

Redefining Health & Wellness

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Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Kelly Diels

Shohreh Davoodi: You are listening to episode number 55 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast, and I am so delighted to have feminist marketing consultant Kelly Diels on the show today. I've been following Kelly's work for several years and she has taught me so much about how to market a business without having to sacrifice your core values. In this episode, she and I chat about the power we all have as culture makers, the problematic nature of what Kelly calls the "Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand," and the importance of moving beyond performance to real action and change. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/55. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/55.

[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.

Kelly, I am so excited to have you on the podcast finally! Thank you so much being here.

Kelly Diels: Thank you for inviting me. I'm delighted to have this conversation with you.

Shohreh: Of course! I have been following your work now for several years. I get your Sunday Love Letter, I've taken workshops, I've even done a consult

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call with you, and I just love everything you put out there. But for those listeners who don't know you, please tell me more about who you are and what you do.

Kelly:

Sure. I'm a feminist marketing consultant, and my work is fundamentally about women and power and changing our culture. I call that being a "culture maker."

I used to be in the corporate world doing primarily communications, writing, and marketing. Then I started my own online business, I think in 2008 or 2009, and in order to learn how to online market, I had to figure out all those systems. So I took all those trainings, did all those things, and I really found that I had to swallow my feminist principles in order to execute those online marketing formulas.

And I tried to do that, and I had a lot of firm talks with myself about like, you know, I have an upper limits issue, or I'm self-sabotaging, or I'm procrastinating, or I'm not able to execute my own marketing system and I'm a marketing professional, like what is wrong with me? And what was actually wrong with me, you know, that I was defective in some way or wasn't able to market, what was wrong with me was that I had a conscience, and I had a feminist analysis and social justice principles that wouldn't allow me to use some of the structures, systems, and tactics that I was learning were the norm.

So, I sort of had this come to Jesus moment where it was like, oh, it's not me, it's these systems. These systems are oppressive, and that's why I can't consistently implement them. So, I've gotta do something different. So that's what I've been doing, I'd say the last five years, is marketing explicitly through a feminist lens, whereas before I was trying to fit myself into the box and failing miserably.

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So, what I put out into the world fundamentally are business practices. So what are the feminist business practices we can use to make sure we're building thriving businesses and also creating a really positive justice impact in the world?

So I teach workshops, I write about something I call the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand, which I think is a really bad thing for all of us, and I coach and consult with female founders, feminist founders, and organizations that want to do business differently.

Shohreh:

And I think often when people find your work they're kind of in that place where they know something is not quite right, but they can't put their finger on exactly what it is. 'Cause I know for me, like when I found your work on the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand, like, it blew my mind! And admittedly, it also scared the shit out of me, [laughs] because I was like, wait a minute, I've been doing some of these things, and I had no idea that this was what I was putting out into the world by doing that. So can you talk a little bit more about the FLEB, we'll call it that for ease, [laughs] and what it looks like out in the wild?

Kelly:

Well, and see, that's the thing, is that we all have been trained to do this thing because it's the norm. So I had the same moment where I was like, oh my goodness, I am complicit. Right? I am doing this thing. And I was definitely performing the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand—miserably, badly [laughter]—for a very long time. And it's when I sort of got free of that imperative and started doing business on my own terms that I started getting successful and building what I actually wanted to build.

So when I'm talking about the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand, I'm saying that there is a success formula for online marketers who are women, and there's a certain way that we are supposed to perform, and if

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we do that thing, we can build successful brands. And basically, what that is, is we are supposed to show up smiling and pretty with long hair and be positive, and then talk about the thing that we're talking about, but we must always be like this thing. And we have to embody what our culture says is the perfect woman in order for other women to look at us and see us as authorities.

So basically, what we have to do is leverage sexism and leverage patriarchy and perform it perfectly, and then we can build successful brands. And I really want us to divest of that because it limits our lives personally, right, that we have to perform a caricature of ourselves instead of being ourselves. We have to fit into a really oppressive box of what women are or supposed to be in our culture. And it's bad for the rest of our culture. It's bad for other women. When we have to perform that thing, we're like tightening the chains around other people. So even if we're benefitting from it personally, we're not helping other people get free. We're just being the exception to the rule. Instead of being prey, we're being predator. So, I just really want us to get free of it.

But like, to break it down, when I say the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand, I'm saying female, meaning that there's an imperative. We have to be feminine or we get punished. So, as part of this brand strategy, women perform femininity. And you have to. It's not an option in our culture to not be feminine. You get punished if you're not.

Lifestyle means that we are highlighting our lifestyle in order to create authority. And usually what that means is we have to wealth signal in order to create authority. So instead of building actual authority based on our expertise, or our knowledge, or our training, or our lineage, or our

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outcome, we have to build authority based on the signals—the wealth signals and the privilege signals that we put out.

