

Conjuring Up Courage #95

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Alissa Rumsey

Shohreh Davoodi: You are listening to episode #95 of Conjuring Up Courage. In this episode, I chat with registered dietitian Alissa Rumsey about her new book, *Unapologetic Eating: Make Peace with Food and Transform Your Life*. Alissa and I talked about her decision to hire equity readers for the book, the role that shame plays in hurting our relationships with food and our bodies, and how to foster curiosity in order to stop trying to fix ourselves.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/95. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/95.

[Music plays]

This is Conjuring Up Courage, and I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. As a self-trust coach, I help people come home to themselves, so they can be more of who they are and less haunted by who they think they're supposed to be.

I created this podcast to celebrate what's possible when you commit to being brave. You'll hear from diverse guests who are refusing to let fear and self-doubt stop them from building fulfilling lives and creating a better world for everyone. I'll also teach you my favorite tools, strategies, and mindset shifts so you can do the same.

Consider this your invitation to stop living according to "shoulds" and to step into your motherfucking magic instead. Stay open, get curious, and let's grow together.

[Music fades]

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Hi, Alissa! We have had this convo scheduled for a while now, and I'm glad it's finally happening. How've you been? How's the book launch been going?

Alissa Rumsey: Oh, yeah, I'm so excited that we are finally getting to chat. The book launch has been going really well. It's been about a month now, and after the long process of writing and only a handful of people really ever seeing the writing, now to have it out into the world and just getting feedback from people has been really, really fun, and just so amazing to kind of see it all come to fruition.

Shohreh: Yeah, I've had a lot of authors on the podcast recently, and it seems like the process can be a pretty long one. It can be, you know, a year or longer to actually take the book from start to finish. And like, you're sitting with this material and mostly with yourself for such a long time. And it's kind of like this baby that you're cultivating, and then you're like putting it out in the world and you're like, "Hi, hope you like it!"
[Laughs lightly]

Alissa: Yes, exactly. And you're just kind of like, okay, I think this is good? But also, [laughter] you know, not many people have seen it, or even the people that had seen it, outside of my editor, are people that I know really well and are also kind of like in this space in a similar community to me. So, yeah, it's definitely a little bit scary being like, okay, now I'm putting this out into the full world, and what are people going to say? So, yeah, I feel that for sure.

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- Shohreh:** Yeah, it's like all those impostor syndrome demons are coming in, and it's like, even if you're like, I know I'm a good writer, I know this material is good and everything is great, it's like they just creep in there, and they're like, "But is it? Am I? Are we sure?"
- Alissa:** Yes, oh my gosh, yes. I feel that for sure. But it has been really nice—I mean, every person that DMs me on Instagram, I'm like, thank you so much for sharing this, because it is just this like bizarre thing. Like you've written this, you know people are buying it. I mean, when I read a book, I don't like reach out to the author and tell them what I think, so I'm really appreciating everybody [laughs lightly] who does 'cause that's just been really nice to hear kind of what's resonating and all of that. So I've liked that a lot.
- Shohreh:** I bet. I'm sure it's so nice just to get feedback and hear from other people, especially outside of the realm of online reviews, which I know is a big thing now, which like, can be good, but inevitably, there are always, eventually, like really mean reviews [light laughter] and things like that. I feel like I'm someone who wants to write a book in the future, and like, that's something that I'm like, oh god, that's gonna terrify me. Like, I don't even know if I could check things like GoodReads [light laughter] when the time comes 'cause it may upset me too much.
- Alissa:** Yes, I said that to my partner when I was doing [light laughter] market research for the book. I was looking at the reviews of different books that are kind of in the same genre to just get a sense, and most of them don't have that many one- and two-star reviews, but I was like, okay, I

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wanna know what people like, didn't like or wish was in this book. And yes, I said to my partner, I'm like, do *not* let me read the reviews [laughter], like, once my book comes out. 'Cause I was like, people can just be awful, and even if it's like four bad ones and like a hundred amazing ones, the brain's negativity bias [laughs] always goes to the bad ones. So I was like, nope, that's a boundary I need to set when the time comes.

