

Redefining Health & Wellness

#79

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Abimbola Oladokun

Shohreh Davoodi: Hello, everyone! Welcome to 2021 and episode #79 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. Today my long-time friend, Abimbola Oladokun, is on the show, and because we both love to talk, this episode is an epic journey that I think you're really going to enjoy.

We chatted about our experiences as women of color battling impostor syndrome in the legal field, the Angry Black Woman trope and how women in general and Black women especially aren't given space to feel and speak their truth, Joe Biden's nomination and the presidential election, and the importance of Black joy in the face of so much Black pain.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/79. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/79.

Before we get into this episode, I want to share some of the changes that will be coming to the podcast in early 2021. This year, the podcast will be getting a brand new name and the scope of the show will be expanding to include more than just health and wellness content. I'm so excited about this next evolution of the show, and I can't wait to reveal all the details soon. If you're already subscribed to the podcast, then there's nothing you need to do. When the changes go live, everything will roll over automatically. And if you're not subscribed to the show yet, consider this your reminder to go ahead and do so. That way you'll never miss an episode.

[Music plays]

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

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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!

Welcome to the pod, Abimbola. I'm so excited that you're here.

Abimbola Oladokun: Thank you! I'm so excited to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

Shohreh: Of course! So, just to give people a little background on how we know each other, you and I went to different law schools in Chicago. And the traditional law school path basically says that the goal is to do really well academically your 1L year so that at the beginning of your 2L year you get a lot of interviews with big law firms for something called "OCI," which stands for On-Campus Interviewing. Then, if a firm likes you in OCI, you have a more involved callback interview at their office, and then if you're lucky, you get an offer to be a summer associate, which is basically a summer job that you work in between your 2L and 3L year of law school with the hope of getting a permanent offer from that firm. So, you and I met because we were in the same summer associate class at a firm in Chicago and our offices were actually right next to each other.

Abimbola: Yeah, wild!

Shohreh: I know!

Abimbola: Yes, I do remember that.

Shohreh: You're still working as a lawyer, I'm not, but we've kept in touch thanks to social media. Did you enjoy that walk down memory lane of summer associateship?

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Abimbola: Yeah, I'm like oh my god, we were next to each other. Yes, I do remember that. I distinctly remember just always walking past your office and seeing you there. I think you were doing real estate and I was doing litigation, so it was nice to not always be surrounded by litigators, like at least talk to someone that was doing something completely different from me. But yeah, that was such a long time ago. Six years?

Shohreh: Yeah, I think so. I remember, like, coming into your office at the end of the day and just sitting on your desk and talking to you. Which was really nice to be able to do also because, people probably don't know, but you are competing for spots in these different practice groups. And since you and I had different practice group interests, there wasn't any competition between us.

Abimbola: Right, exactly.

Shohreh: So we were able to talk very openly.

Abimbola: Totally. I kind of forget that piece, right, because we were still in the time where firms were coming back from '08, and, you know, people just weren't getting offers. You'd spend all this money and weren't getting offers. And the firm that we were at, like, it was assumed that you would get an offer, but there had been people in the past that had not gotten an offer after doing a summer. And I think our class was like 100% return. Like, I think everyone got an offer, which was super cool because it's such a scary thing to do all that work and then not get an offer.

And people could just be super weird. Like, act like they really care about what's going on, but it's like, I know that you're just trying to check and see how much work I have and who is working with me, which is super weird.

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So it was nice to not have that weird tension when you're talking to someone.

Shohreh: Yeah. So I wanted to have you on the podcast because your IG stories rants and raves are a thing of beauty, for one.

Abimbola: Thank you!

Shohreh: Also, I just think you're hella smart and I think the world needs to hear more from you. So until you have your own podcast, I am happy to share my platform.

Abimbola: I'm happy to be here. Hopefully I live up to your expectations. I really am looking forward to this discussion.

Shohreh: Is there anything else you want to share with people about who you are, what you're passionate about, before we get into some of my questions?

Abimbola: So, yeah. I grew up in Arizona. I'm Nigerian American. My parents emigrated here from Nigeria in the '80s. It's a really big part of my identity. I've been in Chicago for god knows how long. I was in Chicago for, I think, 13 years, for undergrad, for law school. I spent some time in Miami. And now I live in the Bay. My pastimes include shopping, which is, you know, definitely a thing to do now during quarantine, and when it was cool, traveling. Though on some Instagrams it seems like there's no pandemic because people are travelling, but that's just my little dose of shade to start off this podcast [laughs].

Shohreh: Traveling, partying in large groups, I don't know what's happening.

Abimbola: I just... It's fine! [Laughter]

Shohreh: Nothing we can do so we have to let it go! We let it go.

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Abimbola: Exactly! Just release it, just release it. I can only control myself. I can only control myself. That's what I tell myself. So I avoid hate scrolling on Instagram and just sometimes give myself breaks.

Shohreh: I love that! I think that's important, especially right now in 2020.

Abimbola: Seriously!

Shohreh: So, let's talk about impostor syndrome because I know neither you nor I are a stranger to it, especially as women of color having gone through law school and becoming lawyers. What has your experience been like with that over the course of your legal career?

Abimbola: Yeah, so impostor syndrome is funny. It manifests itself in so many different ways. So I distinctly remember at my first firm—so I'm in-house now, but I was at two law firms prior to that—and I distinctly remember one way that impostor syndrome would show up for me was that I just didn't feel I could ever make mistakes. I always was very, very, and to this day I'm very, very hard on myself because I felt that one mistake as a Black woman translated to the end of the world and like, oh my god, I'm gonna get fired, they're not gonna think I'm smart.

And then compared to a lot of my peers, it was just interesting to see how a mistake from me versus let's say a white male or a white female was taken differently. Like, just before your eyes, you could just see the way that people kind of accept a colleague's mistake, but then a mistake that you made is like, we're gonna talk about it for 30 minutes and really investigate why you did that as opposed to just letting go and moving forward. So, I think that's one way impostor syndrome showed up for me.

I think, and I don't know if this happened to you too, but I question my accomplishments a lot. Like nothing's a big deal, right? For me, it's always

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expected. I'm supposed to be good at my job, I was supposed to get A's, I was supposed to go to college, I was supposed to go to law school. And impostor syndrome showed up for me in the sense that I never really believed that I did all those things.

And I think that's one narrative that a lot of people who are upset that people of color, Black people are in the office, or in these new corporate spaces, is that they love to throw around, like, oh, so you're here because of affirmative action or you're here because of a diversity scholarship. And if you're not careful, you can really internalize those messages and kind of forget the sleepless nights, the writing, how many different drafts of personal statements to get into law school, to get into college. You forget that you don't have any personal contacts in the legal field and so you literally interviewed for the job and got it because you were qualified, not because, in some cases, as both of us know, your peers, it's like, oh, my dad knows the partner or my mom went to school with another partner.

And that was not my reality. I am the only lawyer in my family. I mean, my great uncle, who passed recently, was also actually a judge in Nigeria, but I didn't have any point of reference for that type of stuff. So, impostor syndrome, really, I feel like I always would ask myself, did you really go to school? Like did you really graduate? How are you making these mistakes? Just so aggressively hard on myself.