Empowerment speaks to the way that I see a lot of people appropriating feminist and justice language to make their stuff look cool, but don't actually have feminist practices. Don't actually have social justice principles built into their business. They talk a good game but they don't do it behind the scenes.

And brand is the way that I think all women in our entire culture are pressured to present themselves as saleable objects. So even if you're not a business person or you're not a person in the public eye, as a woman, you're still pressured to present yourself as a saleable object.

And I object to all of those things, and I see that happening in the wider world. There are certain people who are held up to us as like, this is what a professional woman looks like, this is how she behaves, this is how she builds a business, and if you want to do it, that's how you have to do it too. And for those of us who are fat, or gender non-conforming, or people who are racialized in a white-supremacist world—everyone is racialized, but what I mean is people who are black, or brown, or multiracial—are not going to be able to fit into that package. It's fundamentally oppressive, right?

And so, what are people supposed to do? I've literally had clients come to me who are fat who say, "I can't get a photoshoot," which is like the first prescription of the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand, "I can't get a photoshoot because my photos won't show people the image that makes them buy." And so, if that success formula only works for a fraction of the women on our planet, it's fundamentally an exclusive, privileged thing that creates oppression instead of undermines it. So we have to find a different

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strategy to grow our businesses and grow our livelihoods in a way that's good for us and good for the rest of the world.

Shohreh:

I really like the word that you used, "caricature," because I once worked with a business coach, like early in my business. She was the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand in action, and that's what she taught. And I looked back at my social media posts and everything during that time, and it was like, it wasn't that it wasn't me, but it was like the distorted, fun house mirror version of me, right? Where like certain things were played up and certain things were diminished, and I was like, I see me deep in there, but it wasn't the real me that was coming to the surface. And you're right, it was like a character that I was playing based on the blueprint that she had given me of, well, people care about these things, so this is what we have to build up. But it could never feel authentic because it wasn't actually me.

Kelly:

Well, and it takes an enormous amount of energy to perform, right? And so, to me that's not a sustainable marketing strategy. So what I saw in my own brand, before I had my epiphany that oh my gosh, it's actually the structure and the system that are causing me the problem, the actual marketing strategies. So what I saw was, I would try to perform that character, right, that upbeat, positive, socially acceptable version of myself, and it took a lot of energy. So I could do it for like a month or two, and then I would be so exhausted that I had to retreat and disappear for a month or two. And then I'd like, summon my reserves and try it again.

So it's not a sustainable marketing strategy. Performance to me isn't a sustainable marketing strategy. But actually showing up with your ideas, and your work, and what you believe in, and who you actually are, that's

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not a challenge. That doesn't require a lot of energy. That is just the basic fact of the matter. So that's sustainable.

And so, I always try and figure out, like, what are the things that we can do that don't require entire teams of people to manufacture our persona and is sustainable. Well, actually what do you believe in? What are you about? What are your ideas? You know, what's your actual work? That's not a hard stretch to put out into the world. That doesn't require performance energy.

So, what I wanna make explicit when I'm talking about the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand is that it is 100% tied to white femininity. So, I think it's actually specific to white women running businesses. And I'm a white woman and I can say that with some authority. So, what I mean is, the ideal woman in a white supremacist culture like the one we're living in is a white woman. And a white woman who is young, thin, smiley, heterosexual, able-bodied, all the things. All those privileged statuses.

And so, if a business formula says that you need to get professional photos looking pretty, wearing designer clothes, in luxury locations in order to manufacture authority and make other women look to you as a leader, it is inherently leveraging white supremacy. So, this brand formula, the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand, requires you to leverage white femininity and white beauty in order to build a successful livelihood. And obviously that is not good for a just future or the kind of world that we want to live in.

That's exactly why we, and I'm saying white women, I'm speaking for myself and speaking to other white women business owners, have got to stop that. Because that's reinforcing white supremacy. So we really have to take a look at the way white beauty is used to build financial power and

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interrupt that. And that's what my critique of the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand is aimed at doing.

Shohreh:

And also, in terms of photos, if we're being perfectly honest, when you don't fall into the norms that are expected from these white beauty ideals, you get a lot more badass photos, which is perfectly clear from the great shoot that you did, I don't know, it was a few months ago now I guess. But every time you put out one of those photos, I'm like, yes!

Kelly:

So that was hard for me. I have to admit that, right? Because I still have the internalized conditioning in my own heart and soul, and I get messages every day that my body is not acceptable. I'm a fat woman, right? And so I go and do a photoshoot, I get the photos back, and intellectually I have a certain political position, and I get the photos back, and I'm confronted with, that body does not look like what women are supposed to look like in our society, and then that hurts me, right? And then I have to look at those photos until I love them.

