

Redefining Health & Wellness

#82

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Elyse Holladay

Shohreh Davoodi: You are listening to episode #82 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. In today's episode, I'm excited to introduce you to my friend, Elyse Holladay. Elyse is a style coach who believes that the clothes we wear are about far more than just aesthetics. We chatted about why people often feel like they have plenty of clothes but nothing to wear, the ways in which personal style and personal values are tied together, how to make your clothes work for you, and more. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/82. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/82.

Hey y'all, as a reminder, there are some exciting changes on the horizon for the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. After over 80 fantastic episodes, I've decided to expand the scope of the show beyond just health and wellness content, which will allow me to chat with even more amazing people doing impactful work in the world. As part of the transition, the show will be getting a brand new name and cover art at the end of February.

Want to be a part of the podcast's next evolution? In the first episode under the new name, I'll be answering listener questions. If you've ever wanted to pick my brain, get some advice or just learn something about me, I encourage you to submit a question for a chance to have me answer it on the show. Questions can be submitted with your name or anonymously through the form located at shohrehdavoodi.com/questions. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/questions. You have until the end of the day on Sunday, January 31st, to complete your submission.

[Music plays]

Welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I'm your host and resident rainbow glitter bomb, Shohreh Davoodi. I started this project

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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!

Welcome, Elyse! It is such a joy to get to have you on the podcast today. Thank you for joining me.

Elyse Holladay: I'm really excited to actually finally get to do this. We've talked about it a couple of times and we're finally here.

Shohreh: I know. And I have the privilege of actually knowing you in real life because we're both in Austin, we're both entrepreneurs, but for everyone else, tell me more about you and more about your style coaching business.

Elyse: So, my name's Elyse Holladay and as you said, I'm a personal style coach and entrepreneur, and I'm on a mission to help intentional people transform their relationship with clothes. So, I work one-on-one with clients to help them define their singular personal style, alter their style mindset around self, body, shopping, style habits, and build wardrobe systems that help them make value-aligned decisions about their clothes, about their style shopping in the future. So, for me, style coaching is really a way of helping people model the world they want to live in, and it just happens to be through the lens of clothes. Because I believe that style is far more than just our aesthetic, our look. It's a really powerful way we show up in the world.

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Shohreh: There are many reasons I can think of where style coaching would come in really handy, but one of the most obvious things that immediately comes to mind for me is that so many of us end up in that rut of feeling like we have so many clothes but nothing to wear. Where we like literally stand in our closets surrounded by options, but we still feel super frustrated. So, in your experience, why does that happen to so many of us?

Elyse: There are so many reasons I almost don't even know where to begin. There's a statistic, I believe it's something like most American women wear something like 5-7% of their closet.

Shohreh: Dang!

Elyse: I know! And there's a lot of cultural reasons around trends, and shopping, and appearance, and the sort of cultural story of, oh, you can't wear the same thing twice. But I also think a lot of it is our personal understanding of what we want to wear, what we're excited about wearing, what we're actually comfortable in. The way that we wear clothes to perform being a certain kind of person versus what we actually really feel like ourselves in. And then, of course, we can also talk about the fashion industry itself, and overconsumption, and the amount of crap that we buy and how so much of it is actually crap.

And so, then we get into this place where we actually don't even really know what we have. We don't know really what we like. We buy things and we wear them and it's like, fine, I guess. But we don't love it and so we shove it into the back of our closet. But a big part of it is, then we go in there and we have so much stuff and we look at all of it and it's not I don't have anything to wear, it's none of these things feel like me.

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Shohreh: Mm yeah. When you were talking about the crap, in particular, I was thinking about when I was younger, I found myself buying pieces a lot that when I would get home, I would realize I didn't actually like them. And I would be like, why did I just purchase this? Thankfully this happens a lot less, but especially in the mall days, you know, when it was cool to walk around the mall—

Elyse: Hang out at the mall.

Shohreh: —and just try stuff on, right? Which, like, went through college. It's like, you'd go into the store and you'd be like, oh, it's cute, I want to buy it. And then you get home and put it on and I'm like, what was I thinking? Why did I even spend this money?

Elyse: Yes, for American women especially, maybe like in their forties or younger, that is a cultural thing that we grew up doing. Even for my mom, she made a lot of her clothes. You didn't go to the mall and shop. And so, when you were thinking about what clothes you wanted to wear, what clothes were stylish, it was coming from much, much farther of a distance away. Like you would get a catalog or you would see in some magazine—it was like very slow to kind of trickle down to you. Whether it was for budgetary reasons or just simply that fast fashion as it exists now wasn't really a thing, you made a lot of your own clothes, or you would go buy your nice church dress and then you would like make and alter things. And so, that cadence was just much, much slower.

