

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

**Shohreh Davoodi:** This is episode #68 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast, and I am delighted to welcome Ragen Chastain to the show. Ragen is a speaker, writer, health coach, and thought leader in the fields of body image, Health At Every Size, and weight stigma. In this episode, Ragen shared tips and strategies for how fat folx can navigate a fatphobic world and live lives they love in the bodies they have right now. We talked about different ways to deal with weight stigma in healthcare, employment, dating, and on the internet, and how to foster courage. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/68](https://shohrehdavoodi.com/68). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/68](https://shohrehdavoodi.com/68).

This podcast is brought to you in part by support from listeners like you! While this podcast is completely free to enjoy, the time, energy, and money that I put into crafting each episode is costly. Thankfully, there are multiple ways you can show your support to help the podcast continue to thrive in the months and years to come.

Joining my Patreon community at [shohrehdavoodi.com/patreon](https://shohrehdavoodi.com/patreon) is the best way to offer ongoing financial support and get extra members-only perks in the process. If you prefer a one-off contribution, you can tip me for my work through the payment links located at the bottom of the show notes for each episode. Lastly, even if you're unable to support the podcast financially, you can always subscribe, rate, review, and share it so that more people can find and benefit from the show.

However you choose to invest in the podcast, thank you for believing in me and tuning in each week.

[Music plays]

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

Welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I'm your host and resident rainbow glitter bomb, Shohreh Davoodi. I started this project because I saw how black-and-white messaging about health harms everyone, and I wanted to paint a more honest and vibrant picture. This podcast is a space where we can reimagine health together by confronting limiting misconceptions, delving into aspects of well-being that are often ignored, and prioritizing conversations with marginalized individuals. I encourage you to take what you need and leave behind what you don't. Are you ready for this? Let's fucking go!

Ragen, it is so amazing to have you on the podcast. You are a woman of many talents, an incredible size acceptance activist—thank you so much for being here.

**Ragen Chastain:** Aw, thanks for having me. This is an amazing podcast. I'm excited to be on it.

**Shohreh:** Aw, thank you! Okay, so, for listeners who don't know about who you are and what you're known for, can you please share?

**Ragen:** Sure. So I speak full time about size acceptance, Health At Every Size, fat civil rights, and my particular personal areas of expertise and interest are weight stigma within the medical community, weight stigma within eating disorders community, and then weight stigma within the fitness community because I like to do fitnessy things, and that led me into doing that kind of activism work as well.

**Shohreh:** Well, now you have to share what your fitnessy things are for the people who don't know.

**Ragen:** I am a three-time national champion ballroom dancer, I'm a two-time marathoner, and I currently hold the Guinness World Record for heaviest

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

woman to complete a marathon. And then I'm a triathlete, and I was training for an Iron distance triathlon before quarantine happened.

**Shohreh:**

That is so badass. Thank you for sharing those. Alright, so, on the pod we talk a lot about the systems of oppression that keep people down and how to fight back against those systems while also having to function within them. One topic you speak and write on is that even in this world of weight stigma and fatphobia, fat folx can and do live fulfilling, meaningful, and pleasurable lives. This fact is, of course, in opposition to all of the shitty messaging that we get from diet and wellness culture, the medical industry, etc.

So, what I would love to do today is explore the how. Given the realities of just trying to survive as a fat person in this world, let alone thrive, practically how can people live lives that they love? And I thought the way we'd go about it is to address some of the specific areas where this discrimination crops up and what fat folx can do to deal with that and feel empowered in their own lives. Sound cool?

**Ragen:**

Sounds good to me.

**Shohreh:**

Awesome. Also, before we jump into this conversation, I want to make a global note that marginalized individuals are absolutely not responsible for fixing the systemic oppression that is perpetuated against them, and individual solutions to cope are not enough. That said, talking about practical strategies for living in these systems is really important. So if you're listening, just bear that in mind as we're going through these topics.

So, we'll start with something that you specialize in, which is navigating healthcare. Could you first describe some of what fat folx are up against

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

when it comes to healthcare? And then we can get into strategies for how to deal with medical weight stigma.

**Ragen:**

Yeah, of course. Weight stigma in healthcare is at every level of healthcare. So it starts as simple as they don't do research using fat people. And so, for example, vaccines don't work as well on fat people and they know that, but they still don't include fat people in vaccine trials. So we don't have good information.

Most medical schools don't use fat cadavers, which means that a lot of people don't see a fat patient or body, or in a surgery, or medical setting, until they're starting their actual practice work. So they lack training. Medical schools are rife with fatphobia. I speak at medical schools, and I can tell you for sure it's something that's being ingrained in people from their earliest education that they're having. So that's an issue.

And then accommodation is an issue. Many doctors' offices don't even have a blood pressure cuff that fits fat patients. And so the idea that we can't take the simplest measurements, let alone, you know, a seat in the waiting room that suits someone or a gown that fits someone. And then in hospitals we've got beds that aren't accommodating, surgical tools that aren't accommodating. And then, of course, practitioner bias is something that many of us have to deal with.