And for me it's a political act to put them up on my Instagram feed. To show the world a fat body and to show visions of women's power that don't require you to be tiny. And so, it's important for me that I take up space as a fat woman in our culture. And it's important to me that I follow people who are taking up space as queer people, as black people, like who are taking up space as they are, unapologetically.

And if I want to create a world where every body is valued, I have to also make sure that I value my own body and take up my own space on my own social media feed, and incidentally, there is a brand advantage there because my photos are distinct. They stand out. And the whole point of marketing is to stand out and get attention. So when you deviate from the norm, you do get attention.

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Shohreh: And it sends a very particular message as well. For example, I'm queer. In the last several photoshoots that I've done, I have purposely chosen clothing that is queer-signaling clothing, and as a result of that, that has changed the clientele that I get because people know that I am a safe person for queer folk to work with, which is amazing. That's exactly what I want.

Kelly: Yes, exactly! So I mean we just have to keep focused on what is it that we're trying to create? What is the world that we want to live in? And then make sure that we're building it in our own spaces. You know, I can't control what Goop does. I can't control that. But I can control my own business. And I can make decisions, really powerful decisions, about my appearance, and the way I show up in the world, and what I signal, and the business practices I choose. And that is a powerful act.

Again, this is how we start shifting things. I'm not saying we don't also march in the streets; we absolutely march in the streets. I'm not saying we don't also call our senators or force institutional change. We also do those things. But the places where we personally have power? We need to double down on those things. I can control what's in my social media feed. I can control the images I put out in the world. I can control my business practices. And I'm gonna double down on that and do everything in my power to start using what I've got to change the world.

Shohreh: Yeah, and this is that culture-making power that you talk about where it doesn't matter how small or how big your platform is, we all have that power in our own corner of the world.

Kelly: We all do. We all have the ability to influence each other, and this is what I say about culture making in particular. Every single person on this planet is a culture maker, because if we all died tomorrow, so would all of these

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cultures. We sometimes think that culture is out there, it's this thing that happens to us, but it actually flows through us. And so we can decide what kind of culture we want to allow to flow through our bodies and use our tongues. What do we want to have happen?

And so, if an unjust culture is flowing through us and flowing through our businesses, we can allow that to happen and that is a culture-making act. You are allowing an unjust culture to use you as a vehicle for continuing itself. Or we can interrupt it and decide what kind of culture we want to create. What do we want to use our bodies, our lives, our businesses, and our careers to create? So we're all culture makers. It's just what do we want the outcome to be.

Shohreh: I love that. And the problem with the FLEB too is that it assumes that everyone wants or should want the same thing right? That everyone should be going after a four-hour work week, being able to travel all the time, designer clothes, whatever it may be. So it's this formula, this is what we want to put out there, but maybe not everybody wants that. Maybe that's not the best lifestyle or best living for most people.

Kelly: Yeah, I've had a conversation with my friend Toi Smith about this just a couple of days ago, about self-defining what success looks like for us. And that comes right down to the numbers. So like, there's a lot of hype and narrative out in the world about having a seven-figure business.

Shohreh: Right.

Kelly: The truth is, I don't want a seven-figure business. I don't want to run a big team, and I don't even need a million dollars or two million dollars, I don't need that to flourish. I do support two households, so I have significant familial financial responsibilities, so I need a lot of money. But I don't need

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two million dollars a year, or four million dollars a year, or ten million dollars a year, and I don't want to run that level of business.

So instead, what I do is, I work out my actual numbers. Like what do my two households need to survive and thrive? What do I need to make sure that I can take care of myself and make sure that one day when I'm 90 that I am abundantly resourced? What do I actually need to thrive? And then build a business that delivers that.

Shohreh:

Yeah, and you mentioned Toi, and as we're recording this, the U.S. has been in a prolonged period of civil unrest over police violence against black bodies here, and in the wake of that, several prominent white business women who embody the FLEB have been called the fuck out for those harmful practices. And I'm wondering what it has been like for you to witness that happening for some of these really big names in marketing?

Kelly:

Well, I knew about a lot of this stuff years ago, right? Like that thing that happened with Toi and the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand, I knew about that three years ago when it happened. And it has informed a lot of my thinking. Meaning that people present one way online and use the word empowerment and seem to be representing something, but their actual practices behind the scene are really exploitative, and problematic, and racist, or white supremacist, or sexist, or all of the number of things.

So, basically, I look at this and I have a lot of feelings about this. I wish these things weren't happening. I wish people weren't out there causing harm to other people. And I do think it's a net positive that a whole lot of people are waking up to the fact that we have to take a very strong, clear look at our business practices. So, the system that is crumbling or that we are forcing to crumble, is made up of policies, and procedures, and practices, and behaviors, and norms.