Shohreh: It does. And you know what, I think it's nice to have like a buffer. Like I could see being like, a person who you really trust being like, "Hey, can you only send me the good reviews because I don't want to see the other ones." [Laughs lightly]

Alissa: Yes, exactly. I think that's such a great idea [Shohreh laughs].

Shohreh: Well, to back up a little bit, for those who do not know you, can you share a little bit about yourself?

Alissa: Sure. So I am a registered dietitian and nutrition therapist. I'm also a certified intuitive eating counselor. I live in New York City, and I am the founder of Alissa Rumsey Nutrition and Wellness where I have a virtual nutrition practice that is weight-inclusive and where my team and I work with people from all over the country who are looking to move away from dieting and just really get more connected to their own bodies, and heal their relationships with food, and just feel more grounded in themselves and connected to themselves. And then, yeah, author of the new book, *Unapologetic Eating*.

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Shohreh: Yes, and I feel like with a book title like that, I have to ask you, what are some of your favorite foods to eat unapologetically?

Alissa: I love that question. I would say that at this point, I eat everything unapologetically [laughs lightly]. But some of the ones that come to mind first when you asked that are definitely ice cream, and gelato, specifically, is one of my favorites. I also love cheese, and cheese is just one of my go-to's. I have cheese probably almost every single day. Like, the dinner cheese plate is one of my absolute just favorite things, like a really easy weeknight meal that's super satisfying. And chocolate chip cookies I think is my other one. That's just my go-to, like, comfort food whenever I'm not having a great day. It just always makes me feel better.

Shohreh: I feel like because you're in New York, you have a lot more access to gelato than the average person, and I'm jealous because I love gelato. I love the little cups that they come in and the little spoon, and it's like, you can have the smallest-looking portion of gelato, and it's so satisfying.

Alissa: Yeah. Oh my goodness. They actually just opened one three blocks from my apartment last year, and it is—my partner brought over some last night, so I have some in my freezer right now. Not to brag [laughs].

Shohreh: Mm!

Alissa: But it's amazing. And it's so—and they make it like fresh right there. And the one he brought over yesterday has like banana bread in it, like in the gelato.

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- Shohreh:** [Sounding shocked] What?!
- Alissa:** Yeah. It's just amazing [laughs lightly]. And I just love the texture of gelato, like the softness of it. Yeah. I'm a big fan as well.
- Shohreh:** Yeah, I do too. It's one of those things where when I'm traveling and I see a gelato place, like I'm gonna go in and I'm gonna get some [laughs lightly] gelato. Like it doesn't matter if I just ate a meal or if I'm about to eat a meal, I'll be like, it's fine! I'm just gonna get a little cup. It's fine.
- Alissa:** Yep. I am 100% with you.
- Shohreh:** I also feel the same way about cheese, which you mentioned, and one of the best things that happened to me in the pandemic is that I started having cheese plate dinners, which was not something I really did before. But all of the sudden I was like, alright, I'm going to Central Market, which fellow Texans will know is a great grocery store, and get a bunch of different fancy cheeses. Well, realistically, put an order in online and do pick-up [laughs lightly] because of the pandemic for my fancy cheeses. And get a bunch of crackers, and make like a salad, and have fruits. And like, that's a very delightful meal, especially here in the summer when it's 105 degrees. Like it's the perfect dinner.
- Alissa:** Yes, I am all about the cheese plate. I've been doing cheese plate dinners for at least a decade, 'cause living in New York, pre-pandemic, most nights I was going out to dinner. So if there was a night where I was home, I was like okay, well I don't wanna cook and then have all this leftover food when I'm not gonna eat it. So yeah, cheese plates are

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just one of my favorite quick and easy and super satisfying things for dinner.

Shohreh: Mm, yes. Well, I also eat those unapologetically, so I'm with you on that.

Alissa: Love it.