And then finally, I think one way that impostor syndrome has showed up for me, especially in the law firm setting, I just never felt like I belonged, right? I just felt very out of place. And you can really trick yourself into thinking it's something that's wrong with you. It could be the environment, right? Like, I was in a department where there were virtually no Black people. I think it was me and another woman were the only people of

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color. And I felt like I was in an environment where no one looked like me. I was in a workspace where I can't even remember how many litigators there were, but in one firm I was the only Black person. In another firm, I think there were three people of color, and yeah, and two of them were in a different litigation group. But—

Shohreh: And these are large firms, to clarify for people. These aren't like 10-person firms.

Abimbola: Yeah, very large firms. These are firms that have international offices. These are big firms. Like, multiple floors in buildings, like, have the capacity to have more than one, or two, or three people of color in their firms.

And I think also just, my personality, and this is not to denigrate my former colleagues, but I just never really felt like I could be myself at work. I just felt really restricted in what I could say, how I could act, what I could wear. And don't get me wrong, I still wore bright things, I still got my Senegalese twists and I got them super long down my back, but—

Shohreh: Also, your manicures, I will never forget.

Abimbola: My manicures. Nail game is always on point, like very different. French manicures are fine, no shade.

Shohreh: But they're not bright orange!

Abimbola: They're not bright orange [laughs]. Bright orange, yes. Decals, everything. And I think it was just very hard. I don't think we give ourselves enough credit for staying true to ourselves in those types of environments. It's very easy to conform, and I think for me, those types of decisions, whether it was in dress, or nails, or whatever, I think it was just like an active reminder

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for me to stay true and nothing's wrong with me. Nothing's wrong with the way that I act, with the way that I dress. And if these are small ways that I can just remind myself to stay true, then I'm gonna do that.

So yeah, impostor syndrome really showed up in a number of ways. Work distribution is another way that impostor syndrome shows up—who's getting work. A lot of times people would just mosey on into my colleagues' office and just hand them work. Meanwhile, I'm like, having to go to people's offices. You'll get comments saying, "Oh, we just need to establish more of a connection with her," versus, you never say that about white associates. I've never heard a white associate say, "I need to make more contacts because they told me that I'm not making enough connections at work." That never happens. I've seen it so many times where I'll walk past, typically white, male colleagues, partners are lining up to talk to them.

And don't get me wrong, there were times where I would close my door. Partly because I was like, I'm not trying to hear y'all, I'm trying to work, to be honest. And other times because I just felt so, kind of, alone that it was just hard to put on this, essentially, kind of fake performance of being welcoming when you're the only one, you're kind of battling a whole bunch of things. I mean, any given day there's reports about police brutality, racism, and you're still going into work, you're still having to perform at a high level. And on top of that you want me to be friendly to everyone? Whereas no one's asking what's wrong, no one's asking if I'm okay.

And so it's those types of things where you just feel like you just don't belong and you made the wrong decision to be here versus, I think it took me a while, it's still taking me some time to understand that sometimes it's

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the environment, it's not me as a person. And that you just have to find a place that will accept you holistically versus a palatable version that doesn't really encapsulate all that you are.

Shohreh: Yeah, I've like literally been nodding my head over here such that I'm like a human bobblehead. So much of this resonates with me and it's bringing back all these ridiculous memories from being a lawyer [laughs], even though it was a short tenure. Like, god, what you were saying about questioning accomplishments, for instance. That really resonated with me because I went to a lower-ranked school on a full-ride scholarship, which in that economic environment was an incredibly smart decision. Especially because I didn't end up becoming a lawyer for the long haul. Like, dang, I would be hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt if I hadn't done that.

But I always felt like I had to work triple time because I felt like I wasn't good enough because I didn't go to a T14 school. Where I was like, people are judging me. Even though I was literally at the top of my law school class, graduated summa cum laude, had all the accomplishments, I was like, well, this doesn't really count because it didn't come from a T14 school.

And so that was another way that I had this constant judgment on myself. Because you hear people talk about it. The thing is like, this isn't a thing I just put on myself, for those who don't know anything about the law.

Abimbola: Law firms are elitist.

Shohreh: Yeah, law firms are elitist as fuck. And so, there is this stigma of just like, mm, well, they did well at a lower-ranked school, but it's a lower-ranked school—can we really believe that they're smart, and accomplished, and whatever?

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Abimbola:

Which is true, but, and I've said this before, it's interesting because when you look at the law firms, like the profiles, especially of people of color, like yeah. You went to a lower-ranked school, but you were summa cum laude, you know what I'm saying? Of my friends who are still lawyers or were lawyers, everyone killed it, particularly the people of color and Black people who went to law school. And that's the only way that you can get into these institutions, and I just don't think that it is the same standard of excellence for our white colleagues.

Because I think it's stretched to accommodate people who, oh, I know your mom, or I know your dad, or I know your grandfather. And those types of relationships allow people who, stacked up against someone like yourself, who's summa cum laude—which is hard to achieve—they will get the job. And like, I just think we have to talk about that more. I think there's this really false notion that law firms strictly hire people based on grades and accolades. And while that is true, there is implicit bias. There is relationships that kind of override someone's grades or other issues that people have that would probably prevent them from getting hired. And so those types of things need to be discussed too.

Obviously, you can't just like go to sleep in law school; you need to do as best you can. But I do think that as a Black person, as a person of color, that it is very annoying to keep hearing, oh, you have to excel, you have to succeed, you have to do this, you have to be the best. I think it's a little bit of bullshit, quite frankly, the way that we are forced into thinking that we're not good enough, and how that bleeds into not just work, but personal life. Especially lawyers. Lawyers are very Type A. We can be very neurotic. And so, work always bleeds into the personal. And so it can't be that we just turn ourselves off at 6:00 or 10:00 or whenever we get off work.

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I definitely felt impostor syndrome bleed into my personal life, and I think it's just now that I'm really trying to wrest it back and kind of dismiss it from my life altogether. Because it is something that is just so pervasive and so sinister, and you just have to keep on it or it will take over you in every sense of the word.

Shohreh:

Yeah, and what you were talking about with how the issue is often in the environment and not with ourselves is so important. I mean, most people by now know that I left my firm for exactly the reasons that you mentioned, of feeling like I didn't belong, feeling like I literally had to be a different person in the office and put on a performance every day. And yes, down to what I could wear, what tattoos I could have on my body, was I choosing to wear flats instead of heels.

And I was working at a law firm in Texas that was extremely white male, like, in leadership. I think there was a single woman on any of the leadership committees and those were the committees that literally run the firm and make all the decisions. My firm didn't have lockstep salaries, it was black box, and so ya know the discrimination was happening there.

I mean, I mean I was only there for a little over a year, and in that time, I saw a bunch of queer people quit. I saw a bunch of people of color quit, myself included, another friend included. A lot of women. You know, when you're in that situation, you're just like, there's no future for me here. And I'm glad that I was able to see that for what it was and say, this is not a safe environment for me, I don't feel seen here.