And so, for women our age and younger, if you're in your mid-forties, thirties, you know, a little bit younger, you grew up with this like, we're just gonna go to the mall on the weekend, and we go and we hang and we walk around. And the rise of fast fashion in the '80s and up into the 2000s when we were in high school and college was you didn't have to have any

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intention about what you wanted. You didn't have to understand your body, you didn't have to understand clothes themselves or the fit of clothes. Clothes were just everywhere. You could just go to the mall and walk in and find something cute and be like, this looks kind of neat and interesting. And I can put it on my body. That's a sufficient reason.

And when it was \$7, or \$20, or \$2 if you're shopping at Forever 21, it didn't require any effort, right? It doesn't require any real intention or thoughtfulness about where is this going to fit into my wardrobe? What does this say about me? Why would I actually want to own this? Why do I care about this? It was just a thing that you could get.

Elizabeth Cline, she's a style writer, she has a book called *Overdressed*. This was written, I want to say in like 2012, but she talks about the rise of fast fashion and how this happened, and the way that it basically got to the point that you could go and stop in the drug store and get a pack of gum or chips and a drink and you could go into Forever 21 and get a shirt or a skirt for basically the same price. It fell into that same category for people, where you're just like, I'll just go grab something. You're just collecting and none of it has any real intention behind it.

Shohreh:

Yeah, and of course when we were growing up, we also weren't buying clothes on the internet yet. Now, I buy almost all of my clothes on the internet because I have all these different options, it's easier to look. Most places do free returns, which is a whole other conversation. But I didn't even have that going on. So now you have stores, if you're gonna go into them, you have the whole internet at your fingertips, and so buying stuff is just incredibly easy.

Elyse:

It is incredibly easy and there are so many more options. You can buy secondhand. There are a number of really, really big secondhand

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platforms. So you just have so many choices that it actually becomes really overwhelming. And I think this is another reason that we end up with so much stuff and we overconsume, we overbuy, 'cause we can get stuff for really cheap. We can get stuff and if it doesn't quite work, we can just get another one. And we can search in all of these places.

But I think that's also part of the problem. One, we have too many choices and we become really overwhelmed by them. This cognitive overload of how to shop, and what if it's the right one, and what about this, and can I find it cheaper somewhere else, and I think I want to buy it and so I'm gonna look at 100 stores, and I'm gonna look at all the secondhand shops, and I'm going to wait and agonize over it, and then put it in my cart, and then close the tabs and then come back three days later. And like, it takes this huge amount of mental energy that we spend.

And the other thing that happens is because it is so easy to acquire these things and because we can do it so thoughtlessly, we get something and it doesn't actually really change us into the person that we're imagining it's going to change us into. And so, we wear it a couple of times and we're like, that's not right, that's not the thing. And *this* one, though, this next one, this sweater, this pair of jeans, this perfect, straight-leg, French girl, effortless jeans and a striped tee, *these* are the ones. *This* time it will make me feel the way that I want to feel in these clothes.

And then you get them and it probably doesn't. Or it might a little bit for a couple of times and then you realize that the waist doesn't really quite fit, or the shirt's kind of raggedy, or it's got a pit stain because you wore it in the summer 'cause we live in Texas and that's what happens. Then you want to get another one, right? Then you're back in that same cycle. And so you're kind of on this psychological hamster wheel of never really

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feeling like you get anywhere with your clothes. You never really feel like you belong in them, and you can always just get some more.

Shohreh: So you're saying that we actually put expectations on our clothes besides being just something that we're gonna wear?

Elyse: We absolutely do. Anybody for whom clothes are a way of presenting themselves in the world, which arguably is everybody, but especially for women and gender non-conforming people, the way that we present ourselves in clothes is really, really important. Those beauty standards are very real, respectability politics is very real, job dress codes are very real. And so, our clothes become the way in which we show up in the world and the way that other people view us.

And we do, we judge other people based on their clothes and based on the way that they look. Other people judge us on those. We make assumptions about people because we apply meaning to clothes. And we do this in a sort of social way, but we also do it to ourselves. There's this idea of like, oh, being effortless. Like, oh she's just so stylish and effortless, and she always just looks, you know, oh, jeans and a t-shirt, and just, it looks like a whole outfit and she's so put together. And we want to buy those jeans and that t-shirt. But what we really desire is that effortless, or that sense of polish, or this imaginary idea of what that person's life is like.