Shohreh: In terms of the book, first I want to compliment you because one of the things I really like about the book is that you've laid out a lot of information in what I feel is a very accessible way. It's well-written without being so research-heavy that it's hard to get through as a reader. And I think that's something that makes it an excellent book for people who are exploring their relationship with food and their bodies, and especially for people who are doing that for maybe the first time.

Alissa: Yeah. Oh thank you so much for saying that. That was definitely my goal. I had some research in there and explored and explained that piece of it, but I also wanted it to be something that was approachable, and that was really practical, and that people could read and whether they were just starting out with this kind of thinking around food and their bodies or if it's someone who had been doing this work for a while, just really being able to have a practical resource where they could read, and kind of understand, and then also have different kind of reflection prompts and things like that and ways to put it into practice. So I wanted it to be both educational and approachable while also being practical too.

Shohreh: And the book is about eating, but it's also about so much more than eating. And admittedly, I'm going to focus less on the eating and more

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on some of the other stuff in our chat today because a lot of it aligns so much with the work that I'm doing and I just love getting into the nitty gritty of what's behind food. But I do want listeners to know that there's tons of great stuff in there specific to changing your relationship with food and your body, and why so many of us have a crappy relationship with food and our bodies in the first place.

Alissa:

Yeah, my goal with writing this was when I first started really working from this weight-inclusive, intuitive eating kind of place, like a non-diet place, I was like, okay, I'm gonna be working with people to help them with their relationship with food. And certainly yes, that's what happened, but what I quickly realized is that food is like the tip of the iceberg, and there's so much more underneath. And also, exploring one's relationship to food is this really amazing entry point into just like exploring more about ourselves, and our beliefs, and our values. So it ends up just becoming about so much more. So, yes, the outcome is food freedom, but it's so much past that. So I'd love to hear kind of what your thoughts were with those and talk about that more.

Shohreh:

And I love how you mention that food is one of many pathways to getting to know ourselves. Because as a self-trust coach, this is the work that I do with clients is how do we get to know ourselves? How do we learn to trust ourselves and live according to our values? Many of the things that you talk about in the book. And food is a wonderful entry point into that. It's one of the reasons I became an intuitive eating counselor, and I used to work almost exclusively in health and wellness.

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And for me, I really wanted to expand outside of that because I saw there are so many pathways to this, and I found them so interesting, and I loved exploring them with clients, so I ended up building my work around that. But you're exactly right that people don't often think about the fact that when they start with their relationship with food, it's the [laughs lightly] Pandora's box of oh my gosh, this is related to *everything* in my life.

Alissa:

Yeah, oh my gosh. Exactly. And I relate so much to what you just said, because I trained as a dietitian and I'm also a certified intuitive eating counselor. Really what I love the most is seeing what else we get to and what else opens up in people's lives starting with trusting themselves around food, but then it just ends up trusting themselves in so many areas of their life. So it's kind of like this liberation with food brings liberation from all these other societal kind of like "shoulds" or "supposed to." It just really allows people to get to know themselves better.

Shohreh:

Exactly. So before we get into some of the book content itself, I wanna talk a little bit about the process because I just like to nerd out on these things, especially as someone who's hoping to eventually write my own book someday. And one of the things that you have been open about with your book is that you hired two equity consultants, McKensie Mack and Lindley Ashline, and this becoming somewhat of a standard practice. But, I think that a lot of people might not know about this role. So, would you mind talking about that decision and what they helped you with?

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Alissa: Yes, sure. So I actually was first told about this from Kelly Diels, who is someone that you and I both know and how we were connected.

Shohreh: Yes [light laughter].

Alissa: And I was talking to Kelly a couple months into the writing process, and that imposter syndrome was really cropping up for me. And I was just feeling like okay, I do not want this to just be like another book written by a thin, white dietitian. And like, in my heart, I knew that it wasn't, but I was like, okay, I also know that like, these are my identities. And while I've worked with clients, and I'm certainly working in client experiences and stories from different lived experiences, I wanted to really just be able to make this book as inclusive as possible and have it not be centering myself.