And for me, that meant just leaving the profession because I was like, I just don't want to deal with this shit and that was one way to do it. And I think like you said, another way to do it is go somewhere else in the legal field and try to find a place that is gonna respect you and allow you to be

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yourself. Which for a lot of people means in-house because most law firms, that's just not the right environment.

Abimbola:

Yeah, the last year of my first firm and the last couple of months of my second firm were just very stressful. I knew I needed to leave, and I'm the type that once I'm over something, I'm done. It's not like a, oh, I'll feel better tomorrow, I'm done! And so I immediately started looking for jobs because I wasn't sleeping, I didn't feel like myself. I'm a pretty happy-go-lucky person, pretty extroverted, and I just didn't feel like myself. And you know, when you're working somewhere close to 10, 12 hours a day some days, you can't live in that space all the time.

I was losing my hair because stress can kill you and it can manifest in other ways. I was breaking out. So environment is so key. But I think because of that impostor syndrome, we beat ourselves up and we tell ourselves, oh, you're weak, something's wrong with you, you're the reason why this isn't working. And it's less about the fact that girl, you don't have anyone here who looks like you, no one really talks to you.

Shohreh:

All the partners say your name wrong and don't give a fuck about it.

Abimbola:

All the partners say your name wrong. The microaggressions that happen on a daily basis. I think about it now and I'm like, wow, like, I really just stayed there. And I think part of it is, and I don't want to speak for everyone, but I think part of it is we have this weird thing where we feel grateful to be there.

Shohreh:

For sure.

Abimbola:

We feel grateful that they picked us.

Shohreh:

And the firms perpetuate that.

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Abimbola: Oh yeah.

Shohreh: I can think of so many times partners were saying shit and implying that we needed to be grateful and we were so lucky to be there, no matter how we were being treated. That they were just like, you're lucky you're not on the street. And I'm like, that's not really a real comparison.

Abimbola: Yeah, and especially after '08. And I think, to be frank, even now, right. The fact that people are unfortunately losing their jobs, at firms too, because of the pandemic. There is this culture of like, let me just sit down, put my head down and be quiet, and just do as much as I can to not get fired. But the gag is, you can work as much as you want, and if you're expendable, you're expendable.

And unfortunately, a lot of us non-white people are expendable at law firms because "it's too much work to keep us." And the work for them is actually having to get to know us. Giving us opportunities to get work. Like yes, your favorite associate, you give him 10-15 cases a year, how about you give Shohreh or Abimbola a case or two because that would then help us get hours, which would help us get bonus. Like, we could go into a whole deep dive about the economic implications of not making hours and how a lot of people of color do not make hours and how that screws you up from an economic perspective. But we're not gonna do that because that's off topic [laughter].

Shohreh: Clearly we could talk for hours just about the absolute shittiness and fuckery of working at a law firm if you're not a white man. Or a white woman, frankly. There is that. But I will say, to kind of wrap up on impostor syndrome, I'm sure there are tons of people listening who have experienced that as well, maybe struggling with it right now. Are there any

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things that you found especially helpful for dealing with that, that someone else could maybe try if that's something they're struggling with?

Abimbola:

I saw a post, it was like a tweet, and I'm going to butcher it, but basically they said, I started feeling down on myself and spiraling and immediately stopped myself and said, "Okay bitch, we don't have time for this." Now, you don't have to call yourself a bitch, but I actually have employed that of like, just being really mindful of the tape I'm playing in my head. Because I think it's really easy to be super hard on yourself, especially as someone who suffers from impostor syndrome. So really being mindful about the thoughts you're letting run around in your head I think is important.

And you know, unfortunately, mental health services are not free, so this is really like a privilege, but to the extent you can engage in therapy or have some mental health services, I do think that that has also been helpful for me. Of just kind of breaking down why do I always think that a mistake equals end of the world? And it's impostor syndrome, it's cultural, there's a lot of things that are wrapped up in that, but therapy, thinking about how I'm thinking about myself, and then also, sometimes just taking a step back.

And I think all three of these things really require you to one, pause, because I think we're just so used to pushing through things and not thinking about it. It really requires you to be still and really think about it. And also, just listening to your body. I think with impostor syndrome there's a lot of physical cues that let you know that it's happening. For some people it's like, you just break out in a sweat. For me, that's sometimes would happen. Or your heart is beating fast or you just feel super nervous.

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So those types of things, I think, can really help you just get out of your own head. Or you know, I also would just even have my degrees. You know? I'd look at my degrees.

Shohreh: Yes!

Abimbola: I would! And I would just be like, girl, they're not giving out degrees for free, you know what I'm saying? At the end of the day, you did that. You did that without help in the sense of fancy tutors and all this stuff. When I went to undergrad, all my colleagues, not all of them, but a number of them had gone to all these fancy schools, and I was like, I was #publicschool all day, like grinding through undergrad because it was like, girl, you can't fail, you have to get through this. And reminding yourself of those victories. Because those aren't fake! Those are real things that happened to you. And don't let these people, these institutions, rob you of those achievements.

'Cause at the end of the day, they can't take that away from you. They may try with these tactics, but that's real. That's why you're here. And it may mean that you need to go somewhere else, but those achievements are never gonna be robbed from you, unless you give them over to people by saying that you're not good enough or that, you know, I'm grateful to be here. No! They should be happy that you're here. You are a catch!

Shohreh: Yeah, I co-sign all of that and especially that last bit because you're so right. Especially those of us who are more Type A, have fallen into perfectionism, we so rarely stop to celebrate our accomplishments because we're too busy looking at the next thing, the next mountain that we need to climb or where we're trying to go. We don't actually stop to be like, hey, you've done some really awesome shit that not a lot of people have done and we are deserving of celebrating that. And so I think that is

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so important. We all need to do that, myself included—I need to do more of that.

Abimbola: Yeah, I definitely do. I don't really think anything is a big deal. I've been talking to my therapist about this actually where, yes, I'll celebrate things of saying, "Oh, I'm happy I graduated," or, "I'm happy I got this job," but for me, I always just think it's expected. Like this is what I'm supposed to do, this isn't anything special. And so that's something that I'm working on because I'm not sure how to break that cycle.

Shohreh: Mmhmm. And this is why therapy is amazing.

Abimbola: Yes!

Shohreh: I mentioned earlier about your amazing IG story rants and raves, because it's not just rants. You also rave about amazing things such as everything that Rihanna does. Shout-out to you for turning me onto the lip gloss because I have like six of them now and they're incredible.

Abimbola: Yes, so good!

Shohreh: So many good recommendations there. But I know one of the things that you've experienced as a Black woman, even on your own social media, is that people try to put you in these boxes in terms of what you're allowed to feel and how you're allowed to speak. Like you definitely have experienced people trying to throw the Angry Black Woman trope at you when you're just speaking passionately and intelligently about different topics.

Abimbola: So, when I was growing up, I always remember myself being pretty talkative and pretty opinionated. And I really credit my parents for one, letting me speak, because some parents would be like, girl, just go to your

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room and close the door [laughs]. Like, you're talking too much. And like, even if they didn't respond, if they were like mmhmm, yes, okay girl, I think the ability to speak and say what you're thinking, not all the time, but a good number of moments in my childhood I just remember releasing what I was feeling, I think that was really helpful in preparing me for, kind of, some of the challenges I face now.