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And so we, those of us who have businesses or projects where we have influence, we are making up those behaviors, and norms, and policies, and practices, or we are upholding them. And so we have to take a look at them and think, what personal responsibility can I use, or what's my power? Where do I have power? And so that's why I really want us to just keep looking at our business practices.

And even if hadn't have known about that thing that happened with Toi and that Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand, even if I hadn't had inside details three years ago about that, I could have predicted it, because I can take a look at someone's brand, and the way they're showing up in their social media, and their payment policies, and what social triggers they're using, and I can predict those things based on those practices and those patterns.

And that's actually what I want to teach other people to do too, is like, you can scan someone's social media feed, and you can go onto their sales page and look at their payment policies and certain other indicators, and you can figure out if they're creating a cultural impact that is progressive and helping us create an emergent new world, or if they're just locked in an old patriarchal mindset doing business as usual that is exploitative, and unconscious, and biased, and is just putting pretty pink empowerment words on top of it [laughter].

Shohreh:

Right? And not that any of these big Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brands are listening to this podcast, but if they were, I'm curious what you think can be done, like when someone gets called out for a history of these practices, right? We're living in a time of cancel culture, which I think has its place, and a time where other people are saying, oh, well, people make mistakes, so just, as long as they change things going forward,

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everything is fine. But like if you were going to work with someone who has all these issues with their business and they're like, oh crap, what do I do now, what direction do you think you would take them in?

Kelly: I think you have to explicitly own it. So here's the thing. None of us have been born into a culture of justice. So, none of us are fluent in the language of justice or the norms of justice. We have to live into them, we have to experiment, we have to try. So you and I have talked about how earlier in our careers we were definitely performing Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brands, not with the intention of being nefarious or reinforcing oppression through our slightly sexist branding—

Shohreh: Right. [laughter]

Kelly: Right, like we weren't trying to do that, but that was the outcome, right? So, we just have to explicitly account for that. It's like, okay, you know what, I realized that these business practices, X, Y and Z, have contributed to such and such. I realize now that I had a whole bunch of unconscious biases, and I'm going to mediate them and I'm going to work on them, and here's what you can expect going forward.

And people are not obliged to forgive us or stay in relationship with us, but you can own what has happened and own what you didn't even know that you didn't even know, and then figure out how to do it differently. And then go about looking at your business practices and changing them. And that's the process all of us go through is unlearning, and then experimenting and iterating our way forward.

And I actually don't have, well except for the person who harmed Toi, because Toi's a dear friend of mine and that will land in my soul forever and I may hold that grudge forever [laughter]. I don't tend, usually, to think

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that people are irredeemable. We are all going to make mistakes because none of us were born into a culture of justice. And what matters is, what is the commitment, what are the actions, what's the accountability, and what's the process going forward? And you can start looking at someone's body of work and seeing if they are rolling forward in that way. And after a certain amount of time, you can see what someone's body of work is and what their track record is and speak to that.

But I think what we just have to do is we have to grieve it a little bit, right? We have to look at it, like, oh my goodness, I was complicit. I never meant to, now I see, and now I've got to do something different. But it's heart wrenching. Like, for me, when I started realizing all the different ways that I had bias, you know, and I don't want to go through and harm people by citing my biases, but when I realized that I had certain biases and I didn't even know that I had them, I had to grieve that. It was just wrenching. It's like, I didn't even realize I was doing that. I didn't even realize that I didn't know that. I didn't even realize that I had that bias. But now that I do, it is game on! [Laughs] It is game on! Let's do something different.

But you do have to grieve it. Again, it's not our fault, because we weren't born into a culture of justice where this is the norm. But it is our responsibility if we care to make a difference.

Shohreh:

We so often as a culture speak in terms of "good person" and "bad person" instead of "flawed person who grew up within oppressive, shitty systems." And I think that does a disservice to all of us, because we tend to internalize when we get that kind of feedback. When someone says, "Hey, this thing that you did harmed me," we hear, "Oh, you're a terrible human." And that makes it really hard to hear that and to want to make those changes. So I think that's a mindset shift that has to happen within

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people too, is to see feedback for the gift that it can be, and to use that to make change.

Kelly:

I do also think that we have to stop piling on and start critiquing. Yeah, you're right—the dynamic isn't good person versus bad person or good versus evil. It is, we are navigating an unjust situation, and we have unconscious biases, and we've been conditioned to think that things that are normal are okay when they're really not.

And so, I guess what I want to also hold some space is, like every single one of us is capable of learning to speak the language of justice. And I'm borrowing from Sonya Renee Taylor's *The Body is Not an Apology*. She uses that as a metaphor. But we are all capable of that. We might not have been born speaking this language, but we can all learn it. And so, we just have to make a commitment to learning it and to unlearning and excavating our own biases.