And so I'm like sharing all of this with Kelly and like my struggles, and so she's the one who suggested to me, you know, maybe look into an equity reader. And I approached my publisher and they had never done something like that before, and they're like, sure, if you want to, like, great, here would be the timeline, and then just tapped into my community and ended up yes, hiring two people. So I hired Lindley Ashline, who is a white, fat—she's not a provider, but she's a HAES, like, fat activist.

Shohreh: And a former guest on the podcast, actually.

Alissa: Oh, amazing. Ugh, she's so wonderful. Then I also hired McKensie Mack, who they own MMG, which is a consulting group, and they do equity consulting, they and their team do equity consulting, a whole

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variety of things. I mean, they do it with corporations and businesses, but also books. So basically, the idea with an equity consultant is they are reading it from a different perspective than like me, the author. Lindley was reading it from kind of like the fat, HAES perspective, and then McKensie was reading it for all kinds of like lived experiences and identities. So they were looking from a perspective of race and ethnicity, body size, um, gender identity, all these different things.

And yeah, it was just really amazing to be able to collaborate with them. And so that process is I wrote the whole thing, wrote my first draft, went through it once with my editor, and then I sent it to Lindley and McKensie. It was a really amazing collaborative process, especially with McKensie, I worked really closely with them.

And there was definitely a part of me that was nervous. I was like, okay, you know, I was preparing myself [laughs lightly]—

Shohreh: Yeah.

Alissa: —to be like, okay, don't get defensive, like, you know, just kind of preparing myself for whatever they were going to say to me. And our first call, before they had seen the book, they asked me what like my biggest fear was or what I was worried about, and I was having a lot of the like white guilt and like the thin guilt. And they just said to me, they're like, look, you've been given this power that is not yours to have. You've been given this unjustly, but you have it, so how can you use it and how can you like step into that and then kind of shed light on

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these—these things that are happening and on these experiences of other people

So they really helped me to just like own that and think about it in how can I be super explicit about the different systems of oppression that are happening? How can I be super explicit about my own identity? How can I do like citation audit and just make sure that I'm citing a wide variety of people and experiences? So, it was really helpful.

Now, obviously, I was going in like knowing that I was already gonna do this, so I think even that alone really helped me when I started writing. Like there wasn't any major changes that they had, but just like little things about like, well, what do you think about this word? I mean, I learned so much in the process, not even just like [laughs lightly] about the book, but in general. And it was really fantastic.

Shohreh:

And something else that you explicitly mentioned in the introduction of the book is the book is not perfect. And you even go so far as to say that when you would read the published version of it, that you'd probably notice things that you might have changed or said differently if you had known them at the time. And I think that's so important for people to hear, especially in the age that we're living in now where information dissemination is happening very quickly. We're all learning a lot so fast with social media and the internet. And so it's scary to put out a book—I mean, I get scared just putting out podcast episodes. Like, you know, there's episodes from the last month, the last six months, where I'm like, welp, I would've said that differently.

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And it's like, that lives out in the ether forever, and that could be really scary to have. And for me, it has really helped me to just say like, this is growth happening and to talk about that with my audience, of like, because I have a public platform, I'm growing and evolving in public, and y'all get to see it and be there with me, and if there are mistakes you tell me, and I do my best to have accountability for those, make changes, and do better in the future.

'Cause it's like, in the world that we're living in, if you can't accept that, it is just really hard to do anything that is public-facing because we're all gonna make mistakes.

Alissa:

Exactly, and I consider myself [laughs lightly] a recovered perfectionist, or like a recovering type-A. And yeah, you know, I work with a lot of people in the same, and I just think that perfectionism and this fear of like, oh, I'm gonna say the wrong thing, like it just keeps us stuck. Like it doesn't allow ourselves to move forward.