We want it through the clothes because the clothes are the surface representation of those things, and they're also a lot easier to acquire [laughs].

Shohreh: The effortless idea reminds me of when it got really popular to have "natural" makeup and you'd see these tutorials that it would take like an

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hour and a half to create the “natural” makeup. And I was like, what the hell is natural about this? [Laughs]

Elyse: Yes, I put in hours of work to appear as if I have not done anything at all.

Shohreh: Exactly! [Laughs] But that’s such a good point about this idea that we have these oppressive systems, of course, that we all grew up in and the standards of beauty that we’re taught there are only certain things that you’re allowed to wear, depending on your body size, on your skin color, on what kind of a job that you have. And then we also get these ideas about what is “flattering” for your body and tons of TV shows that really feed into that about, oh, you know, the goal is to always look as thin as possible. And so that really ties in for me as to, well, of course we’re having a closet full of clothes that we don’t love and resonate with because we’re often dressing for other people instead of for ourselves.

Elyse: Yeah, I love this idea of dressing for yourself versus dressing for other people because in some way, I don’t really know if we ever dress for ourselves. Clothes have cultural meaning.

There’s a study that was done at Northwestern University in 2012, and they studied a concept they called “Encloded Cognition,” which is the symbolic meaning of our clothes and the experience of wearing them. So in the study, the researchers gave participants a white coat, and some participants were told it was a doctor’s coat and some were told it was a paint smock, and then the participants had to take a test. So they had to do a little exercise. And the participants who were wearing a doctor’s coat did better on the test. They were more careful and more attentive.

Shohreh: Fascinating.

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Elyse:

It is really fascinating. And so what clothes do is they change our experience of being in them, but they also change the way that people view us. So when you look at somebody in a doctor's coat versus a paint smock, your brain, as a very powerful pattern-recognition machine, is going to start making assumptions about that person. About what they're like, how smart they are, what they do for a living, what their class, or race, or gender, all of these visual things that we can reference, our brain is going to start making assumptions about that. And the clothes do just as much to power those assumptions. And so we do it to ourselves and we do it to other people.

So the idea of dressing for ourselves is kind of funny to me because always when we put on clothes we are signaling something. We are dressing for our experience, our life, our job. I mean, not to get on a whole tangent about this, but I think that's why working from home in the pandemic has really changed people's experience of clothes so much because now we aren't really dressing for other people in the same way. And so what does it mean to really dress for myself and how can I be comfortable? And maybe I'm not gonna wear those same kind of hard pants that I used to wear to the office, but then I don't feel so good because I'm wearing sweatpants and that doesn't make me feel productive. And so this "enclothed cognition" of the feeling of being in your "real" clothes or being in your sweatpants or what have you, is very real.

But, to go all the way back to what you actually started with, which is the feeling of not feeling like ourselves in the clothes and dressing for other people, sort of like performing.

Shohreh:

Yeah, I think performing is a good choice of word.

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Elyse:

Yeah, performing a certain beauty look or a clothing look. And we're never quite comfortable in our clothes when we know that we are doing that performance. What I say to my clients is, our clothes should support us. And by that, I mean you should be able to spend your really formidable mental and emotional energy on doing whatever it is that you're doing in your life, whether that's your work, or play, or your kids, or your workout—any of that. Your clothes should be moving with you. You shouldn't be having to fuss with them. You shouldn't be sweaty and uncomfortable, or too tight, or falling off. Any of the things that clothes can be on sort of a tactical, physical level.

Or if you just feel like you're in costume, right? Like if you feel like you're wearing something that is so awkwardly not you, your mental energy then is spent on that. You are fussing with your bra strap or your underwear, or you're uncomfortable because your jeans are too tight, or, you know, it's messing with your digestion, or you're in like a frilly dress and you're really kind of a tomboy or androgynous and you're in ruffles. And you're like, I'm spending all this mental energy on the fact that my clothes are not supporting me. On the fact that my clothes are really interfering with my life in the things that I do all the time.

And I think a big thing when we are reaching for a personal style that feels like us is that we want our clothes to kind of disappear in between us and our life. We don't want them to be this really obvious thing that we're feeling all of the time and messing with all of the time. So we're constantly searching for what is the next thing, what is the perfect pair of jeans? What is the perfect dress? What is the perfect blazer? What is the perfect outfit that I can finally A, have things that fit that I'm not messing with all the time, but B, they can also sort of psychologically disappear so that I just bring that confidence and that energy to whatever I'm doing without being like,

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is this showing, is that showing, is my dress going to come up, is my bra strap falling off? We also just really want to feel really good in ourselves and we want that to disappear.