And, at the same time, when someone critiques me, or offers me criticism, or tells me that I could have done something better, to me that's an expression of care. That's not like they're trying to erase me or cancel me. That is an expression of care, like, hey, you did something wrong, we'd like for you to improve it, means that they still want me around, they just want me to do better. And so, my response to that is, thank you! Like thank you, thank you, thank you, I am on it.

However, what can also happen is sometimes there's like an intellectually dishonest argument happening where people just have personal grievance and pile ons, and there may be a seed of legitimate critique, but they want to actually erase the person that they're aiming that vitriol at. And that I'm not going to accept. Right?

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So like, I'm really sort of discerning about, if someone offers me critique, I accept it, I say thank you, and I'm on it, and I listen, and I integrate, and I grieve, and I do what I've gotta do to improve. But if someone is like, "I hate her, she's a shitshow," I don't have to listen to that. If the intent is to erase me, I don't have to hear that. But I do have to hear, "You did this thing wrong, and we would like you to do better." That I have to hear and integrate.

Shohreh: Yes, that's so true that there's obviously different kinds of feedback and when we're saying that people need to hear feedback, that doesn't mean that all of it is a gem, right? Sometimes you get shitty rocks thrown at you that aren't actually trying to help you.

Kelly: Right and so that we don't have to listen to. Like people who are just, have had enough of you and are sick of you because you're everywhere, that's not legitimate. But saying, "Look, this thing that you did was harmful," that is legitimate and that's useful, and that we need to listen to. And we need to be able to listen to that through our activated nervous systems, right?

Shohreh: Right.

Kelly: Which is a challenging thing to do, and the online space can be challenging in that way. But I have such enormous hope for us because we're seeing so much change. So when I started talking about the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand five years ago, you know, I got so much pushback. And people were like, "Oh you're just criticizing other women and tearing other women down." And it's like no, that's not what I'm doing. If you notice, I never even name anyone's names. I speak to the pattern, because I want us to notice the institutional norms and behaviors here that we can change. We actually have the power to change in our own spaces.

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And now I'm seeing people say the same things that I was saying five years ago and it really land with people. So I'm super excited about it. Sometimes I have feelings because I'm like, I was saying that five years ago and you were arguing with me, and now you're like on your pulpit saying the same thing [laughs]. Sometimes I have feelings about that, but on the whole, I'm so encouraged. We are actually so resilient and capable of so much change and so much brilliance, and I'm encouraged by where we could take this.

Shohreh:

So, on a related topic, something that I have also noticed in the wake of the recent protests here in the U.S. is the corporate participation, or attempted corporate participation in activism and social justice. And some companies have done a really wonderful job with this, and other companies have dropped the ball and their actions have mostly been performative. And this is also something we see every June, right, in the queer community, where companies switch all of their shit to rainbow everything, but then they don't actually do anything of substance. It gets to July 1st, and then they pretend like it never happened.

So that has made me think about how often companies, big and small, don't put social justice at the forefront *unless* there is a strong pressure to do so because they're going with capitalism, right? The idea is, alright, well, public opinion says that I will lose money if I do this thing, I don't want to do it. But if public opinion shifts and I will stand to lose money if I don't do this activism/social justice thing, then I want to do this.

And I find that dynamic really interesting, because of course, that's a big reason why people push back against a lot of your work is, oh, well, if I do that, I can't make money, right? Like, well, if I stop selling weight loss, I

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can't make money because that's what people want in this industry. So I'm curious what your response is to that argument.

Kelly:

Well, I have two things to say. So that parallel you're noticing where a whole bunch of brands are kind of like coming on board with Black Lives Matter right now and issuing statements, I see a parallel there with the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand and the performativity we were talking about, which is that people will perform a message, but not actually change their practices. And so we're seeing like memes and social media stuff about okay, thank you very much for your Black Lives Matter statement, now let me look at the composition of your executive board.

That's the same thing I'm talking about with the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand who might use the word "empowerment" a lot and to say that she's about bettering the conditions of women, but doesn't actually pay the women in her business appropriately. So what I want us to always focus on is let's focus less on the optics and the message and more about the business practices.

So in this moment, I don't even care which companies have made which statements, I wanna know who's on their board. I wanna know what their hiring practices are. And those are the things we need to focus on. And the same with the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand. I don't care if she uses the words "empowerment," I want to know does she use unpaid intern labor in her business. Those are the things I wanna know and those are the things I want us to pay attention to.

And then around this idea that people are afraid to incorporate feminist business principles or social justice practices into their businesses 'cause they feel that they won't make money, there's an assumption there that says that those two things are opposed. And I want to assure people that

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you can build a flourishing business without exploiting anyone, because that's the root issue. It's like, well, how do I have a successful business if I don't exploit people, or if I don't leverage privilege? If that's the only way to have a flourishing business is to leverage privilege and reinforce oppression, then let's not do that, right? Let's not have flourishing businesses.