And so it was something I, you know, with Kelly, with McKensie, just really working on that through the book process. And I ended up putting that right in the introduction, 'cause I was just like, okay, look, there's gonna be a lot that comes up that it's probably gonna make you feel uncomfortable, and just acknowledging that. And also acknowledging for myself too, like, I am there with you. I don't consider this to be perfect.

You know, it's interesting. Like I turned in the first draft in, I guess July of 2020, and then went through like several rounds of edits through

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November. And like I read my book, oh my gosh, like a dozen times [laughter] cover-to-cover, and every single time I caught multiple things that I had like learned in the past few weeks and changed. And so I was like okay, yeah, like there's gonna be stuff by the time this comes out months from now that I'm definitely gonna [laughs lightly] you know, see and wanna change, and that's fine. Like that's what you end up like speaking about and just sharing along with people.

Shohreh:

Yeah. I mean, even Sonya Renee Taylor just released a second edition of her book *The Body is Not an Apology*, and like, within days, there had been a critique of something in the book, and she came out and said yeah, y'all are right. Like, I messed this up in the book, and I'm working on it, and we'll see what I can do to fix it. But you know what I mean? This happens to all of us. This is sort of the nature of books now I think, that if you're gonna write one, like, this is a part of the process and being willing to see that and be okay with it.

Alissa:

Exactly, and I think, you know, I spoke to this a little bit in the book too, but how for me, personally, the last few years, it's really been learning of like okay, when I feel that defensiveness coming up, like that is always a sign [laughs] that there is something there for me to like sit with and learn. And so whenever I feel that now, I'm just like, it's really fast. I'm like, oh, okay, this is probably something I need to do better with next time, and just yeah, accepting that and acknowledging that. And I think really too not internalizing this as like, oh I did something bad or like I'm a bad person. It's like no, I am human, and I want people to be able to like call me in and tell me these things.

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So yeah, I did not hear that with Sonya. I did get her—the second copy, I have that sitting right near me. But yeah, I just think that speaks to like we're all human, it's gonna happen to all of us. We're all learning continuously.

Shohreh: Well, and this is a good segue into talking about shame because I really liked how you had a whole section of the book on shame, and on the role that shame plays in our relationships with food and our bodies, and on how shame is socialized into us in so many ways, and it makes us think that something is wrong with *us*. But in reality, we were taught that these things were wrong with us and then we're turning against ourselves. So I'd love for you to talk a little bit about that role of shame and how you've seen that play out with your clients.

Alissa: Yeah. Oh my goodness. Well, I just think there's been so much that's put on people, especially marginalized folks in terms of like, what they should be or how they're supposed to act or supposed to look. And then, just really, I feel like so many people, like all of us, have these internalized shame stories that we're kind of like telling ourselves. And I think that whether it's through food, bodies, but then really kind of the like core beliefs underneath that, which often is around lovability, being loved, being accepted, but then it crops up as things related to like food and body image.

I think it's just really helpful to understand how shame is part of what causes us to feel disconnected and actually keeps us kind of stuck and less capable of changing, and growing, and learning. And it really keeps us disconnected both from ourselves, but also from other people as

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well. And when it comes to someone's relationship with food and their body, shame gets in the way of just being able to really figure out what's going on and what your body needs.

So, I just think that it affects us in so many ways, and it disconnects us in so many ways from our own bodies and ourselves and what we want, but also from other people too.

Shohreh:

And you talk in the book about how having awareness of shame and these other things that are acting as barriers to keeping us from having a better relationship with food and our bodies is really important. And you actually talk a lot about some of the history of different beauty standards and things like that, which I'm equally fascinated and horrified by those kinds of histories because it's just amazing to me to read some of this stuff. Like, you even had some stuff in there that I didn't already know. Like you talked about the history of body hair and like my jaw dropped open where I was like [exclaims] what?! This is why we all remove our body hair? Like what is this?