Because I think my outspokenness on IG, to be honest, I had to develop it, right? Because I think as Black women, you're just always aware that people are foaming at the mouth to misunderstand you. And people really like this idea of feeding off of Black women's self-esteem for sport. I see it all the time in IG. The way that people come for Black women who are simply stating facts is nothing that I've ever seen for other groups. And I think that there's something there about the desire for people to bully and impose their views on Black women.

And so, when I started talking on IG about race, about gender, and all these things, I really had to make a decision that I was not going to be a public profile. I really respect people that are public. I think that that's amazing. I am very conscious about my energy, and I could not deal with random folx in my DMs trying to argue with me about facts.

Shohreh: As someone with a public profile, I don't blame you in the slightest.

Abimbola: I just can't, right? 'Cause I was like, you know, someone's gonna screen grab that. You know, as a litigator, don't write nothin' down.

Shohreh: Yep!

Abimbola: I'm not gonna be able to respond to you the way I want to, but I'm just gonna block you. And I just realized, you know, at the end of the day I'm

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just gonna keep it to people that I know, or friends of friends, and organically develop my profile that way.

But you'll be surprised. One of the things that I've also learned is that there's your actual persona, like who you know yourself to be, and what people think you are. So if I'll be blunt, I have a diverse group of friends. I have a lot of friends who are white. I definitely think some of my white friends are shocked by my IG stories because I very consciously say white people, white supremacy, racism. And I think that makes them uncomfortable because in their mind, they see me as like, oh, Abi, we go to drinks with her, she's super fun, she's lively. Like, she can't be that "angry."

And those are the people that will come in my DMs. Those are the people that are like no, I want you to act this way, don't get mad, don't talk about injustice, I want you to entertain me. I want you to post about random fashion facts or random makeup that you bought, but don't talk about the other stuff. Don't talk about the real shit.

Shohreh: Yeah 'cause it makes them feel guilty.

Abimbola: Right! And I think another thing, for me at least, is I just had to ask myself who do you wanna be, right? At the end of the day, I don't want to be palatable for everyone. I don't want to be palatable at all. I want to be my true self. I want to say what I mean, how I feel, as accurately as possible, but I'm not going to sugarcoat the truth. And I'm not going to conform my beliefs to be accepted by other people. Particularly white people who are usually the first ones to be in my DMs and question why I said something a certain way.

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And I don't think that people understand how violent that is to, one, to just break someone's boundary without any acknowledgement of the boundary that was set. Because many times, as you know, I'll say, "Don't come in my DMs. I said what I said. I'm not arguing."

Shohreh: Can confirm.

Abimbola: And then you'll still have someone come in your DMs and start arguing. And I don't think that we really appreciate the fact that for Black people, people of color, queer people, Indigenous people, we have to set boundaries for ourselves and that's a form of self-care. That's a form of maintaining mental health. And when people abuse those boundaries, like, you can't really go back from that, for me at least, right? I have blocked people who I used to be friendly with because they disrupted a boundary. And I told them they disrupted the boundary, and they proceeded.

And at the end of the day, I think all of what I'm saying is I'm going to choose myself over this idea that I need to be likeable and palatable for people. 'Cause at the end of the day, I have to live with myself. And I become less and less wed to this idea of likeability the more I speak the truth. And so I continue to speak the truth because I want to get to a place of complete, unabashed joy and freedom about how I view the world and how I want the world to change for the better.

And that doesn't mean you can just say whatever you want and be homophobic, transphobic, all that, that's not gonna fly. But what it does mean is that when I see injustice, I'm going to talk about it. And it may seem like I'm being, you know, oh, she's raining on everyone's parade, like why is she such a killjoy. And I just think it really is incumbent upon me to point out things that might seem great on the surface, but are really just extensions of racism, sexism, or whatever.

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So that's a long-winded way of me saying, the Angry Black Woman trope, for me, used to really scare me. It used to really freeze me up and, kind of, if I'm being honest, it forced me to edit myself. But the more that I get used to my thought patterns, the more I keep speaking, the more that I talk to friends and family who affirm me and who see me, the less I get scared about that. Because it's really just a tactic to silence me. It's not real.

And honestly, Black women should be angry. Black women are constantly disrespected. We are undervalued from an economic, social, and political perspective. And yet, people still expect us to work at maximum capacity all the time for everyone else. So I don't really understand how any individual would not be angry. But the Angry Black trope that is used in the context of when Black women are speaking is simply used to silence us. And so, I just kind of let that shit roll over my shoulders, quite frankly, because anyone that knows me wouldn't say that, and people that do say that are not even people that I really fuck with anyway.

So it's actually great. It's like, awesome, I can block you and continue on my way. Because you know, let's be honest, like in the beginning of Instagram, we were just letting anyone follow us, [laughter] and then you're like, damn, this girl is at my stories. So when they act up, I'm like, this is awesome. This is a great opportunity for me to just block you and just remove you from my profile. I'm queen of just culling down my follower list. Because you just can't have everyone follow you, right? Some people just shouldn't be allowed to get a front seat into your personal business, so I'm all for that. So, say, call me an Angry Black Woman, get blocked. Period. That's really what it is.

Shohreh:

You and I have talked recently about how women in general, and Black women doubly so, aren't given the space to be angry, like white men in

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particular are. Like, you and I have talked about how nobody describes Trump as angry, even though he's like fucking angry all the time.

Abimbola: The man is tweeting right now about something, about standing or something, and yeah, it's like—

Shohreh: Rage tweeting like he does every damn day.

Abimbola: Yeah! I was like, we've never called this man angry. Ever! Never called him angry. When he is yelling at women, when he's yelling at reporters, no one ever says angry. We barely got to the news outlets actually calling what he's saying "lies" as opposed to "misleading" and all these other words that aren't hitting the nail on the head, which is that the President of the United States is lying. And it's dangerous for us to continue to kind of placate him and not say what it is, which is that he's lying. But yeah, they don't get called angry. It's wild to me.

Shohreh: Yeah. And, you know, if a woman dares to raise her voice, even a little bit, all of a sudden, she's like an unruly bitch. And—

Abimbola: Yeah.

Shohreh: —the other thing too, and I know this happened to you, is that when you're not angry, people will say that you're being angry. You know, if you just get passionate, people are like, oh, you're so angry. And you're like, I'm literally just talking. Excitedly.

Abimbola: Literally just talking. Just talking. Just sharing my viewpoints. Yeah, and I think for me, I'm very extroverted and I'm very animated, so that, in and of itself, maybe suggests emotions that aren't really there. But yeah, it's very frustrating to just be misunderstood. And sometimes it's on purpose and sometimes it's accidental, but either way, the result is still the same

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because you already live in a world that does not value you. And then you have the added insult of any attempt to try to participate in the political process, or speak on social issues, or anything like that, it's completely destroyed by people who want to box you out because they actually don't want you involved at all.

So I think that's another reason why the Angry Black woman Trope exists is because it's really just a way to keep Black women out of the conversation while at the same time stealing from Black women at any chance that we get. But that's a whole separate conversation.