And so, it's a system that's created to give us poor outcomes and then blame us for those outcomes. And probably not the last time I'll say this today, none of this is our fault, but it becomes our problems. And so when I talk about strategies to deal with it, I always want to talk about it from the fact that no matter who is blaming us for this, none of this is our fault. None of this should be happening. You shouldn't have to gear up for a doctor's

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

appointment. But that's just what we're living through right now. And so having those skills can be helpful.

So given that that's the situation, there are things that we can do. In terms of starting out, say, finding a practitioner, you can call ahead and you can do it anonymously and say, "I am looking for a doctor who will provide weight-neutral care, which means they're not going to suggest weight loss to me, they're not going to suggest weight loss surgery, they're going to treat my actual health conditions. Can you do that?"

And I've had really good success doing this for myself and for other folks. Sometimes they'll have to call you back, but I have gotten good, honest answers. You know, they'll say, "No, our doctor's won't agree to do that," or, "Yes, they will." And if they say yes, then you can introduce yourself, you can say, "I'd like this to be in my chart," and then when you go in for your appointment, remind them of this fact, that kind of thing, so that you have it in your chart.

The weigh-in—some people choose not to be weighed in. I am one of those people, and for me it's because I don't want to participate in a system that suggests that my weight is a health diagnosis, and because once doctors have that number, they often have an even harder time focusing on anything else.

And so there's lots of ways to do this. You can say, "I decline to be weighed in." I have found it really helpful to just, you know, as they're leading me toward the scale, they stop and motion to the scale, I keep walking and say [laughs] pleasantly, "No thank you." I just say, "No thanks," and keep walking because the thing is, you're not allowed to just walk around back there by yourself. So they're going to have to come after you. And at that point they usually just take me to the room.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

There's a new thing that's happening because they can't code to get paid for "ob\*sity counseling" unless they have a BMI. So if you refuse to be weighed in, they've started to ask, "Do you mind if I guess your weight?" And my answer the first time I heard this, I was so surprised, I said, "This is not the county fair!" [Laughs] I was like, we'll not be guessing my weight.

And also, just the more I thought about it, they're trying to say that this is a legitimate thing that they need for your health, but they're also saying it's fine to guess? Like are we also guessing my blood pressure? What else are you going to guess at? It tells me that this isn't legitimate as a medical number if you're willing to just take your best guess [laughs] by looking at me.

**Shohreh:**

Absolutely!

**Ragen:**

So there's that piece of it. And then within the doctor's appointment, I have a lot of privilege, obviously, as a white woman, as a cisgender able-bodied woman, currently neurotypical. There's a lot of privilege. But I also have a lot of what I call "personality privilege." I grew up in a family that has a lot of confrontation. Like we just will fight with each other for fun and then we're fine. So confrontation doesn't get me off kilter. When I am upset, I tend to get really focused, and I don't happen to cry when I'm emotionally upset. And that's a lot of privilege in the way that doctors interact. And so, I want to be clear that when I talk about how I deal with things, I'm coming from that perspective.

But I have found it can be really helpful to just ask the question, "What would you do for a thin person who had these same issues?" Because often thin people get evidence-based interventions and fat people get diets. I have personally been prescribed weight loss for a broken toe, a separated shoulder, and strep throat.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

**Shohreh:** Oh lord!

**Ragen:** And the strep throat thing devolved. I was just so sick! And they did the test and they were like, “Yep, it’s strep throat. The doctor’s coming in.” And he came in and the first thing he said was, “Well what are we going to do about your weight?” I’m like, what are we going to do about my strep throat? Right? And he’s like, “Well, whatever’s wrong with you, you’re going to feel better if you lose 50 pounds.”

**Shohreh:** Oh my god!

**Ragen:** And I was like, probably not the best answer, but I said, “Not if I have cancer.” And so he literally threw his hands up and said, “Well what do you want from me?” And there’s a counter right there, so I was just banging on it with my hand, “What do you give thin people with strep throat?”

**Shohreh:** Yes, medication! Very simple.

**Ragen:** Antibiotics! And I wanted to scream, “Let’s have some of those then in case they also work for fat people.” But what I said was, “Antibiotics, now.” I probably would have done better and gotten through that faster and with less irritation if I had said immediately, “What is it that you give thin people with this health issue?”

Again, thin people are getting evidence-based interventions and we deserve the same interventions. And I have found for doctors who are really hung up on weight loss, you can say, whether you intend to do it or not, “I’ll definitely take a look at this program that you’re giving me, but for right now can we try the other things that you would do for a thin person and then as I’m in the process of doing this weight loss program you gave me,” which obviously I’m not going to do. But that gets them past that

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

hump sometimes to actually give you an intervention. So there's that question.

I created little cards that I have on my blog that people can print for free that have questions to ask and research. So that's, if you want to have that discussion, if you want to do that activism with your doctor, that's always an option. I tend to do that, and I've learned that over the years that instead of just coming at them with all the research I know, I start with asking, "What research backs up what you're saying? My understanding is there's not a single study anywhere where more than a tiny fraction of people are successful at long-term weight loss. You're telling me I should do this. Can you provide any study that would negate what I understand?" And they can't. They absolutely can't because the study doesn't exist. But putting that burden of proof on them instead of me telling them 17 studies that I know and having them dismiss them all out of hand, for example.