Alissa:

Yes, and I think that was so important for me to try to convey in this book, of like okay, this isn't a problem with you, like this is a problem with our society. And all of the things that you think you know or that you think are true about food, about bodies, about beauty standards, appearance, all of these things, all those things were things that were taught to you, either implicitly or explicitly. So like some of it's like oh yeah, this is what's beautiful. Others, it's just like thinking about movies, and TV shows, and books, and like what types of people are written into those and what types of people are not.

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And I think really just understanding where some of these ideals came from, and also why, and really understanding with any of the ideals, whether it's like body hair, body size for sure, age, like wrinkles, all of these things we kind of consider flaws, like cellulite, gray hair, white teeth, like all of these things that we're like, oh yeah, this is just what's beautiful, like no. All of these beauty standards were created and created specifically to keep certain folks, you know, those that were non-white, non-men, so really to keep women, to keep BIPOC folks, to keep queer folks down, and to be able to have like men, and white men specifically, remain in power.

Because when we are considered about adhering to or meeting a certain ideal, we spend a ton of time, and money, and energy on that. And I see this a lot with women, but also with men too. We hold ourselves back because we're like, oh, well I haven't met this ideal yet, so I can't do XYZ. And again, this was put on us specifically to keep us not in our power and to keep us, you know, just really like grinding away at living up to these ideals rather than stepping into our power and really kind of being able to change the world.

And I just think—I use a quote from Naomi Wolf, and she talks about how dieting is one of the great distractors and how in U.S. history specifically, every time women started to gain more power in society, a new beauty standard came down the pipe. And there was like a new thing to try now, like, oh, well I have to meet this.

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So again, I think it's really just starting to question, why do I think I'm supposed to do this, or why do I think this looks good and this doesn't, can be so helpful.

Shohreh: You also use this really beautiful phrase throughout the book: "Stop fixing and start allowing," and I love that. And tell me a bit about what you mean by that.

Alissa: Yeah, the first whole section of the book is about how we are taught that something is wrong with us and that we need to fix ourselves in order to be "be better" [Shohreh laughs lightly] and to meet these certain ideals. So we're taught like, okay, there's something wrong with us. That's shame—there's something wrong with me, and I need to do XYZ in order to be accepted, be loved, etcetera. So really, throughout the book what I'm trying to show is okay, we can stop trying to fix ourselves, and instead, just really like allow ourselves to be and allow ourselves to, from the food perspective, like step away from dieting, step away from trying to control our body, and sit with, you know, what that brings up. And just allowing ourselves to really rediscover and trust our own inner wisdom.

And I think that is just, when we kind of get off this sort of like hamster wheel of like okay, I've gotta like fix myself, and then first it's one thing, and then it's the next, and now I'm like aging, so now I have to dye my hair and I have to think about Botox. And not that any of that is wrong, and certainly people can do that for sure, and I don't shame anyone who does do that, but I do think it's really helpful to just understand why am I doing these things? And is it because of me, or is it because of

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something outside of me? And really, when we just like allow ourselves to be, that's really where we get deep and really start to understand and explore ourselves more.

Shohreh: And I wanna honor too that this allowing is really difficult [laughs lightly], especially at first.

Alyssa: Yes.

Shohreh: You even use the phrase, "sit in the suck" [light laughter] in the book, which resonates a lot. And I have so many clients who struggle with this piece of it, where they're like, alright, I don't wanna be doing the fixing anymore and I like wanna get into myself, but it's not an easy thing to do, especially because of the culture that we live in where we're really taught not to have to deal with negative feelings, or it's like numb out, put them away. And it's just not easy to do. So for anybody listening who's like, that sounds great, but it's really hard. Yes, yes it is.

Alissa: Yeah. Oh, 100%. And I'm so glad you brought that up. And just to give a shout-out, the "sit in the suck," that comes from Brianna Campos, who is @bodyimagewithbri on Instagram. That's something that she taught me and that she talks about a lot.

Because yeah, when you stop trying to kinda fix yourself, it brings up a lot of thoughts and feelings that often, the like, act of fixing, or doing these things, or coping by trying to control your body has kind of like numbed or suppressed these thoughts and feelings. And it really is difficult. It's also even more difficult for people in marginalized bodies who are actively oppressed.