Shohreh: [Laughter] Yes. So, I know we kind of just went a little bit into politics, and I actually do wanna talk to you about the presidential election and the transition that's happening in real time. This episode will be coming out at the beginning of January, but we're recording it at the tail end of November. And I, for one, can distinctly remember you saying during the primary that Joe Biden would become the nominee. And I will say that I was still very much in the Elizabeth Warren train at the time and I was desperately hoping that it would not be the case that Joe Biden would be the nominee, but you definitely called it. So talk to me about why you felt so strongly that the white mediocrity that is Joe Biden would ultimately win out?

Abimbola: You know, thank you for pointing that out because people really thought I was crazy. I'm a Capricorn, so it's just feels nice to be affirmed. Like, oh, yes, once again, I was right.

Shohreh: Not the first time I've seen you be right on something like this, though.

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Abimbola: [Laughs] Yeah, so I think I just did process of elimination, kind of sort of. But then I just ultimately felt that this country accepts white men in any form.

Shohreh: God, that's true and I hate it!

Abimbola: The fact that this man is even president right now, lets you know that anything is possible for a white man. It doesn't matter what he does, what he says, who he harms, he can assume the most powerful office in the world.

Now, Elizabeth Warren, we're not gonna pick Elizabeth Warren because low-key we hate women as a country. And we tried it with Hillary, Hillary lost. And so people are so ready for Trump to get out of office that they're not going to "gamble" with Elizabeth. Even though she's qualified.

Shohreh: Yep. I heard so many dudes say that. So many!

Abimbola: They're not gonna gamble. Like no, we tried it, it was cute. Okay, women, we gave you a shot. Even though Joe has been running for like, I think this is like his third time that he ran? But you know, oh, we can't do two women! Can't do that! One woman [laughs] and then we're done, we're back to white men.

Shohreh: And then you lose your privileges for like four rounds before we're willing to try again.

Abimbola: Right. I think with Bernie, you can see this playing out right now. People don't understand socialism. I want to be clear, I think there are people that have lived in socialist countries who have very particular experiences that are important to how they vote in this past election. However, I think the majority of Americans don't understand what socialism is, and I think

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conservatives did a pretty good job of completely distorting the meaning of socialism and making it something that's bad. And therefore, even though Bernie's version of socialism is not what Conservatives are talking about, he was not going to win based on that, right? All you had to say was "socialist" and people were just off Bernie. So that wasn't going to work.

I think any person of color, I think you're going to say, well, we had Obama already. Also, I think if we wanna be completely honest, people were really scared of angering poor and white middle class white people, and so they didn't want to put another person of color in the frame. Because if we're honest, Trump in part was a referendum on Obama in the sense that white rage swelled up to incredible heights, and people were like, I don't want to ever see another Black man assume the office again. I think that is in part why Trump is in office.

And yeah, I was like, it's gonna be Joe. He's "safe." It's unfortunate because you don't have video so you can see my facial expressions, but he's just there, right?

Shohreh: He's white bread.

Abimbola: Yeah, he's a white man. He did a pretty good job in the Obama administration. You know, he's fine. And I think because we were centering, again, white voters—

Shohreh: Even though white voters almost threw the whole thing, to be clear, particularly white women.

Abimbola: And I think that's what's wild, right? I think that, you know, at the end of the day Arizona, Latinx and Indigenous communities came through. Michigan, Detroit—shout-out to Detroit—Pennsylvania. Like all of these states were, Georgia. Oh my god! I can't even believe I was about to not say Georgia.

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Shout-out to all the Black women organizers who pulled through in Georgia, a story that should get a lot more coverage than it's getting. All of these states would not have turned blue if not for Black people and people of color.

And yet, I just saw another article today about Trump voters who are upset or focusing on white middle-class or poor white voters. It's so fascinating to me that the eye never moves off of whiteness. Even as Black people, and people of color, indigenous people are clamoring to make sure that we don't have another four years, the media has continued to focus on white voters. No matter if it's because they're voting for Trump or they didn't vote for Trump. And I just find that very frustrating and very disrespectful, quite frankly, to the efforts that were put forth by all these different communities to ensure that Biden was elected. Because if we're honest, if it weren't for them, we would have another Trump presidency. So it's very frustrating to see them not get the shine that they so rightly deserve.

Shohreh: I have to ask you, because I'm very curious, about your feelings about Biden's "president for all people" rhetoric that's happening right now. Because I can tell you, it's making me feel some things.

Abimbola: So, here's the thing. I know what Joe is trying to do, and while it might be cute for him, and again, he's centering white people. Because Black people, people of color, Indigenous people, the LGBTQIA community, undocumented individuals, immigrants, should not have to move at all to compromise with anyone that voted for this current administration. What you are asking people to do is to completely forgo their lives, quite literally their lives, for some faux American narrative that everybody gets along.

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The cat is out the bag! BBC done shown that we are a dysfunctional-ass country. So this idea that we need to come together and be friendly with one another and that we're gonna be okay, it's not real. If anything, we should be learning from the fact that Trump got elected. That exposed what was already there, present in this country. The deep, rotten core of how this country came to be that we have not adequately acknowledged or accepted.

And instead of acknowledging that and facing that head on, Joe is trying to put a band-aid on it. In part because if the senate goes a certain way, he will have to work alongside Republicans, and Republicans in a lot of these states have constituents that voted for Trump.

I just refuse to play that game. Black people, marginalized communities have given up more than can ever be repaid to them and do not need to sacrifice any more for this country to be unified. That is not the work that we should have to do and I refuse to do it. So no, I'm not going to compromise with someone that was voting for children to get separated from their parents. I'm not voting for someone who wanted to strip away protections for trans people who wanted to serve in the army. I'm not going to work alongside someone who allowed the Voting Rights Act to get gutted. That allowed this man to put in wholly unqualified judges into the Supreme Court. I'm not going to work with people like that. I'm not going to break bread with them. I'm not even going to sip their water. Don't ask me, I won't show up, carry about your business.

Like, the line has been drawn in the sand, and I just find it fascinating that we're just supposed to forget the last four years as if there hasn't been immeasurable damage done by this administration. That people have lost their lives because of this administration. People will forever be separated

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from their family members because of this administration. And you want us to just sip coffee with these people? I'm good.

Shohreh: I deeply agree with you. And, like you, I understand why his team has decided this is gonna be the party line, but I also find it immensely frustrating that this is something that only Democrats do. It's constant. We're like, let's just let the conservatives do whatever they want, abuse all their power, and then when we get power, we're just gonna sit back and not care and just say, "Let's unify." I'm like, no, have you not learned anything from them? Use your firepower!

Abimbola: And that's exactly why they got three Supreme Court justices, right?

Shohreh: Yes.

Abimbola: Like literally let Merrick Garland flounder in whatever purgatory they had that man in. And it's a complete disregard for all that, again, marginalized communities have sacrificed. How can you fix your mouth to say that for people that have lost so much? That we're just supposed to unify? What does that even mean? I would have respected him more if he had just said, "This country has to do a lot of soul searching. We have to look inward to understand why things came to be this way."

Now, again, I could give you a laundry list of how things came to be this way, but at least it acknowledges, it doesn't skip over the ugly part. And the ugly part is that this country is broken in so many ways. And for you to just tell us that we need to skip over that and just kumbaya together, I'm not doing it.