So, you can always have that activism. I always say, "More privilege, more work." So since I'm coming at this with a lot of privilege, I'm also going to do a lot of work. I also have a lot of privilege because I live in Los Angeles right now. There are a ton of doctors with the insurance program that I'm lucky enough to have, that I can fire a doctor or be fired by a doctor and get another doctor. And so, a lot of my activism with doctors is trying to make the interaction memorably uncomfortable that they won't do this again [laughter]. Or that they'll think about it every time they're about to prescribe weight loss to somebody with strep throat, that they're going to think about, do I really want the potential of going through that again, or do I maybe just want to give this person some antibiotics?

As an activist, I run a lot on rage, and so one of the issues with the way that the medical establishment treats fat people is that not only is it harder

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

for us to get treatment, but often we will avoid going to the doctor until things are much worse. And then again, we get blamed because fat people have worse outcomes. Well, part of that is because you prescribed a diet for our cancer until we got to stage four and you finally actually decided to look into it. And part of it is that we waited to come to the doctor because we didn't want that experience again.

And so for me, I always have to think about, I will be damned if I will allow medical fatphobia to keep me from getting the care I need. I'm going to do everything I can to fight this system even though I shouldn't have to do this. And I'm going to involve advocates, and I'm going to get support, but I'm going to do what I need to do to get healthcare because I'm not going to let these people harm or kill me because of their bigotry.

**Shohreh:** Yes, it's about taking back some of that power that they have stolen by virtue of them being the ones in control in their profession, to say that you want to make sure that you get the best health outcomes you can get given the system that we're stuck with.

**Ragen:** Exactly. And I can tell you, I speak to physicians quite a bit, and my talk is extremely evidence-based. Over the years I've learned that works much better than talking about feelings. But you'll always see a couple practitioners who are like, they're mad that they had to come, they're mad that I'm getting to talk about this. And the first question they ask is, "Where did you go to medical school?" And my response is always the same. My response is, "If I had gone to medical school, I'd probably be making these same mistakes because you learn it there. I had to go outside of that system to get this information."

And I think that's important and helpful because I think my generation and older were taught you do not question a doctor.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

**Shohreh:** Yeah

**Ragen:** They're the expert, and how dare you question someone with a medical degree? But the truth is that medical degrees, they are incredibly difficult, they're incredibly broad, but they're not good at specifics and they're massively fatphobic. So, like, for people with chronic illnesses, many of them know much more than a doctor about their specific illness, especially the more rare the illness becomes. And so the doctor is part of our care team, but like, we're the CEO of our body. Coming from that perspective and taking back that power, in saying, "If you believe this to be true, then you should be able to provide some kind of proof to me that this is an evidence-based, ethical intervention you're suggesting," is completely reasonable.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, absolutely. And those cards you mentioned, I have seen them, I've actually shared them with clients and others in the past—they're wonderful. So I'm definitely going to post a link to those in the show notes for anybody who wants to see those and potentially arm themselves with those when they are going to their medical appointments.

And I want to go back to what you said as well about how you are in a larger city, you have a lot of options for doctors, and sometimes people are in situations where that's just not the case. They're either in a rural area or their insurance sucks. Maybe they have one doctor. And so that limits what they can do. And I know one of the pieces of advice that I've heard recently that seems to work decently well for people is that if a doctor is refusing you the care you request, to ask them to document it.

**Ragen:** Yes! Absolutely! So if you want a test and they won't give it to you, say to them, "I need you to document this on my chart while I'm here, that I asked for this test and you denied it." First of all, often that will just result in them

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

doing the test. But even if it doesn't, it gives you at least a, you know, that you asked for it, they denied it, and then the next time you can say, "Look, this problem is still happening, I really want to go back to this test," and continue to do that.

Also, in terms of chart, you have the right to see your medical chart, including all of the notes there. It's a HIPAA regulation. So, the only things that they don't have to give you are notes that are more like impressions. So, for example, a psychologist's or psychiatrist's notes, you may not be able to have access to those. But they have to give you your medical chart, including notes, and labs, and test results. Even if they think that their notes will upset you, that's not a reason that they can keep them from you.

And I have found it to be very useful to get my chart, and then you can ask them to change things that you believe are inaccurate. And if they refuse to change them, then you can put a note in your chart. So for example, my chart often says that I'm non-compliant because I won't engage in weight-loss interventions.

**Shohreh:** I hate that word so much!

**Ragen:** I hate it a lot, and it can have an effect on you if you need other medical care. A big example would be if you needed an organ because compliance is part of how they judge who gets the organs that are donated. And so, I always put a note in that says, "Practitioner wasn't able to provide a single piece of evidence to suggest the ethical, evidence-based nature of this intervention. I provided this evidence. Since there was no proof that this was an ethical, evidence-based intervention, I refused." So at least that way it's clear, like, what happened and it's not just a practitioner saying I'm non-compliant.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

**Shohreh:** Right, the chart is really a record of what is happening in these appointments, and you have as much right to help make that record as the medical practitioner does.