Shohreh:

As someone who does a lot of work around helping people get to know themselves better, what's coming up for me is that one of the reasons people struggle with this so much is because they actually don't know themselves that well and they don't know their values that well. And I know that's something that you've really brought into your style coaching, this idea that if you can get clarity on your personal style, it's actually a path to understanding yourself and your values better. So explain to me how that happens.

Elyse:

This is a really important point for me. I came to a lot of my personal understanding of my values and my ethics actually through this process of digging into my personal style. It started in that very sort of superficial way. I was like, I want to like my outfits better. And so I started looking at my shopping, and that made me look at my money, and that made me think about my financial goals, and economics. And then I was looking at the clothes I was buying and I was like, why don't these fit? And so then I was looking at fit, and my body, and the way the clothes are made, and fast fashion, and the ethics of the fashion industry.

And so, a lot of the stuff that I learned through that process helped me solidify a lot of the things that I actually really value—where I wanted to spend my money, the ethics and the things that I believed. But it also really helped me start to understand who I was. So you'll hear this a lot when you look up personal style how-to guides. They're like, your clothes say something about you. And this is sort of shorthand for this idea that, like

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we were talking about earlier, that what you wear will make people make assumptions about you.

We can wish that that wasn't true, but that is true. We do pattern match and we do judge based on what we see. And so, at the surface it's just that. It's like, oh, well, if you want to look "professional," you wear a suit and hose and pumps, and it can be very static and rigid. But, what I discovered and what I see with my clients all of the time is that as you start to dig into what does this personal style aesthetic actually mean to me and how do I define it in a way that means something to me?

Like we say, oh, I wanna be polished, or I want to be effortless, or my style is kind of like tomboy-y or it's feminine. Okay, what is feminine? What are feminine clothes? Do you mean like tweed and girly and ruffly? Do you mean like dramatic and elegant and like '20s movie star? There's this huge gamut of surface-level definitions of feminine, and then once you get past that, is any particular garment more or less feminine, or masculine, or gender-neutral, or anything? Like that doesn't even mean anything for the clothes themselves.

And so, doing this process and actually being able to define, this is a look that actually means something to me because that actually is who I am and how I think about myself. So then your style definition turns into things like simplicity or discernment. I have a client who one of her style words is "unusual." And what are unusual clothes? This could be very, very broad and it can mean something different to a lot of different people, but for her, that's actually something that, in conjunction with everything else that she knows about her style, her measurements, her lifestyle, her comfort levels, her color palette, her shopping ethics, all of these things, helps her actually make an interesting outfit or an interesting shopping choice that feels

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really like her. And it also has helped her start to think about what is that idea of unusualness mean to me and my personality? Where is that coming from inside me that that's really important to me?

Shohreh: You know, the number one question that I ask myself these days when I want to buy new clothes is, is it gay enough?

Elyse: Exactly! And what does that even mean?

Shohreh: Right, because for me, I really love leaning into looks that, like, are outwardly queer where I want to showcase that aspect of who I am. And there's all kinds of things we could get into about queer fashion, but that's what I have in mind. Where somebody else could have, like you said, the exact same idea, is it gay enough, but to them, that means something different in their clothing. So I like this idea of defining it for ourselves and understanding that we are taking these words and giving them their meaning. It doesn't have to be what somebody else's meaning is or maybe our cultural definition of it.

Elyse: Right. And we are also trying to make our own meaning. Like, it doesn't have to be even clear to anybody else what unusual might mean, or what somebody else might think unusual means, or gay enough means, like you said. We only have to define it for ourselves and in conjunction with all the other things that we know.

Another important thing to note here is I don't think people are born stylish. I think this is another kind of cultural thing. We're like, oh, that person just knows how to dress, they know their style, they just magically were like that, and I'm not. Maybe there are a few people who are like that, but for the majority of us, this is a skill that can be learned, right? And it doesn't have to be about being a fashion person, or trends, or following

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what's happening in the fashion industry in any way. There's a lot of information that you can learn to become, I'm gonna say, "stylish" in a way that is very personalized and has nothing to do with fashion or trends. But it's a skill.