Shohreh: Yeah, no, I agree completely, and it's definitely gonna be interesting to see as this transition continues, and of course with the senate races in Georgia in January and all of this that's happening, but I'm obviously eternally

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grateful that we don't have four more years of Trump and forever devastated at what we do have as well because it's only marginally better.

Abimbola: Yeah, it's marginally better. And I understand and I get the sentiment that people are like, oh, you know, we shouldn't be happy that Joe is in office. I understand where they're coming from. I'm happy it's him and not Donald Trump, right?

Shohreh: Yeah, me too.

Abimbola: Like, I'm not going to lie about that or say, oh yeah, it's the same, I'm just not. It's a different type of problem that we're dealing with, but the idea that we would continue with this man in office, from both a domestic and international perspective, I think it would have been catastrophic. I truly do.

Shohreh: Yeah, I mean, four years was catastrophic enough.

Abimbola: I'm telling you, right, the damage. I mean, the damage in four years. I don't even know how Joe is going to be able to undo, well, there's some things he just can't undo.

Shohreh: Yeah.

Abimbola: But he's gonna spend much of his presidency just cleaning up, and we're gonna hear a lot more in the coming months about basically how the previous administration wasn't doing anything and were just letting their friends get all these lucrative contracts. I want to say it was one of the least staffed administrations in decades? The government was never working at full capacity. So we're just gonna hear a lot about how this was a sham of an administration, and I wonder how Joe's going to battle that because that's gonna be a huge challenge for him.

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Shohreh: Yep, I agree. Time will tell. We'll have to have another conversation when we know more about what's happening there [laughs].

Abimbola: I know, I know. Yeah, it's gonna be wild.

Shohreh: Alright, well I wanna round this out by talking about something very important, which is Black joy. And I want to talk with you about why it matters so much and also how you cultivate it in your own life.

Abimbola: Yeah, so Black joy for me, I think, is really important. I think the media—social media, newspapers, all that—I think it is lucrative to sell Black pain. You see it in people widely disseminating Black people getting shot on Instagram. And I think there's a thoughtlessness with people that share. I understand that there's a need to be aware of what's going on, but something as simple as typing "trigger warning," I think speaks volumes, right?

Because a white person watching that will never have the same physical reaction as a Black person watching another Black person get shot by a police officer, right? On top of the fact that Black people, in many cases being attacked by the police, never make it out alive. I understand that people want to share and notify people what's going on in the country. I understand that people want to make sure that people understand the injustices that are facing Black people. But you have to be mindful and careful about the aftermath of that, which is that Black people are going to watch that, and especially as a non-Black person, you're never going to really understand the physical and emotional toll it takes to keep seeing images of Black death.

Stress literally kills people, and Black people are constantly being assaulted by images of Black deaths by non-Black people. And that's

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something that needs to stop because it's very, very violent. It's just so harmful to the body to see that. So I made a decision a long time ago, I don't watch videos. I mean, reading about it is enough for me. And so the idea that I would watch that and have that forever burned in my brain, so I don't watch the videos. I don't do it at all.

And I think from that I realized that I had to balance this overwhelming sadness that I've been feeling over the last couple of years, honestly, with the fact that I needed to be able to survive. That the biggest gift that I could give myself and people that were here before me and people that will be here after me, is to thrive in this environment as best I can. So for me, Black joy is just really important to see.

I love seeing Black people smiling. I love seeing Black people in sunlight, smiling up to the heavens. I love seeing Black people in their best outfits and just, you know, doin' it for the gram. Or there's been this trend lately of Black women roller-skating in various parks. I just love that. There's a lightness that I feel. So just like, imagery for me is one way that I cultivate Black joy. So I really try to find and surround myself with imagery of Black joy, and it really does something for my psyche.

I exercise a lot. I am a Peloton gang, so, you know, shout-out to my favorite instructors! I love you all. But I exercise a lot. Because for me that hour is a way to just clear my brain, to de-stress. It's not about losing pounds, it's not about getting those abs. It's literally about, for an hour, it's just me. And I still have to train my mind not to wander, but for an hour I just want to focus on myself and not focus on the ills of the world.

For me, Black joy is, I'm really into fashion and beauty, so I curate outfits just randomly, especially that we're now stuck in the house for, it's about to be 10 months? So I think about different outfits that I want to wear, like,

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when I'm allowed to go outside, or, you know, decorating my place, making it a soothing environment for myself. I think just taking less time to focus on the negative and really make sure I'm focusing on the positive.

Now, that is not to say that, oh, I'm putting my head in the sand, I'm not aware of what's going on in the world. But I think it's important to balance that out so that you are not just overcome and overwhelmed by the devastating weight of the evil that is racism in this country, in this world. And so, I am very, very protective of my energy. Hence why my account is private.

I really am judicious about who I spend time with, who I allow around me. It's all in service of Black joy, in keeping myself at the highest levels of happiness, of clarity, of freedom, so that I can continue to do the work of understanding the areas that I need to improve upon. Understanding ways that I can be a better person, that I can be a better ally, even though I'm like, we can talk about that later, but I like low-key hate that word now because I feel like it's been overused. Like I feel like if you're calling yourself an ally, you're not an ally, right? You don't get to self-appoint yourself as an ally.

Shohreh: Oh my god, the people who have it in their, like, Instagram profile.

Abimbola: Just stop! It's akin to like the Black square. Everyone was doing the Black square and now we're back to normal. But that's neither here nor there. I don't like saying "ally" personally because I think it's not my place to say that I'm an ally for a certain community. So I instead try to say that I'm a student in understanding how I can serve a certain community. How my values can be aligned to help other communities and serve them as much as I want to serve my own.

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So that's Black joy for me. It's a lot of work. Now it doesn't even feel like work. It's kind of become automatic in so many ways, whether it's working out, whether it's talking to people, whether it's just, you know, sometimes I was the queen of like, ugh, I have this call, but I don't want to talk right now, and now I just don't take calls. Like I know that may sound toxic to people, but you know, sometimes you've just gotta check your energy levels. I want to show up as my best self, and so I will be more inclined to say, "Hey girl, I love you, but can we talk later?" than try to get through a 30-minute conversation where I'm not present, I'm not joyful, I'm not authentic.

And so, it's really just about ensuring that I'm my best self as much as I can be at all times. I'm a major proponent of Black joy. Traveling, when we could travel, that was like my number one, I'm a big fan of solo trips. I think everyone should take a solo trip. I think it's very, very important to just be alone and understand yourself separate and apart from other individuals. But yeah, I have a whole toolbox, happy to share more at any given time.

Shohreh:

And I know you're saying it started off pretty difficult to cultivate that Black joy and make it a priority, and one of the reasons, of course, is because like you said, Black pain is everywhere. And we've even talked about how you can't even escape it in fiction, right? And this is true for all marginalized communities. All these stories of pain in books and in movies, and it's just like, where are our happy stories? Where are our silly, whatever stories? Like marginalized communities don't get those.