**Ragen:** Exactly.

**Shohreh:** I love that. Thank you for those excellent suggestions. I think those are going to help a lot of people who experience anxiety around medical appointments and medical professionals.

**Ragen:** Yeah, glad to help, and sorry that it's necessary.

**Shohreh:** So next, let's talk about employment. It is no secret that weight stigma in hiring and in the workplace in general exists. And many people have shared with me that they fear they will not be taken seriously in job interviews or in their careers in the bodies that they have, even though they are competent, intelligent, and accomplished in their work. So, do you have any suggestions for ways that fat folx can get in the door and get more comfortable in some of these spaces, given that this discrimination is out there?

**Ragen:** Career-based fatphobia is a huge issue. Again, coping strategies that we shouldn't need and that are often shitty in their nature—the way that we present ourselves at interviews. So a lot of it has to do with overcoming stereotypes, and I hate doing this. The stereotype isn't the problem; the fact that there is a stereotype is the issue.

**Shohreh:** Right.

**Ragen:** But being, like, whatever their perception of "presentable" would be, super neat, super professional, over-dressing just a tiny bit, but not too much because corporate culture is now such a big thing. But if it's like a blue

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

jeans and t-shirt culture and we show up suited up, that can then create a mismatch.

So, really researching the companies. Working to get leads through referral so that somebody at the company is already backing you can be really helpful. Finding companies that have a commitment to this or that don't. So, for example, Whole Foods, literally their benefits are fatphobic.

**Shohreh:** Oh yeah.

**Ragen:** Whole Foods gives less benefits to people based on higher BMI. And so if that's somewhere that you dream of working, like, that's an important thing to know. And if you're not sure where you dream of working, that may be something you cross off your list, for any number of reasons, but that's one of them!

Getting all of your other things really in line. So, to the extent that you're able to afford a resume writer, an interview coach, so that everything else is at the peak of what it could be. And again, none of this is fair. Someone who's thin and didn't do this stuff shouldn't get a job over you because of weight bias, but this is the world that we live in.

And then, if you want to do activism, if you're looking for a job but don't necessarily need a job or you're in a position to do activism, you can ask at your interview, what are the policies here to avoid discrimination based on size? Are you aware that the pay differential between very thin women and fat women is about \$19,000 according to some studies? Like what are you doing to combat that because obviously, I'm sure this is a great company, you don't want to be engaging in size-based stigma and bigotry.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

So you can do activism if you want to. You don't have to. You're never obligated to do activism, especially when we're talking about a job that you need to pay rent and have food.

So, those are all things that can be helpful. Looking through LinkedIn and seeing, does this company already have fat employees? Are they all thin? Is there anybody fat in leadership? Doing that research beforehand can be helpful in choosing where you want to concentrate your energy.

If you're working with a headhunter or a job placement company, asking how do they help combat that and what can they do to help can be a helpful thing to do. You know, a lot of it depends on what job you're going for and at what level, kind of, what resources you can bring to bear in terms of a headhunter or a placement agency, but it's something to look into.

**Shohreh:** Yeah. There's always going to be an accessibility piece when we're talking about things like this because again, kind of like what we were talking about with healthcare, in some places maybe there's only one company that does the job that is your specialty. And so it's just about, okay, how can I get this singular place, regardless of the situation, to accept me. And then I think that's where some of those ideas you had about having to dress the part and be really well-researched, and everything. It's this idea, right, the more marginalized you are, the harder you have to work to get the same things. And it's utter bullshit and it's so frustrating, but you're right, having that awareness of that to be able to make the best choices going into it, is helpful for that reality.

**Ragen:** Yeah.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

**Shohreh:** So shifting to something a little bit different, I'd like to talk about love and dating. There is so much awful messaging that folks get that only thin bodies are lovable or dateable, which can lead to a lot of pain and people feeling like they have to either hide who they are or change themselves to have any chance of finding a partner. Can you share any thoughts you have on how to work through that?

**Ragen:** Sure. I'll start with a little story. I was involved in a kind of questionable graduate student project in which they were trying to figure out, like, fat dating online and what it's like. And so there were three groups, and we self-selected into them. One group tried to hide the fact that they were fat as long as possible in the dating process in the hopes that the person would grow to like them enough to be okay with their body. The second group talked about being fat, about not dieting, that kind of thing, but as part of a larger profile. And then the third group was full-on activists. Their whole profile was about being a fat activist and wanting somebody who was on board with that.