You have to learn about your body, your proportions, patterns, the way clothes fit, fabrics, how to make shapes with clothes, how to do color, and put those things together. It doesn't necessarily have to have anything to do with "fashion" so much as it has to do with getting a lot of information about yourself.

Shohreh:

Right, 'cause when we hear this word, "stylish," a lot of times people have a very specific idea in their mind, or like, when you're out on the street you're like, ooh, that person is stylish, but it's just because it fits into your preconceived notions of again, what this put together type person is. And for me, something that I've really come to look at for other people and their style is just like, are they happy in it? Are they comfortable? Whatever it may be. Even if I wouldn't wear it, who gives a fuck because they're expressing what they want to in the world. And I wish more people would come to that, you know, and stop being so judgmental about what other people wear because it drives me absolutely bonkers.

Elyse:

Yeah, there's a lot of judgment that comes from those societal meanings that we give to clothes. If I say a hoodie, or a doctor's coat, or a mask, or a hijab, or a bodycon dress, or a blazer, you're visualizing lots of different things and those things connect very deeply to other biases that you might have, other beliefs that you might have. And so, we then apply those things to the people who are wearing those clothes, whether or not those things are applicable or not.

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Shohreh: One of the things that annoys me the most is when I will see people telling people they're dressing too young for their age, right? Like that there's this idea that you reach a threshold and you're not allowed to wear certain clothes anymore.

Elyse: Yeah. And I read a definition once of appropriate clothing as something that doesn't make you feel uncomfortable or out of place. So rather than this idea of, oh, well, you can't wear shorts that are too short once you hit a certain age, or you can't wear, I don't know, white after Labor Day or whatever, this kind of nonsense, do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable in those clothes, in that certain setting?

And there's the judgment of other people, right? Maybe you feel comfortable in those clothes in that setting and somebody else doesn't or they're gonna judge you about it, but if you do, then those clothes are appropriate. And other people's judgment is not a thing we can control. And I find it's so much more powerful to feel like yourself, to feel confident in yourself, to trust yourself, to show up with that confident energy. It's so much easier to not put too much stock in other people's judgments when you have that in yourself already.

Shohreh: Yes, could not agree more with that. And I think when people do that, there are two things that typically happen. One, as you do that for yourself, you're giving other people permission to do it as well, right? Like the more that you show up as your whole, authentic, vibrant self, other people can feel that and that helps some of their walls come down so they can feel like, wow, it's okay and safe for me to do that too. Or, you have the opposite reaction, where it scares people and they're like, whoa, whoa, whoa, you are breaking the rules. I am uncomfortable with that. And so they put that back on you, right?

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And this is why we get these comments like you shouldn't dress like that, you shouldn't wear this kind of makeup. Because that is terrifying to them, and they're like no, let us all go back to our boxes, it's safer here, let's not rock the boat. And that's what is so sad to see.

Elyse:

Yeah, absolutely agree, and I think you hit the nail on the head when you said it's reflecting on them, right? It's always the judgment is saying something about *their* thought process, *their* comfort level, *their* ability to see what could be and not so much about you. And that doesn't mean that those comments don't necessarily sting, right? We live in a world where we are judged based on our bodies and beauty standards are a real thing.

I feel like I'm a pragmatist about this, you know, and I work with my clients to manage both the beauty standards aspect and also, just sort of the practical experience of living with them. Just because we're working to challenge and change those standards doesn't actually mean that we can just pretend that they don't exist. Say like, I disagree with this, I disagree with this judgment, or this rule, or this meaning of clothing, or this respectability politics, therefore I'm not going to care about it. We still live in a world where we very much have to care.

Jessica DeFino actually talks about this a lot very eloquently. She is a beauty investigative journalist and she actually just wrote about this in a recent Instagram post. She writes, there's two ways to address the stranglehold of beauty standards. One is by helping women better perform beauty, so to do it with less effort or expand our perceptions of what is beautiful. She's talking about skincare so here she also says safer ingredients or things like that. And the second is "by pushing for a future where beauty has no bearing on how women are treated or how women feel about themselves." But to the point of our conversation, she goes on

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to say, “There are distinct social and economic advantages to better performing beauty standards,” and existing within a culture that pressures us to change our appearance is exhausting and it’s not always possible to push back.

And I love the way that she talks about this because I feel like the work that I do with my clients and the way that I think about style is kind of somewhere in between. Because to get to option two, to get to this place where we are interrogating our own stories about beauty, or clothes, or body, and rewrite them to not care what other people think about what we wear, or how we dress, or how we are, or how we talk. That work is really crucial, but to get there we often have to go through option one first. We have to go through the surface-level stuff first and we have to get past these stories that we have. We have to figure out how to dress ourselves every day. We have to change our shopping habits. We have to find clothes that fit.