Abimbola:

Yeah, we don't. And we discussed this last night, I don't watch slave movies. I would rather read non-fiction about it or read different articles about it from different thought leaders that I respect. I don't even want the imagery in my brain, honestly. And I think I've seen enough to know it was

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a horrific time, and in many areas of the world it still is, and I don't need to see that. What am I doing to combat that? What am I doing to combat the institutions that are still here from slavery, quite honestly? And so I don't want to watch that.

So I think one thing that goes back to what we were saying last night is, I'm really mindful of what I watch. So I can't tell you the last time I watched a movie about slavery. I did not watch 12 Years a Slave, you know. Love Lupita, love her, but I didn't watch it because it just does something to me. I won't say it even ruins my mood because I don't think that does it justice, but it really puts a dark cloud over my entire body. And I just realized over time how much I take in of those, that violence of that, just the devastation, it's not something that I can just after two hours of watching I'm like, okay, I'm ready to go get drinks. It sticks with me. It hangs over me. And so I've just decided to stop watching.

I wanna watch Black people succeed, I want to watch Black people fall in love. I wanna watch, you know, some Eat Pray Love, like, How Stella Got Her Groove Back, great movie. Angela Bassett, where is your Oscar? You know, like, that's the type of stuff I'm trying to watch where it is a different side of Blackness that's not always wrapped up in suffering. Because again, who is that for? Black people live this day-to-day. We know what that's like, so who is it for?

And we want to see joy too. Like we're not just trying to always be bombarded with these violent and disgusting and sad images all the time. We want to see joy too! We want to see that mirrored back to us as opposed to always, kind of, this highlight reel of pain. It's just awful and it takes a toll, and I've really been judicious about that too, about what

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images I'm taking in. Not only on social media, but you know, in any type of media quite honestly.

Shohreh: And I understand there's an argument that non-marginalized people need to witness the pain of marginalized groups, right? That, like, it's important for people to see it and understand it, and perhaps that is true in certain scenarios. But I also think about the fact that if we only, or for the most part see marginalized groups in media, and particularly again, fictitious media, who, it's a painful story, there's death, there's sadness, there's heartbreak, all of these different things, and we don't see the joy side of that, that also shapes how we view people in our actual lives, right?

Abimbola: Exactly.

Shohreh: And that's a huge problem because then you see these movies of Black people where it's like always, there's drugs and there's death, and there's slavery, or whatever. And it's like, that is not showing you the full width of experience that Black people have, and so that's going to color how you actually view Black people in the world and in your life. And it's the same thing with queer folx. We only see these movies where people are being killed, beaten, have AIDS, all these different things. And it's like, this is what people think of when they think of queer folx, you know, is only pain. Again, you don't get to see this wide breadth of our experiences.

And it's like, that's not what happens for white stories!

Abimbola: Right.

Shohreh: They get everything. All of the different levels, and volumes, and possible things that could happen. And like, the storytellers are out there, they're just not getting the opportunities.

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Abimbola:

Right. And I think also, just going back to what you were saying about it colors your view of, the different movies and shows that color your view because you're not watching these stories on the screen. I also think it substitutes doing actual work. Because it's also a way for you to sidestep the real work of engaging with and learning from Black people, queer people, right? Like, how many people will watch a movie about slavery, watch a movie about, like, an LGBTQ story, but then not have a Black person or a queer person in their life? And simply take that story as knowledge that they can then use to try to engage with people if they ever do.

I find it fascinating and just somewhat lazy because you're avoiding having to do the uncomfortable work. You're gonna make mistakes when you engage with queer people, when you engage with Black people. Because you don't know anything but the movies and the shows that you're watching, which are, like you said, devoid of the full experience of our lives. And I think people just don't like feeling like they're gonna make a mistake, and so they'll just stick to the screen as opposed to talking to living, breathing people who've lived that experience and can tell you whether it's bullshit or not.

Now, that doesn't mean you should go up to any Black person and say, "Hey, is *The Wire* true where you're from?" [Laughs] Don't do that. But it does mean that maybe you should diversify your friend group because you would then be able to watch these shows and watch these movies with a critical eye. Because if you actually had Black people and queer people in your life, you would realize that a lot of this media that we're getting is so skewed to fit a certain narrative that actually doesn't serve Black or queer people.

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Shohreh: Yeah, and at a minimum, thinking about why your friend group isn't diversified already. Because maybe you're not a safe person for those people [laughs].

Abimbola: Well, right. I'm telling you, and that's another thing, like people have to be introspective. And as someone that is, to a fault, honestly, I'm always thinking about ways that I can be a safer person. Not because I want everyone to like me, but because even if I never develop a relationship with someone, I don't want to ever have committed violence to someone. I think, for me, I don't understand, and I'm trying to say this without being judgmental, I just think in this day and age we're in a world where you can really meet and connect with so many people from so many walks of life and different backgrounds. And if your group is the same, I wonder why that is.

Yeah, I mean I think for me, I like having a different group of friends. I grew up in Arizona and I was the only Black child in nearly all of my classes up until college. There were like three Black children that I ever was in the same class with, and I still remember their names to this day, but that was it, from K-12. And it wasn't until college that my friend group really reversed. And I feel like I was surrounded by Black people, and I gravitated towards that because I realized, I have not had this for so long. Like, I am so happy to have Black friends, you know?

And I think it's so healing to have people that look like you, that see you, that understand you. But at the same time for me—I will speak for me—I also love having friends from people who are different from me, people that have different backgrounds. Now, I'm not going to be friends with everybody. I'm not going to be everybody's cup of tea, and that's okay. But the friends that I have cultivated, who are different than me, I value them

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because I've learned so much from them, and I feel like they've learned so much from me. And it's such a beautiful relationship that's built on difference, but on this mutual love and respect for one another.

And I just don't understand why people are so averse to bridging the gap between people that are different than them. I mean, I think I do know, but it's odd to me because I enjoy that so much in a lot of the relationships that I have with people that don't share any type of identity with me.

Shohreh: And I think some of that comes from the fact that you are a marginalized individual, right? 'Cause I think for me—

Abimbola: Yeah.

Shohreh: —I love to be in queer community because these are the only people who understand what that's like. I love to be in community with mixed-race folk in particular because it's a very specific experience, as well as people of color who have experienced things that I've experienced. But because of that, I know the importance of having a wide variety of people and perspectives in my life because I see what happens when you don't, right? And so I think—

Abimbola: Yes.

Shohreh: —as marginalized folk we have this lens where we're very much wanting that in our lives because we know what it's like to not have people who understand you. So we really want to understand other people. So it's people who aren't marginalized who tend to be the ones with the very monolithic friend groups because they don't know why that's important. They don't know how their world can be expanded by doing that.

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Abimbola: And they don't understand that, like, you inviting your Black friend, or your queer friend to an all-white, or all-cisheteronormative space, you're asking a lot of us. That's just not a space where I'm gonna be 100% myself. I'm gonna be on guard. I'm waiting for somebody to say something crazy. I'm waiting for someone to touch my hair. All things have happened, by the way, by grown people. Like late twenties, early thirties, like grown people. And I think that's where for a lot of my white friends, thankfully that doesn't really exist anymore because I have like slowly just been like, I'm not coming.

Shohreh: It's that real-life block button.