But there is a way to have flourishing businesses without doing those things. And I would even point to Ben & Jerry's who actually is one of the people who issued a brilliant statement about Black Lives Matter and said, it wasn't just a statement, it was like a four-point plan of like, we call for these things. It was demands, right? That was brilliant. But Ben & Jerry's was founded by two hippies who have always agitated for social justice, publicly and in their brand. And in the year 2000, their brand sold for \$326 million.

Rachel Rodgers is a business coach for online entrepreneurs who makes a very strong stand that all businesses should incorporate anti-racist principles into their business and anti-racist practices into their business, and she just had a million-dollar month. You 100% can build a thriving business on top of equitable practices. It's only a lack of imagination and a lazy norm that says we can't do it.

Shohreh:

Yeah, and one of the things I love about your work is that when you talk about our power as culture makers, particularly as business owners, you often break it down into small, like super implementable steps. I can give some examples of this, like for instance, not charging extra for payment plans is something I learned from you and that I've implemented within the last year. And recently I was emailing with you about how you've made an effort to bake consent into your email marketing practices, which is

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definitely not taught by most of the major names in marketing, but it's genius. And it is so easy to do once you understand the reasoning behind it.

And I bring these up because I think people are afraid of what feminist marketing means for their business in the sense that, while I personally don't mind burning things to the ground and starting over when necessary, for a lot of people that's really scary. And so that makes them run the other way. They think, "Well, my business is so problematic, right, that I don't even wanna mess with that, and I'm just gonna keep doing what I'm doing." Instead of realizing that you can make incremental change to start going in a better, more positive direction for your business.

Kelly:

Right, so there's that old sort of saying about how do you eat an elephant, one bite at a time. It's the same with your business practices. You sort of audit your business practices, and then change one thing at a time. And most of them are actually very doable, non-dramatic changes that create dramatically different outcomes.

Everyone knows this, this is a culturally iconic moment, but you know the show when Oprah gave away all the cars—"And you get a car, and you get a car, and you get a car,"—right? So dramatic and over the top and totally captured my imagination. I was like, I wanna be Oprah. I wanna be able to just give away masses of money, and houses, and cars, and like, make big impacts like that. And then what happens though, when we have that example in front of us, is we think that the only way to make change is to be able to give someone a car, or a house, or do something huge and dramatic, and we're not able to do it, so we can't make change.

The truth is, change happens in tiny interactions between us and in tiny incremental changes that add up to a big thing. And change is actually way

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less dramatic than that and way more doable. And a lot of the things, like even the things that you just mapped out, they are simple shifts within your business that create a radically different cultural impact. And often don't have a negative impact on the bottom line and can even have a positive impact on the bottom line.

So, for example, you said that thing about, I have this practice where before I run a launch I send an email to my list saying I'm just refreshing consent. I'm checking in with you. I'm about to launch something which means I'm going to send an email every day, or every other day, and I want to see, do you want to receive those emails? Because if you don't, if you're not interested in hearing about this product and you don't want to receive those sales emails, you can click here and opt out. You'll still get my newsletter, but you won't get those sales emails. And on the face of it, it looks like well, I'm going to be much less successful because fewer people are gonna read it because a whole bunch of people are gonna opt out.

But what happened for me, when I sent that email was a whole bunch of people bought the thing that I was selling and even bought things I wasn't selling, because they were like oh, well, if that's your value and consent is important to you, then you're someone I want to buy from. So I sent an email where I wasn't even trying to sell anything, I was actually giving people an opportunity to not be sold to, and I made more money [laughs].

So, I mean, I had no idea that was gonna happen, to be honest, but I want to say that when people see what you're about and they want to be about the same thing, there's a net benefit and they actually bind closer to you and closer to your business because you are allowing them to put their money into something they actually believe in. So they're still gonna get

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the product and service they wanted, but they're also going to get to feel good about supporting the kind of business that they want to see existing in the world.

Shohreh: And in terms of that particular marketing tactic, not only were you able to make more money from it, but if you just look at it from a global perspective, it's a better practice because typically when you do a launch, you lose hundreds of people off of your email list who are just annoyed with the launch. And as a business owner, it's always so frustrating 'cause you're like, I don't sell all the time—

Kelly: I worked so hard for that!

Shohreh: Yeah, I'm like, why are you leaving [laughter], it's just a few emails. And so, your method circumvents that. It tells people, hey, you get to stay on my regular email list, and if you don't wanna hear this, you don't have to. So it's genius!