We have to do all of this surface-level addressing, and then through that process or after we can do some of that process, then we can really start to think about, wait, why do I feel this way about clothes? Why do I feel this way about my body? How can I actually start to address some of that stuff? How can I actually start to do that for other people? But often it’s really hard to go there if you are still stuck in this place of crazed sales shopping, and going to the mall after work every day, and agonizing over your clothes all the time, and spending 30 minutes every morning trying to get dressed. Like, you don’t have the space for that kind of thing.

Shohreh:

Right. So by kind of taking that time to actually figure out what it is you want and you want to reflect with your clothes, even if it is within the

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systems that we all have to navigate, it can still help you to, like you said, open up some of that brain space so there's not as much focus on that.

Because I agree completely. Yes, we have to fight for these systems not to exist, but we all know that the reality is in our lifetimes, you know, there can only be so much progress made on that. And Ragen Chastain came on the podcast and she was talking about how to survive and thrive in a fatphobic world. And she was saying how, for example, if you are a fat person and you're going to a job interview, that one thing that can help you, even though it sucks, is to play up femininity in clothing, right? So wear a dress, put on makeup, even if that's not how you normally dress, because of the judgments and reflections that we have in this world about fat bodies.

And so, it's that tension of like, that fucking sucks, no one should have to do that, *and* people need jobs. People have to navigate this. And that balance is tricky, but it's important to hold both.

Elyse:

Absolutely. It sucks that it is that way and it shouldn't be that way, and the more that we live out loud, the more that we show up in our own confidence and show up as who we are and show that a fat person can be a style influencer, a fat person can be very fit, whatever all these things are, that you can be Black and have locs and still be very professional. Like breaking down some of these really bullshit myths about surface-level appearance actually truly meaning something about you.

The more we break those down, the more other people think that they can do them. You touched on this a few minutes ago, this idea of, you can't be what you can't see. And that that makes other people uncomfortable. And also, you have to get up and go to your job, and you have to do job interviews, and you have to try to shop for clothes that fit your body and

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there's not a lot of options for people who are fat. These things are also just real as they are.

And so, I think there's a lot of value in learning to best navigate those beauty standards or navigate those judgments. And at first, often, it is how do I just make it easier on myself so that I'm not experiencing so much agony? And then you can kind of start to push.

Shohreh: One of the things that I work on with my clients is this idea that because the world is the way it is, not every space is gonna be a space of true belonging, right? Where you feel like you can fully show up as yourself. And that's why it's so important to find spaces where that does exist for you. To find community where that can be the case. Because maybe you can't wear your ideal outfit to your job, but if you can find a place in your life where you can show up that way and express that so it's not stuck inside, that is going to ease that situation and those tensions a little bit more.

Elyse: Yes, and then what happens is you finally get so fed up that you can't do it at your job that you quit your job and go do something else.

Shohreh: Hello, me! [Laughter]

Elyse: It really is true. Like, figuring out your style helps you figure out who you are. Figuring out who you are actually helps you figure out how you dress because you start to feel stuck inside some little shape that doesn't really fit you. And as you start to define those things, you also really start to define, why is it that I feel that way? What is it that I value? What matters to me? Why does this feel so confining? And this is, again, where I think personal style and personal values and how those two are intertwined.

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I think it's really fascinating and interesting because I don't think you can be considerate in your consumption, I don't think you can be clear about your financial and economic spending without also kind of thinking about class, and jobs, and money in general. And I don't think you can shop without starting to think about ethics, and bodies, and measurements, and fatphobia, and fast fashion, and all those things. Once you start to dive in, like once you peel that first layer off, it just like keeps going. It keeps getting deeper and deeper and there's so much more to uncover.

And so much of what is wrong with the fashion industry and what I think is wrong and troublesome about our experience of clothes and getting dressed is because we're really not diving any deeper than that very, very top surface layer.

Shohreh: Actually, this is a good segue 'cause I want to talk a little bit with you about ethics and fast fashion. And I wanna just state up front that I know this is a complicated topic for a lot of reasons. One, because for a lot of people abandoning fast fashion outright just isn't realistic given the realities of their income, and then also, you have to consider the balance between individual responsibility and, of course, the fashion industry that is perpetuating these problems. So, where do you come out on all of this and how do you help your clients navigate it?