Abimbola: Right! Like you just slowly fade away from their lives. But I think that's another thing that I think that people don't understand is that when your group is the same, whoever you invite into that space who is different from your group is going to have a sense of uneasiness. And should feel uneasy, quite frankly, because it's just foreign, right? And I think that white people have never really had to feel out of place, right? Like every space is welcoming to you.

And so, to be in a situation as a Black person where I am going to an all-white space, I mean, obviously having grown up in a lot of white spaces, I know what could possibly occur, but it would be nice to have a diverse group of people in the room. When I say it would be nice, it's incredibly important to me. I don't want to feel singled out. I don't want to feel uneasy. I don't like those feelings. I don't want to have to shoulder that just to keep the peace, so to speak, especially when a microaggression has happened.

So I think that's another area where people in general should just think about what type of space you're creating for other people who are

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different from you. Would you feel welcome if you were in their shoes? And I think that's when a lot of people understand that they actually don't have as safe a space as they think they do.

Shohreh: Exactly! I think this goes back to what I was saying about if your friend group looks a very specific way, like, really needing to assess why that is. Because it's not as simple as like, let me just go make a Black friend! Let me go make a gay friend! Because, again—

Abimbola: Yeah, okay, right.

Shohreh: —chances are, like, you are not safe for that person yet and you have not demonstrated that you can be. I see this in business all the time too. People will be like, I don't understand why I don't have any clients who are people of color or queer. And I'm like, well, have you made it clear in every way possible that you're a safe person to work with. and that you're able to take correction if you fuck up. and all these other things? I'm like, if that's not there, that's why these people are not coming to you. And even if that's there, that doesn't mean that someone will come to you because they may want to go to someone who looks like them or who they know for sure is in their community. And that's perfectly acceptable.

Abimbola: Yes, right. That's such an important point. Not taking the criticism personally, but also, if someone, if a marginalized person decides not to be in community with you, that's okay too. And you've just gotta keep on moving, right? I think there's this expectation placed upon marginalized people to be palatable for non-marginalized communities. Whether it's, if you're a queer person, straight people need to like you. If you're a Black person, white people have to like you. You have to be popular, you have to be well-liked. And that expectation is never put on those groups.

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And I just don't think that marginalized people should have to shoulder that on top of everything else we have to do. So for me, I am not going to ever put myself in a position where I feel like I have to conform. Not intentionally, right? So sometimes you're like, damn, I'm in this space and I didn't realize it was gonna be one thing and now it's another.

Shohreh: Yep.

Abimbola: But when I can help it, I don't wanna be put in a position where I feel like I can't say what I feel. I can't push back on something that's problematic that's been said. And people won't like you for that, right? People don't like being called out on things. People want to just be able to say things and, oh, it's a joke, we're so PC nowadays. Which is just a trash way of saying, I don't want to have to acknowledge anyone's humanity but my own. And so I think for me, I just really think it's important for non-marginalized people to be introspective and really think about the spaces you're creating. And do you think or do you care if it's a safe space for everyone?

Shohreh: Absolutely. This has been a fantastic conversation, Abimbola. I feel like we've really gotten to showcase all of your amazingness and the spark that I get to see in your Instagram stories for the world.

Abimbola: Oh good! I was like, oh my god, really, don't fuck this up, girl, don't fuck this up.

Shohreh: No, no, no, no. You didn't fuck it up, you couldn't have fucked it up. This is great. I think people are gonna get so much out of this. For me, you're someone who really exudes self-trust. Like, I can tell how hard you've worked to understand yourself and what you want and to not let other people stop you from embodying that and achieving those things. And that

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just warms my heart because I help so many people with that because it's not easy. It is not fucking easy, especially if you're marginalized.

Abimbola:

Thank you so much for that, that's like one of the best compliments I've ever received in my life, thank you so much. But yeah, no, it's not easy. It's not. And you're gonna tell yourself that you're crazy, that you're doing too much, that you're so mean because you put up a boundary. And I'm still someone that works on boundaries, right? So it's not something that you just get overnight. But I wouldn't trade the work that I've done for who I was a year or two ago

I'm just so happy to be myself, right? I think that's the goal. Is I don't wanna feel uncomfortable in my body. I don't wanna be told that I should feel uncomfortable in my body. Hence why I curate my space so well. I am perfectly fine the way I am, and I'm not gonna let any outside force try to knock me off and tell me that I need to be smaller, or I need to be lighter, or I need to not wear my natural hair, all this stuff. Like no, I don't want that. I wanna be myself. I wanna be Abimbola, full effect, all the flaws, but at least I'm me, at least I'm true. And that's always been the goal and that will continue to be the goal, is just being who I want to be at any given moment.

Shohreh:

Perfect note to end on. Thank you so much for being here, Abimbola. I'm so glad we got to have this conversation. How can people find you if they want to keep up with you?

Abimbola:

Yeah, so my Instagram is @the.a.league. Like I said, I'm private, so if you request to follow me, please just send me a DM and just let me know how you found me. Because I really, honestly, like I don't just accept requests, but I would love to meet people from this community. Obviously, if you are listening to this podcast, you have great taste, so I love meeting other

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people who share our love for Shohreh's podcast. But yeah, just send me a request, send me a DM, and you'll be on your merry way.

Shohreh: Awesome. I will put a link to that in the show notes so it's easy for people to find. Y'all, if you go follow Abimbola, be on your best fucking behavior because I don't wanna hear that you are the people that are up in her DMs causing problems, okay? [Laughter] So you better be fucking respectful.

Abimbola: It's just a block. Like, you won't even get a response. It's just a block, right? So that's another thing, Like, if you come in the DMs, I have plenty of conversations, I've developed friendships with people I've met on IG through conversations, but there's a difference between engaging in a conversation because you want to learn and engaging in conversation because you want to gaslight and be combative. If you are in that latter camp, let's just agree to stay on separate journeys [laughter].

Shohreh: Exactly. I think the vast majority of people who are listening to this podcast aren't those folks, but we'll just put out the warning, just in case, so that—

Abimbola: You've got to. Just so people are reminded.

Shohreh: Yep, yep. We've just gotta remind people how to behave, unfortunately [laughs].

Abimbola: I know, in 2020.

Shohreh: So true. Awesome, well thank you so much Abimbola, I really appreciate that we got to have this conversation. It's kind of amazing to think of where we both are now considering how we first met each other. But I've loved watching our journeys.

Abimbola: Yes, I'm so happy that we have been able to stay in touch, and I don't think I've ever said this, but I'm just so proud of you and I love the life that you've

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created for yourself, and just how, even from the moment that we met, you've always been your own person and chosen not to conform. I think that's such a trait that so many people learn from, so I just want you to keep doing what you're doing. You're doing great, sweetie!

Shohreh: Aw, thank you! Yes, it's pissed off my parents my entire life that I've refused to conform [laughs].

Abimbola: They'll be fine.

Shohreh: So, it's been a good time. Yep, yep. They're fine, they're fine. They're over there. It's whatever [laughter].

Abimbola: They're over there! They're over there! Yes, Zoom parties for the foreseeable future! [Laughter]

Shohreh: 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 members-only perks by going to 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. Hope to see you for the next episode.