And I self-selected into group two, and it was a really interesting process. And what I kind of learned through that process was that this was a good filter for me. That it sucks that so many people that I might otherwise find interesting are fatphobes, but at the end of the day, I don't want to date a fatphobe regardless of what size I am. Because bodies change over the years, and so, I find if somebody has really narrow parameters for what they're interested in in a partner, that tells me that that is not somebody that I want to date, regardless of how interesting they might be otherwise. That's just not someone I'm going to be interested in. That is a dealbreaker for me.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

And so, I found that in the dating process in that way, being fat was kind of a nice immediate filter. I mean it's difficult because there are amazing people, and I do see people try to lose weight for a partner, but we know that about 95% of people gain all their weight back and about two-thirds of those gain back more than they lost. And so, to me, that's really setting yourself up to be in a really bad situation where you gain the weight back and now this person that you love and have started to create a life with, now you're having to deal with their fatphobia, which you tried so hard to accommodate.

And people are allowed to do whatever they want, but that path seems particularly dangerous to me. And I think the more that we are out there and the more that we're getting this work out there, the more that people are questioning and challenging their own perceptions. It's helpful to see the ability to perceive beauty as a skillset because we have this idea that like, we know what's beautiful and it just happens to align with our cultural stereotype of beauty. Like you'll hear people say, "Well, no, I just happen to like tall, thin, white girls with long blonde hair, and big boobs, and small waists, and big hips, but that's just how I was born."

**Shohreh:** Yeah, "It's just a personal preference."

**Ragen:** Yeah, it's a personal preference. It's like, really? Really? And so, to me, the ability to perceive beauty is a skillset. So, if somebody can't see my beauty, it means they haven't developed those skills, and that's not on me.

And same with me! If there's something about somebody that I can't see the beauty in them, like, that's because I haven't developed the skillset and because I've internalized our culture's stereotype of beauty, which is very narrow and is built on the same sort of fatphobia, white supremacy, ableism, ageism that so much of our society is scaffolded on. So that's my

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

work to do, and that's their work to do, and they may choose to do that work or not, but that's on them.

It's also my choice whether or not I want to help somebody through that process. I had somebody email me, a blog reader, and say, "I met this guy and he's amazing, and, you know, he told me that he's struggling with finding me attractive because of my size, but that he understands that's his problem and he wants to work through it. What should I do?" And I was like, well, you have a couple choices. You don't have to be there for this journey with him. You can send him on his way and tell him to come back when he has worked this out. But if you want to go on this journey with him you can, and you can support him, and here's some things you can do.

And she chose option two, and it totally worked out for her.

**Shohreh:**

Aw, yay!

**Ragen:**

They've got a baby now. They're very happy. He worked through his issues. He worked really hard. And so, only we can make that choice for ourselves whether or not we want to go on that journey with somebody else.

My partner is a fat activist and she's amazing. And so that relationship was amazing for me because there's so much support. And as an activist, I get so much constant pushback from the world, like, having to be in a relationship where I'm also having to do that activism every day, I don't think that is something that I would sign up for. But everybody's different.

But we have to kind of understand, what are our boundaries and what are we willing to do when we're fat in a fatphobic society and that's going to affect us. And my approach to dating when I was single was always better alone than in bad company, right? I will figure out how to get my needs

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

met, I will figure out how to have community, and be single if that's what it means if I can't be in a relationship where I'm properly valued and appreciated.

**Shohreh:**

Yeah, I love that, and I really like the fact that there's this element of choice here. Because I've been thinking about this lately in terms of dating, where it's like, I'm at a point in my life where I could not date somebody who is deeply stuck in diet culture and weight stigma because my whole work revolves around that. I don't want to have to walk somebody through that in my personal life as well because this is what I do for a living. So that's a personal boundary that I've set is that I cannot date someone who is gonna talk about their keto diet, even if they are otherwise a wonderful, fantastic person.

And does that mean that my dating pool is smaller? You bet that it does mean that my dating pool is smaller 'cause there's a lot of people out in the world who are really into that. But that's a boundary that I've set. And so I totally agree with you. It's this idea of figuring out what are your boundaries, what are you willing to accept in another person, and what are you not?

**Ragen:**

Yeah. And I wanna point out too, like there are no guarantees. When I was in that dating project, I went on a date and it was fine. And at the time I was dancing competitively. I was dancing about 20 hours a week. So I was like, I'm looking for dates that are relaxing and seated 'cause I'm tired all the time [laughs]. And so, we went out, and then he asked for a second date, and then said, "Well, what if we went and walked around the lake?" And I was like, was I not clear? First of all, I'm indoorsy AF, and second of all, like, no to walking around the lake.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

And he was like, you know, I like you so much, but I just don't want to throw you down and rip your clothes off. And I was like, well, that's a problem. And he said, you know, "But I'm willing to stay with you while you lose the weight and help and encourage you."

**Shohreh:** Ugh!

**Ragen:** And I was like, dude! We went through this. I was like, what part of my profile was unclear to you? Like how dare you date me and then try to turn me into something you want? Just don't date me. But the best part of the story is that I ran into him at H-E-B, which you'll understand 'cause you're in Austin. It's a Texas supermarket.

**Shohreh:** Oh yes. Go there every week!

**Ragen:** With this girl. And he asked me how I was doing, and I said, "Fine." And I said, "You know, I ended up writing a blog about you on Dances With Fat." And it turns out the girl he was dating read the blog, and she turned to him and said, "That was you?" And I was like, I gotta go, bye!