Elyse: Yeah, this is a massive, massive topic and there's so much to get into. But the fashion industry is a massive, I think like \$75 billion industry. It produces 10% of humanity's carbon emissions and 85% of everything the fashion industry makes, goes to the landfill within a couple of years. And it's also one of the worst for, I mean, pollution and environmental impact, but also for human rights violations. So, 60 million people work in the fashion industry, including children, and more than half of them are not

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paid a living wage, they work extremely long hours, and they don't have healthcare, they don't have benefits.

And this industry is so big, so powerful, so damaging, and we really have to point out here that the reason that this industry is so big is a cyclical thing with beauty standards and us not feeling good enough, and so we buy more stuff, and so we support this industry and we prop it up. And so, if we're gonna keep buying cheap clothes, the industry is going to keep making a profit, and then we can talk about capitalism and so now it's a whole extra conversation. [Laughter]

But the point is, this is a very, very big topic and a big industry, and your point about individual responsibility, I think is where it gets really tricky for individuals. How do you find clothes that work for us and how do we take into consideration all the things that need to be done beyond shop less or buy expensive ethical brands. There are so many levers we can pull. And I personally believe that it's not just on our individual shoulders to shop better. I think that's important. I think we should take into consideration size inclusivity, ethics, organic fibers, where clothes are made, the factories they're made in. But there's so many things, there's no one brand that's doing everything exactly perfect.

If you're a clothing brand, you have choices that you can make. You can buy organic fibers, or you can use synthetic fibers, or you can use natural fibers that aren't organic. And all of those things have a trade-off. You can make clothes in the U.S. or you can make them overseas. One of those things is not necessarily more ethical than the other. And so, every brand makes decisions, and of course, brands are made of people that operate in capitalism and so you're pulling all of these levers.

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And then as an individual, when you go to a shop for a brand, you might be weighing where is it made, what are the fabrics, what is this company's business model, what are their supply chain ethics, what are their labor policies. All of that stuff. And you only know what they're telling you. Of course, they're gonna try to tell you something that makes them look good, right? And you have to weigh that with, does this fit me, and do I like it, and will I wear it?

Elizabeth Cline, I mentioned her book, *Overdressed*, earlier, she wrote a really great article in *Atmos* where she talked about being a consumer activist versus an ethical consumer. And she talks about how our individual decisions and our individual consumption is impactful, but also not sufficient. And that we as a collective have some power to state our consumer preferences. But her point in the article is that we haven't seen ethical consumerism change brands in capitalistic business policy. We haven't seen the efforts of ethical consumerism actually make a difference, and so now, sustainability has simply become a marketing thing. And that's how you get into greenwashing and brands that are doing exploitative labor practices, but they're using organic cotton.

So the effort to change that has to happen at the policy level, not the consumption level. If you're interested in this, I highly recommend reading her article. It really helped me weigh my individual choices and my individual actions with what I can do as a person who cares about the industry and so what activist policies that I can support.

Shohreh: I'll be sure to link it in the show notes so that it's super easy for people to find.

Elyse: And so, when we talk about overconsumption, right, the first thing to do if you care about this, is buy less stuff. There are so many clothes made, so

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many clothes going to the landfill. We buy, I can't remember the statistic off the top of my head, but something like 70 or 100 new pieces a year, on average. And like half of them or more than half of them we don't wear. Like, the average wear for a garment is like seven times, and then you put it in the landfill.

And so shop less, first of all. Like you don't need 85 shirts from Forever 21. But also, I fall on the side of, I would rather a client of mine buy something from a "non-ethical" brand that fits them, that makes them feel good, that they like, and that they will actually wear than to buy a very expensive ethical garment that will sit in their closet. And so you have to decide, as an individual, what fits into your resources, your budget, your body, your style, something that you'll actually wear, and play all of that together.

Which is really tricky! But as an individual, I think that this comes down to having a lot of information. Getting as much information as you can about clothes that fit you, things that you like, and the brands that you want to shop from, and then balancing that with budgets, with brands that fit you. If you are fat, there are many fewer choices, so even if you would like to spend your money on very ethical brands, your choices are limited. And so maybe you buy some things that do fit you from a fast fashion brand.

And there's no real right or wrong answer here. You are doing the best you can in the world that we actually live in.

Shohreh:

Yes. And let's talk practically. So, let's say that someone is listening to this podcast right now and they're like, damn Elyse, I really need to start thinking about my personal style. At this point in time I'm not quite ready to hire someone to help me with that, but where can I get started? Like, what are some of your best tips, the first things a person could do, that can move them along in this journey?