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So, for example, I share in the book how there's a study around salary and pay, and they found that women who were not as groomed actually made less money—whatever grooming means, right? And I'm thinking about this with—we hear this a lot with Black women, how like their natural hair is seen as unprofessional. And whereas, of course, the study showed with men, it didn't matter. Like grooming did not affect their salary at all.

So like, this does have very real effects on people, and so again, that's why I say I don't shame anybody for trying to attain or be in line with these beauty ideals because it can affect it. You know, I feel very lucky I run my own business, so I can show up with no makeup on, and—

Shohreh: Right.

Alissa: —my hair not done, and you know, sitting right now with like my [laughs lightly] grays growing out, and like, just how that brings out—but like, that's not affecting my ability to exist and make money and all of that. So yes, it's definitely difficult.

Shohreh: So given the shame that we've talked about, all of the socialization we experience, the beauty standards, the diet culture, it can definitely feel like a lot [laughs lightly]—a lot of pressure and there's no hope that we can possibly get away from this. But you and I both know, and we've worked with a lot of clients on this, that it is possible to make strides to move away from what society has told us we should do and to start listening to ourselves and doing what we want to do instead. So, you give a lot of strategies in the book. Are there a few that you might

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recommend somebody start with if they're just trying to go down this path for the first time?

Alissa:

Sure. I have an entire chapter all about cultivating awareness and mindfulness, and I put that towards the beginning of the book because those are strategies that you will use with everything, you know, with all of it. Because as we talked about before, like, the first thing is like, you mentioned it with the shame, but like, being aware of what's happening. And until we're aware of what's going on and like what our thought process is, and our feelings about those thoughts, and how that affects our behaviors, and things like that, then we can't make any shifts.

So I would say one thing I find is really helpful is kind of this four-step process of mindfulness that I outline in the book, which really helps you to separate yourself from the thoughts and beliefs that you might be having. A typical chain of events tends to be like, we have some kind of experience, whether that's a specific like pants are tight, or someone makes a comment about our body or our food, or we feel guilty about something, or we see a magazine cover and it has like a really thin, "conventionally attractive" like, person on it, and then we feel bad about ourselves. Like whatever it is, we have this experience, and then typically we tend to just react to it. And then it can kind of like spiral down.

So, in the book I use this example from a client of mine, who the experience was a pair of pants, that it was like spring, and she's pulling out her spring clothes, and she put on a pair of pants and they were

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tight. And normally, what would happen was she'd react to that by kind of panicking and being like, oh my god, what am I doing? Kind of, again, like the shame stories coming in. And then she'd react, usually by like dieting, by starting to restrict more, by starting to exercise more to try to make her body smaller.

So with mindfulness, between that experience and that reaction, instead what we try to do is that experience happens, and with mindfulness we can notice what's going on. So we can notice what's happening in that moment, and when we're aware, like okay, I'm having this experience, pair of pants feels tight, this feels really uncomfortable, and we can kind of pause instead of just reacting. And then we can shift our attention and start to get curious about what might be going on in that moment. And then we're able to respond to whatever the experience we're having is, rather than react. And respond in a way that feels aligned with our values and where we're kind of trying to go.

So, for example, with this client with the pair of pants, she put on the pair of pants, and then she started to notice okay, I'm feeling really upset, I'm feeling really sad that these pants are tight and they don't fit. It's bringing up fears of people judging me, of that I'm gaining weight. It's bringing up fears that I'm failing. Ultimately kind of like working down the list of just not being accepted, not being loved. And then she was able to pause and kind of get curious, and she was like, okay, you know, when I think about it, even last year, like, these pants have always just been kind of tight, and they were even uncomfortable a little bit last year. And she realized okay, I think this is affecting me even more

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so than normal because she was already like really on edge, and I think like her mother and father-in-law were visiting and she was just had a really stressful week with them, and she felt really out of control because there's all these people in the house. And she's like okay, I think I'm projecting some of this onto my body.