**Shohreh:** The drama!

**Ragen:** And I just walked away from that. But I was like, in a million years I could not have planned this moment or understood just how wonderful that moment would feel to me.

**Shohreh:** Oh, the redemption is amazing!

**Ragen:** Dude. A little bit of payback there. But yeah, there are no guarantees and that sucks that we're gonna deal with fatphobia within dating. But we can protect ourselves by staying really centered, by always having our body appreciation practice going, so that we just constantly remember, like, it's not me, it's you.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and I think what you said at the beginning too, I want to come back to because this has been really important for me in my adult life, is that any time that I have had to hide who I truly am in some way to get someone to like me, it has not panned out in the end. Because the person that they were thinking that they liked or were interested in, whether that's to be friends, romantic partners, whatever, was not the real me. And so eventually problems were gonna come out of that.

And I think that's a really hard lesson to learn in a world that, you know, really teaches us that you should just be trying to strive to fit into these boxes, and like, who you are isn't good enough. But when you can get really comfortable with who you are, you don't want to hide it. You don't want people in your life who expect you to hide it because it doesn't feel in alignment. It just doesn't feel good.

**Ragen:** Exactly. I'm feeling this so much 'cause there's this idea that we've got that I think is such a mistake that tolerance means you'll put up with anything, but then you pat yourself on the back for being tolerant. Where it's like, sure, you can be a Trump supporter and still be my friend because I'm so tolerant. And feel free to oppress as many people as you want or harm as many people as you want, including me, because I'm so tolerant. And I don't think that's necessarily a good thing. I think it's okay to have boundaries and say, "If you can't treat me well, then you can't be around me." Right? Like you must be this respectful to ride this ride.

**Shohreh:** Yeah.

**Ragen:** And it's okay to be intolerant. You know, there's the paradox of tolerance, which is one of my favorite things to be talking about right now. But just in general, you don't have to tolerate someone who's merely tolerating you.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and you don't have to tolerate someone who literally would prefer you didn't exist either.

**Ragen:** [Laughs] Exactly, or would prefer you exist, like, you, but a mythical thin you who exists. Like no, I'm not a thin woman covered in fat. There's not like a thin woman in here I'm keeping in. I'm a fat woman, and if you don't like that whole thing, then you don't like me, and it's okay for you to just move on.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, or mythical straight woman, or mythical white woman, whatever it may be. If someone doesn't fundamentally like who you are as a person, they are not your human.

**Ragen:** Exactly.

**Shohreh:** Yes. Awesome. Okay, so we have one final area that I want to talk about, and that is the great internet that we love to hate [laughter] and being visible in online spaces. Because of course, wherever there are fat folx on the internet, trolls are sure to be close behind. And the internet in general can just be a very scary and triggering place. So, I would love to hear any thoughts you have about how fat folx can navigate that to protect their own health with also not feeling like they have to shrink themselves or disappear.

**Ragen:** Yeah, so especially when you're just starting out, finding groups that are unapologetically fat-friendly can be really helpful. Because you know that when you post in there you're gonna get positive responses, and if you don't, they're gonna come in and moderate that. I think that is really helpful to kind of start getting that sense of community and getting that confidence and remembering how you should be treated when you are visible on the internet or anywhere really.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

Moderating spaces I find really helpful. When I first started my blog, I fell into the idea that I had to post every comment that came, otherwise I was censoring ideas. And at some point, not too long after I started doing that, I was like, no, I don't. No, I don't! Like I wouldn't let someone come into my living room and talk like this. This is my space! I created it, I'm responsible for it, and I get to choose. The ability to work out how to leave a comment is not the threshold that I want to have for discourse in my space. And so, again, if you can't meet my guidelines and needs in my space, you gotta go.

And so, it's fine to moderate your spaces. It's fine to delete comments off your Facebook. It's fine to create a space that is supportive of who you are and what you want to be in the world. And to say, "If you don't agree with that, you're gonna have to go talk about it somewhere else."

**Shohreh:** On Reddit maybe.

**Ragen:** Yeah. [Laughter] Trust me, there are plenty of places that you can find like-minded people to be fatphobic with if that's your goal, but it's not gonna be here. It's not gonna be in my space. I'm not providing a platform for this. And so, moderating has been really helpful.

And then, I started a group years ago. It's a little secret group on Facebook called Rolls Not Trolls. And the idea is to leave body-positive comments in body-negative spaces, right? So, somebody will say, "Oh, there's this terrible thread on Instagram," and we go and we post. But the secret is, we never go back.

**Shohreh:** Mm.

**Ragen:** And this to me has helped activism to be more of a self-care thing for me than draining for me, doing activism like this. Because I'm not trying to

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

convince the fatphobe who posted this horrible meme. I'm not gonna change that guy's mind today. All I want is that for someone reading this thread to see something other than vitriol towards fat people. Just putting one comment in the thread gives a fat person who is reading this and feeling terrible about themselves another option.