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Elyse: Yeah, so I think the first most important thing here is getting clarity. And I think that's getting clarity on your habits and getting clarity on your actual style. So, I firmly believe that it's really hard to move ourselves towards something when we can't define where we want to go or where we are. And this is where a lot of people start with their style. You are going, I don't really feel like I have a style, I don't even know what it is, I don't even know what I like. My habits are, in the before time, going to the mall after work and seeing what was on sale and buying things because they were on sale.

Shohreh: Or "Add to cart" online. A lot of add-to-carting happening during the pandemic.

Elyse: Pandemic anxiety shopping, yeah, absolutely. Or in the pandemic, wearing your sweatpants and your leggings because you just want to be comfortable, but then you don't feel good, you don't feel like yourself. And your body is changing maybe because of the pandemic or just because that's normal and bodies change. It's really hard to move towards something else if you don't really know where you are now.

And so the first thing you have to do is look with clarity at what it is that you're really doing. So start by paying attention to the outfits you wear. Outfit log. Take photos of the outfits that you wear every day. And this doesn't have to be good outfits, or real outfits, or posed Instagram influencer shots, or anything that anybody ever sees, you're collecting information. And collect information about your habits too.

When do you move towards shopping as an anxiety, or avoidance, or emotional release technique? Like it's called "retail therapy" for a reason [laughter]. We are stressed about something, we're anxious about the pandemic. Like oh, you know what's fun? Looking at clothes on the

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internet. Maybe you're not like that, maybe you are frustrated that your clothes don't fit and you can't find clothes that fit and you don't really know what you want to buy, so you look online and you get frustrated, and so you just avoid it and you haven't bought clothes in years. That's the other end of that spectrum.

Either way, you need to start getting a little bit of clarity on what is it you're actually doing, what are you actually wearing, and then where do you actually want to go? So, collecting inspiration is often where personal style guides will tell you to start, but I find that without really thinking about your own self, and your own habits, and your own lifestyle, you're just collecting pretty pictures. And if you're not really clear, you're often collecting pictures where the model is very pretty or the photography is very pretty. Or you're telling some underlying story, like we talked about earlier, like, actually, what I really want is she looks polished and effortless and happy. Or I wish my body looked like that. Or whatever these other subtle underlying thoughts are, that we aren't really clear on.

So I would say try outfit logging, try noticing when you want to shop, try paying attention to the clothes that you wear the most and that you actually like. Take measurements of them. See what information can you glean from the things that you actually do. And then start thinking about what are the things that I actually want to do that would change the way that I feel in my clothes every day. So, if you're in pandemic sweatpants land—

Shohreh: Hey, some of us love it here in pandemic sweatpants land!

Elyse: That's fine! If you love it, then you don't have to change anything at all. But if you don't love it, and you're like, I feel sloppy and ugh and I wanna not

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feel that way, maybe there are some pairs of sweat pants that make you feel ugh and some that don't. What's the difference between them?

So this is a practice of noticing. A practice of noticing, paying attention, collecting information, and that is always where I start my clients, and that is always where I will tell people to begin.

Shohreh: Because awareness is always the best place to start. You're speaking my language!

Elyse: Yes! Self-awareness.

Shohreh: Awesome, I think those tips are super helpful. Thank you so much for being here, Elyse. I loved having this conversation with you. How can people find you and how can my listeners best support you at this time?

Elyse: You can find me on Instagram @elyseholladay or online at elysestyled.com. I also have an email newsletter where I send articles, thoughts, worksheets, tips, etc. for you, if you are taking the style journey for yourself. And if you want to know more about style coaching and working with me one-on-one, you can find that information on my website.

I would also recommend that people check out the Slow Factory Foundation. They have an equity-centered education specifically for Black, Brown and Indigenous ethnic communities taught by ethnic scholars, thinkers, and educators. And they do a lot of really amazing education on fashion, the fashion industry and how it connects with food, agriculture, labor rights, all kinds of deep topics around the fashion industry beyond the clothes themselves. You can donate to them, or you can watch their videos which are on their website and free, or sign up for their classes. They are doing incredible things and I highly recommend them.

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Shohreh: Perfect, all of that again, will be in the show notes so everybody can access it. In particular, I'll make sure that there is a link to get to your email list, so that people who want to learn more about this have a great resource for doing that. Thanks again, this has been so much fun.

Elyse: It has been wonderful. Thank you so much for having me on the podcast.

Shohreh: Of course. 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.