Kelly: Thank you! I'm really pleased. I honestly had no idea it was gonna work so well, but I did it because I value consent, and I don't think consent is one and done. And just because you signed up to my email list doesn't mean you've consented to hearing these things forever. So I always just wanna check in. So it was just a principle. I'm like, I'm gonna refresh consent periodically, and it does keep my list stronger. People stay with me for longer. And that is a net positive for my bottom line. And interestingly enough, that launch did better because of that consent email, which on the face of it, would look like it would not help my business.

Shohreh: Well and you mentioned consent as a principle, and I think people often think that their personal principles are not necessarily something that they can bring into their business and again, be successful, make money, and

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that is not the case. If anything, people should be starting with what are my principles, and then build the business around that.

Kelly:

Well, just think about it every bad job you've ever had, right? And you've looked at things and like, this does not align with my principles, this itches my soul, I hate this, why would we then go and create businesses where we hold into the same things that we don't like in other spaces? It just makes no sense. I think we have to start with our principles, what we want, who we are, the impact we're trying to create, and then design something to produce that.

And again, it's totally unsustainable to work against your own interest, desires, and principles. If you have to swallow your principles in order to run your business, you are going to hate that business, and you're not going to market it enthusiastically, or fluidly, or often. But if you are so proud of your business principles and so proud of your practices because they are completely in integrity with your beliefs and the impact you're trying to create, then you're never gonna feel embarrassed about marketing it.

Shohreh:

Right, 'cause that goes back to what you were saying before about how it takes more energy to perform something like the Female Lifestyle Empowerment Brand. It takes more energy to perform principles that are not your own.

Kelly:

Truth never runs out, right? It is an endlessly renewable source of fuel. Truth never runs out. So if you ground your business in the truth about who you are and what you're here for, you will never run out of energy to run that business.

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Shohreh: Yes. So, we've talked a lot about business owners and the culture-making ability of business owners, but much of your work is also really informative for consumers. So I'd love if you could talk about what culture making could look like on the consumer side, and how consumers actually have the power to drive the direction that businesses go in.

Kelly: Yes. So I think that one of the most powerful moves we make in our personal lives is deciding who gets our followship. Right, who gets our time and attention? Who do we accept ideas and leadership from? And so, really critically evaluating who you're offering your time to, who you're offering your mental space to, who you're offering your heart to, who you're being influenced by, is a powerful decision.

And so you as a consumer, and I even mean like as a consumer of information, not just a consumer of objects and products, but a consumer of information, can decide what kind of culture you want to create. So if we suddenly all collectively retracted our attention from influencer X, then that influencer would no longer have influence, right? We can decide that and if we decide that, you know what, we want to lift up indigenous women. If we want to lift up trans women and we want to make sure they're being paid adequately, then we could go follow en masse and lift up those profiles, and then they would then have the power to command certain opportunities.

So, where we direct our attention, who we like, what we pay for, has a culture-making impact. And so, figuring out who you want to support and where you're putting your time and your money is a powerful decision that you make for our culture, but it's also a powerful decision that you make for yourself. Because if you're consuming a whole bunch of media that makes you feel bad about yourself, then that is not good for your soul.

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So you deciding, like really discerning who you let into your space as a leader and an influencer can have an impact on how you lead your life, and how powerful you feel, and what you do with yourself.

Shohreh:

Yeah, and I think for individuals as well there's a tension between the demands that we put on individuals to make change versus the systems and the organizations that are the root of a lot of these problems. And, you know, you have individuals who are like, "Well, I am just one person, how much can I really do?" Or, "I need this thing that I'm not supposed to use," right?

For example, a lot of people are saying divest from Amazon, don't use Amazon, whatever. But there are people who Amazon is one of the only ways they can get certain goods in their area. So at what point do we say, well, it's on you as the consumer, how dare you not do this, versus well, this company is the root problem.

Kelly:

So I actually think it's really a bit dangerous to put all the emphasis on what we can do with our buying power. So the way I'm talking about it is, we can do a lot, that's not the end game. If we can change the structural context or the political or the legal context...so let's say there's a company that is paying people just an abysmal wage or doing, like, I can't think of it. Just let's say they have this terrible labor practice. And we could all boycott, we could strike, and maybe that would have an impact. Maybe. Or, maybe we could go to the law makers in that state and change the policy so that whatever that horrible thing that they're doing, that they no longer legally can do it. That would actually change things.

Or, we could do both. We could have a public protest and we could have a boycott, and we could draft legislation and pressure law makers into passing it. Right, we can do both things. So there's multiple entries into

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change, and it's not that we have to pursue one path at the expense of other. And so for example, I was just saying like, we have to focus on our business practices and the spheres of influence that we have, and *also* march in the streets, and *also* call our representatives, and *also* vote. We have to use all the levers of power, because the people who actually have the power, they are using all the levers of power. They aren't leaving any unexplored, right? We've got to use them all.