My whole activism is about creating options, right? People can do whatever they want, but I want people to know, you are allowed to love yourself, regardless. You are allowed to have a healthy relationship with food, and movement, and your body, regardless of anything else that's happening. You are able to pursue health outside of a weight-loss paradigm. Understanding that health, again, not an obligation, barometer of worthiness, or entirely within our control.

So, in doing activism in online spaces in this way, I can provide those options, but then I don't have to debate about that. There's this idea that oh, if I want to say that I have the right to exist, I should have to fight for that. I should have to debate anybody who wants to for that. And I disagree. There aren't two valid sides to every argument. When it comes to size acceptance, you either agree with it or you're wrong. Those are the only options. Nobody has to love their body, but everybody of every size has the right to live without shame, stigma, bullying, or oppression, period. You either agree with that or you're absolutely wrong. There's not another valid side. I'm not debating.

**Shohreh:**

Yeah. I love the idea of activism as creating options because of course, it respects each person's individual autonomy to decide whatever they want for themselves, and it also allows you to say there are other possibilities out in the world. And sometimes just knowing that the possibility exists is

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

enough for things to really bloom in a person's mind. Again, it's this like, if you can't see it, you don't know that it's an option for you.

So even having these little comments here and there, having this idea of like, yes, there's this thing. Maybe that's not gonna bloom today, but having that seed there, six months, a year, five years from now, that could really come to fruition. And I love thinking of activism in that way, as we're planting seeds. And it's not our responsibility to see what happens with them, our job is just to scatter them out into the world.

**Ragen:**

One of the things I had to come to terms with is it's very rare that I, in any way, control the outcome of my activism. I can't control other people's behavior. I can only control what I do, if I choose to do activism. And so, like I said, for me, in many ways it's a self-care practice because I see injustice happening, and then I do something, anything, however small. It's like, okay, that happened, and I did something about it, and now I can move on.

And that, just for me, personally, feeds me and is self-care for me instead of just sitting around and being angry about what I'm seeing. I can't control the outcome of my activism. I might not be able to fix the injustice completely, but I can say something. I can refuse to be silent about that, and I can use my privilege in whatever ways I can leverage it in that situation.

And so, to me that is a helpful thing to remember when we're being present online. I can't control the reaction to me posting a bikini picture, and I'll never know what the reaction is because people tend to post negative reactions more than positive ones. So who knows how many people I've positively influenced with anything that I did because I'm not gonna hear from all those people.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

**Shohreh:** Mm, that's so true.

**Ragen:** Because they're not organized to respond to me like trolls are. This is what trolls do. This is how they're getting their self-esteem, this is how they're getting through whatever in their life has led them to be this person, is by organizing and doing this. And so we're gonna hear from them, perhaps in larger numbers, but that doesn't mean they're actually larger numbers.

And I get emails every day from people who were like, basically, I didn't know loving my fat body was an option, you know? I always wanted to try to dance, but I didn't think I could do it at my size. And I did that! I spent years making lists of the stuff I was gonna do when I was thin. And as part of my journey into Health At Every Size and size acceptance, I decided just to take my fat body out for a spin and see what it could do.

And there's stuff that I've been successful at and there's stuff that my body can't do, and there's nothing wrong with that. And that's the case with every body of every size. But like, we are so conditioned to blame being fat for everything, and other people are so conditioned to blame our being fat for everything, that it's hard to see, like, no, this is my body. My body is fat. There are things it can do, there are things it can't do, and that is okay.

**Shohreh:** I think this really comes back to the importance and necessity of visibility and representation. With greater visibility we probably wouldn't even need to be having this kind of a conversation because everyone would see and know that yes, of course it's possible to go after what you want no matter what your body size is. But we live in a world that suggests at every turn that no, that's not possible, you can't do that, don't even try. And that's why conversations like this are necessary so that folks can hear from people living it and putting themselves out there.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

**Ragen:** For sure. And it's not just that our world doesn't show us, it curates content that leaves us out.

**Shohreh:** Yes.

**Ragen:** In the fitness world in a lot of places, you'll hear the idea of, oh, we don't want to promote ob\*sity. That if we show fat people as being anything other than self-loathing and desperate to lose weight, we're somehow "promoting" fatness. Which is weird 'cause like, Mary Lou Retton is on a speaking tour, but no one is saying she's promoting shortness even though she's quite short. Because it's ridiculous.

And so, this world creates a situation where fat people struggle to have or be role models to each other. You know, it makes us into monsters who can't even be seen. The idea when people say, "Don't call yourself fat," right? Like what you are is so terrible that it can't be named. So this world curates that.

As a fat person, getting out of bed and not completely hating yourself is a revolutionary act in this culture. You know, posting a picture of yourself just hanging out and being fat, revolutionary act in this culture. It's huge to do that. And so any time that we can have that visibility, that we can have them be role models for each other, we start to crack this ceiling of fatphobia that holds us down.