And then, instead of her like, the default reaction to like I've gotta get this back under control, she was just like okay, she responded, she's like, you know, these pants have always been kind of tight, I have lots of other pants that I like, or I can get like a new pair that are just as cute or even more comfortable. And so she's like, I'm gonna donate these, and she really came back to, and I talk about this towards the beginning too, came back to her "why" of like why she was trying to divest from diet culture and really pursue liberation. And she was like, you know, I'm not gonna let this pair of pants like spoil how great I've been feeling and how much progress I've made.

And so I think that this, the mindfulness and just the ability to be aware of your thoughts and then where your thoughts like tend to spiral and kind of to catch yourself, and pause, and get curious is such an important skill.

Shohreh:

That whole exchange that you just described, like, I have had word-for-word nearly [light laughter] with several of my clients. I think it's gonna resonate with a lot of people because who hasn't been there in taking an item of clothing from their closet and trying it on and it doesn't fit? Even to the point of like, it didn't fit before, I just had a client who, we had this whole conversation about pants where she was like yeah,

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actually, I don't think they've ever fit very well. And I was like, oh, well, that's good information for you to have.

I love that you talk about curiosity and openness throughout the book; those are two of my personal core values as well as two of my business core values. And I think it's so important. Such a big switch has happened for me as an adult where I used to care a lot more about the answers than the questions, and now I care way more about the questions than the answers.

Alissa: Yeah, I love that. I think the curiosity is just so key because when we shift from this judgmental kind of like shame-inducing place to just like being curious, like what's going on right now? Like what's happening? It just opens up so much more space to explore.

Shohreh: Yes, I agree completely. Like almost any judgment statement you say to yourself can easily be turned into a series of questions that will give you so much information.

Alissa: Mmhm. Exactly.

Shohreh: Well thank you so much for being here, Alissa. I am really excited that your book is out in the world now. This is definitely gonna be one that I recommend to people who are going on this journey with food and their bodies. I love how it covers many different topics. For those who are listening, how can they best find you and support you at this time?

Alissa: Well, my website is alissarumsey.com, and I also spend a good deal of time over on Instagram @alissarumseyrd. And then my book,

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Unapologetic Eating, is now available basically anywhere books are sold. In the U.S. and Canada, it's on IndieBound, Bookshop, Amazon, and then if you are anywhere outside of the U.S. or Canada, you can find it on the Book Depository.

Shohreh: Yeah, and if you read it and you like it, send Alissa a DM [light laughter] because that makes her happy [laughs].

Alissa: Yes! Yes, I would love that. My DMs are open. I love to hear what resonates and what you explore, and unpack, and uncover, so I would love to hear from you. And reviews are also super helpful, so please, if you do read it, I would love any honest reviews left on Amazon and/or GoodReads.

Shohreh: But if you leave a one- or two-star, she may not read it, so just keep that in mind.

Alissa: [Laughs] Yes. If that's really what you feel about the book, go for it [laughter]. I will probably not be reading it. Setting that boundary.

Shohreh: Totally fair. Well, I will get all of that into the show notes so it's very easy for people to find you, to purchase the book, and thank you for making the time for this today.

Alissa: Yeah, thank you so much for having me on. This was a really fun chat.

Shohreh: Awesome.

[Music plays]

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Shohreh: And that's our show for today. If you're enjoying Conjuring Up Courage, don't forget to subscribe through your podcast provider of choice so you never miss an episode. Additionally, if you haven't left a rating and review in the Apple Podcasts app yet, you can do so from any Apple device to help more people find and benefit from the show. I also love hearing from listeners, so feel free to take a screenshot from your podcast player, post on social media, and tag me. My username is @shohrehdavoodi on all platforms. Finally, you can sign up for my email newsletter, The Sunday Share, and get more details about how to work with me by going to shohrehdavoodi.com. Thank you so much for listening, and I hope you'll join me for the next episode.

[Music fades]