Shohreh:

Right, 'cause it gets dangerous to suggest there's a one-size-fits-all approach to changing any of these things, especially knowing that different people have different lives, different marginalizations. Like for instance, I've had a lot of disabled friends saying, well, obviously I'm not out marching in the streets, that doesn't work for me and for my body, but here's what I'm doing instead.

Kelly:

Exactly! And this is why it's so important. I use this analogy of, like, let's say there's a wall of injustice, kind of like a Game of Thrones ice wall that's a thousand feet tall. So let's say that wall is injustice. Now, each of us can pick up a chisel and go chisel away, right? Let's say my chisel is my writing and my business practices. So I can go pick a spot on the wall, and I can chisel away on my spot with my tools. And all by myself, nothing is happening, right, that is a futile endeavor.

However, if a whole bunch of other people show up, like a painter shows up with their chisel, their paintings, and a whole bunch of other people show up and they're chiseling away at the wall, and also the massage therapists show up and put their tables out so that the people chiseling can get a rest and a massage, and people show up with porta potties, and we all show up with all the things that we have, then now that wall is coming down.

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And this is what I mean about culture making and what you just pointed out about your friends saying, I can't march in the streets, so I'm going to do something else. We all can play a role with what things we've got, and we don't need everyone doing the same thing. We need architects designing the new buildings after we smash down the old structures. We need painters envisioning what the new world looks like. We need gardeners being able to garden. We can't all do the same thing. There are multiple levers that we have to work, and everyone can pick their lever.

Shohreh: Right, and so when people are feeling that urge to quit because something isn't working for them, what that may be is the sign that they need to find something else that is a better fit for them instead of abandoning activism or whatever it may be altogether.

Kelly: You can be creative and definitely find the thing that you can do. So for example, I am terrible at logistics. If we were like having a rally and it required someone making sure everyone was gonna be there at a certain time, and arranging buses, and arranging porta potties, you would definitely not want me on that team. I would mess everything up [laughs]. The whole thing would be a flop.

However, if you needed someone to write a really persuasive message to go out to the media, and a press release, and maybe someone to go do some radio spots, that I could do. That I would be amazing at and be really useful. So we actually have to use our talents, because we're gonna get more out of them.

Shohreh: Yeah, and they'll go further as well.

Kelly: Yes, easier too.

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Shohreh: Mm I love that. So, for our final question Kelly, I would like to know, how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

Kelly: I define that as being grounded, resourced, and ready to meet the moment. And so, right now when people say, “Kelly, how are you? In these urgent times, how are you?” I always wanna be able to answer, “Grounded, resourced, and ready to meet the moment.” And if I can’t answer those things, then that indicates something that I need to pause and take a look at.

So, if I can’t say I’m grounded, then I need to do something to get centered, to get out of my reactivity, to calm my central nervous system so that I am grounded and making clear and deliberate decisions. If I can’t say I’m resourced, then maybe that whatever thing people are asking me to take on, this isn’t the moment in time for me to take it on, I need to back up and figure out how to get resourced. And that could be emotionally resourced, that could be resourced with childcare, it could be a number of things. And then ready to meet the moment doesn’t mean that I have the skill to do the thing, but it means I’m ready to meet the moment. So I will do the thing even if my voice shakes. I will do the thing that I don’t know how to do, because I’m ready to meet the moment. And if I’m not ready, I’ll get ready.

Shohreh: That is so cool, it’s like you have a little well-being checklist that’s based around your own personal needs.

Kelly: It is! That’s exactly it. And it’s like a little bit of affirmation, and also like a discernment point. Am I these things? If not, let me get those things and then let me opt in.

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Shohreh: Yes! Aww, that's awesome. What a great answer. Well, thank you so much for being here, Kelly. How can people find you and work with you?

Kelly: So, they can find me at www.kellydiels.com. They can work with me as a coach or consultant if they want to build businesses that flourish, that are grounded on feminist, equitable principles and practices, and they can attend some of my workshops. I have workshops a few times a year, they're usually very low-cost and very high-quality, and they're all about feminist business practices.

Shohreh: I can confirm that they are high-quality and wonderful. Definitely get in on some of those workshops. And I will also include a link in the show notes to your weekly Sunday Love Letter, because those are just a wonderful thing to get in my inbox each week.

Kelly: Thank you so much. You know, I'm so proud of them. I pour my heart and soul into them, and I love writing them, so I love hearing that they land in that way.

Shohreh: Yes, highly recommend. Thanks again, Kelly, this was great.

Kelly: Thank you so much for having me, I appreciate it.

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.

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more information on what I'm all about and how to work with me, head on over to shohrehdavoodi.com. I hope to see you for the next episode.