you so much for that. I really appreciate you saying that.

Erica: Yeah, thanks for Shohreh, creating this space. I did not know I was gonna have the kind of [laughs] emotions that just came up. But yeah, thanks everyone for holding that.

Rocky & Sarah: Yeah, thank you.

Shohreh: Yeah, thank you Erica for sharing that, because I think that's actually a crucial part of Pride, right, is that Pride is as much a celebration of those of

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us who are living our lives as queer as it is a memorial for those who aren't getting to.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely.

Shohreh: Well, thank you, all of you, for making time to do this and being part of the first inaugural Pride Panel on the podcast. This was a lovely conversation. You're all wonderful humans, and I'm so glad that I was able to bring everyone together in community and conversation.

To wrap up, let's have everybody just briefly say how people can find you, and this will all be in the show notes as well. And I wanna throw out there to everyone who is listening, that for each of the panelists I am going to have their Venmo, PayPal info, so if you learned something from this conversation, I encourage you to drop some dollars. And I'm also going to ask each panelist to pick an organization that they'd really like to get some dollars sent to as well. If you're feeling inclined to send some money to the panelists and some of their fave organizations, we would all really appreciate that, especially during Pride month.

Alex: Most of my updates on events and amazing panels like this are on my Instagram, @glamputee, plenty of sassy stories are in store for you there. If you want resource guides or other things that I've written, kind of been a part of, more of the business side of things, that's my website, so www.glamputee.com. If you wanna invite me into your space or facilitate a workshop, if you wanna work together, if you have any recommendations for resources that I don't have included, that's a great place to go.

Rocky: You can find me @therockyverse or @swirlbabytv. Or you can also support my org @transtexas or @austinblackpride. You can also support me as a wellness provider, @autonomymovement or @trans.forming.wellness.

Redefining Health & Wellness

#52

This episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Alex Locust, Erica Smith, Rocky Lane, Sarah Swofford

- Alex:** He out there!
- Rocky:** I'm outchea!
- Sarah:** I'm Sarah Swofford, and you can find me on Instagram @swoffstyle or @swirlbabytv. You can find Rocky and I both making all kinds of goofy videos on our YouTube channel, which is also SwirlBabyTV, all one word.
- Rocky:** www.swirlbabytv.com, okay.
- Sarah:** And also our website is www.swirlbabytv.com, yes.
- Erica:** You can find me at @ericasmith.sex.ed on Instagram. Instagram is kind of the center of my online presence. Erica with a 'C.' And also my website is www.purityculturedropout.com.
- Sarah:** Oh my god, I already follow you [laughter].
- Erica:** Oh, really? [Laughter]
- Sarah:** You're amazing, I love your page.
- Alex:** Oh my god.
- Erica:** Oh, thank you.
- Sarah:** I'm geeking out! [Laughter]
- Erica:** I love this so much.
- Rocky:** This is so lovely, thank you very much Shohreh for giving us something to do that's awesome.
- Erica:** Yes, thank you so much.
- Alex:** Yes, thank you.

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Shohreh: Of course, thank you all for joining in to do this, especially on such short notice. I was like, this is a brilliant idea and hopefully I can wrangle people to do it and like—

Erica: I mean if anyone could, it's you. You work your butt off on your podcast, so, I mean, I'm not surprised you were able to make this happen.

Rocky: Yep.

Shohreh: You are too kind, all of you. Thank you very much. And thank you for being part of this Pride Panel, I think people are gonna love it.

Rocky: Yay, happy Pride!

Sarah: Woo!

Erica: Happy Pride everyone.

[Music plays]

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

I also love chatting with listeners, so feel free to screenshot from your podcast player, post on social media, and tag me. And if you're looking for more information on what I'm all about and how to work with me, head on over to shohrehdavoodi.com. Hope to see you for the next episode.