**Shohreh:** Yeah. That's beautiful. I love that. And to bring all of this together, something that I talk a lot about in my work is courage and the fear that naturally accompanies courage. And people often mistakenly think that to be courageous is to be fearless, but the literal definition is, "the ability to do something that frightens one." So, as an ending here, could you leave everyone listening with some of your best tips for how they can hold their

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

very valid fears and still step into courage to live the kind of life they've been dreaming of?

**Ragen:**

Yeah, there's that, "Courage isn't the absence of fear, it's being afraid and moving forward anyway." And to me, that's like, what am I going to allow to stop me? If I don't do something because I fear that my trolls will behave in a certain way, then I'm allowing my trolls to control my behavior. And that might be necessary for my safety, but it also might not. Like I said, I move forward in activism with anger sometimes and it helps to drive me sometimes.

And so, for me trolling has gotten bad. They've showed up at events that I'm at. They've threatened my life. They've done bomb threats and all of that kind of thing. And I've multiple times had to walk up to a podium to speak to a group of people knowing that someone threatened to shoot me while I was up there and not knowing how credible that threat was.

And so, my decision was, I know that whatever they do that will stop me, they'll just keep doing it. So if they find out that calling in a death threat will stop me from speaking, they're going to call in a death threat every time I'm about to take the stage. So I choose not to let that stop me and to accept the consequences of that. For each of us, this is going to be a balancing act of what we want and what we're willing to risk. But I always think that risk is the currency of revolution. So with my privilege, I have more currency, and I'm gonna spend it.

**Shohreh:**

"Risk is the currency of revolution." I love that. That's really beautiful. Alright, so for our final question, which I ask all of my guests, how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

**Ragen:** I don't define health and wellness. I think it's too much of a moving target. It can change minute to minute and day to day. So, I think more of like, how can I support my body in this moment, in this day, day by day. And what does my body want or need, and how can we come to an agreement about that. So I don't really try to define the amorphous concept because I think it just ends up in a situation where I'm chasing something that may or may not be possible and may or may not have changed since I defined it, you know, moments ago.

**Shohreh:** Ooh, thank you for that perspective. You're actually the first person ever on the podcast to decline to want to define health and wellness at all, given how transient and ever-evolving these concepts are, and I totally respect that viewpoint.

**Ragen:** Cool.

**Shohreh:** Well, thank you so much for being here, Ragen. How can people find you, and what is the best way for my listeners to support your work and the things that you care about?

**Ragen:** So, the first place to go is [www.danceswithfat.org](http://www.danceswithfat.org), and from there they can find all of my social media. There's like a little link at the top to my Instagram and YouTube. I'm starting to do comedy more. I get asked a lot, 'cause in my talks I use a lot of comedy, and so people are always like, "Have you ever tried stand-up?" And my answer has always been no because, you know, at a talk, if I'm not funny, I'm still an expert. But with stand-up, if I'm not funny, I'm just a girl with a mic who's not funny. [Laughs] Right? I can't exactly pivot to, like, the Cooper Institute Longitudinal Studies if I'm bombing, though I might.

# Redefining Health & Wellness

#68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

But anyway, so my YouTube channel I'm just kind of starting and doing some comedy stuff there, so that's a fun, new thing that I'm doing. And then in terms of support, I have, my blog has like, a membership club, and you can sign up, it's 10 bucks a month. And for those folx they get, I do a monthly workshop. Like this one coming up in October is about dealing with fatphobia at the holidays. Members get to attend those workshops for free, they get deals on all of my stuff, they get deals on other people's stuff, so that's one option to support me monetarily.

But also, just in general I think, with any activist who you like and appreciate, you can support them for free by sharing their content, by liking, by commenting, by doing those things that center their voice and their work and get them in front of a bigger audience. So, those things I always, like, it's always such an honor to me when somebody shares something that I've written on Facebook or on Twitter or something like that. It's incredible to me. So there's that as well.

**Shohreh:** Amazing. Yeah, y'all can share this very podcast episode!

**Ragen:** Absolutely.

**Shohreh:** And get Ragen out there. Awesome. I'll make sure all of that is in the show notes so that people have very easy access to it. Thank you so much for taking some time to be here today. I really enjoyed this conversation.

**Ragen:** Met too. Again, thanks for having me, thanks for the work that you're doing. It's really powerful, and I'm just honored to be a little part of it, so thank you.

**Shohreh:** Thank you. And that's our show for today! If this podcast has taught you anything or helped you in any way, I hope you'll consider supporting me in my effort to keep it going. You can join my Patreon community and receive

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #68

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Ragen Chastain

---

members-only perks by going to [shohrehdavoodi.com/Patreon](https://shohrehdavoodi.com/Patreon), or you can tip me for my work through the payment links located at the bottom of the show notes for each episode. I would also encourage you to subscribe and submit a rating and review through your podcast provider of choice. I love hearing from listeners, so feel free to screenshot from your podcast player, post on social media, and tag me. Finally, if you're looking for more information on what I'm all about and how to work with me directly, head over to [shohrehdavoodi.com](https://shohrehdavoodi.com). Hope to see you for the next episode.