

Conjuring Up Courage

#112

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Danielle Cohen

Shohreh Davoodi: You are listening to episode #112 of Conjuring Up Courage. Today's guest is visibility coach and brand photographer Danielle Cohen who has a unique talent for helping folks step into and offer their greatest work by becoming more visible, owning their story and their magic, and sharing it with the world. Danielle and I discussed the risks and power of visibility, the deeper worries that may be fueling a fear of being seen, the importance of sitting with and growing from our mistakes, and more.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/112. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/112.

[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 Danielle! Welcome to the show. How are you doing today?

Danielle Cohen: I'm well, how are you?

Shohreh: I'm doin' okay. You know, we're recording this on a Thursday and it's one of those weeks where I just feel like I'm so ready for it to be the weekend and it has taken so long to get close to the weekend. I'm like, please, can we just get there?

Danielle: Mmm. What does the weekend mean to you?

Shohreh: Uh, well, the weekend means I get to see my girlfriend [laughs lightly].

Danielle: Ohhhh.

Shohreh: Which is the first time that I'm mentioning that she exists on this podcast, soooo...enjoy that one, listeners!

Danielle: [Laughs] So that's a fun reason to be banking for the weekend.

Shohreh: Yeah. It is a fun reason. We are long distance, so weekends are when we get to see each other. So now, the weeks, they go by so slowly as I am waiting to get to see her on the weekend.

Danielle: Aw, that's sweet.

Shohreh: Yes! Well, I had the pleasure of connecting with you through Kelly Diels, who has been one of my greatest teachers, also was a past guest on the show. For those who are just getting to know you, can you please tell me a little bit about who you are and what lights you up?

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Danielle: Oh, well first I just wanna second your love of Kelly because I think she is just an incredible human on so many levels. I think her intellect and her brilliance and her beauty are so obvious. But there's also just such incredible care and depth and humanity. She's just a really special person.

Shohreh: She absolutely is. I agree.

Danielle: I'm happy that she connected us.

Shohreh: Me too!

Danielle: So what lights me up is life, and nature, and the people that I work with, for sure. I think I had four one-on-one sessions today, which is more than normal for me.

Shohreh: Oof, that's a lot for one day.

Danielle: It is a lot for one day. But I took a half an hour kind of nap between my last session and this call, and it was just sort of almost like a movie playing on the screen of my mind of these different people that I worked with just today, even, without even going into the other times and spaces. And how much hope it gives me. And how much gratitude it fills me with. And how much it lights me up.

Because you know, our world is hurting in so many ways, is causing hurt in so many ways, is off course, problematic in so many ways. And yet the humans, there are so many good, amazing, important, valuable humans that are doing good work, and that really lights me up. Also my family.

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You know, there's endless things. The way the light hits a certain room at a certain time of day. The way the light hits a client when I photograph them. When I read a great book. When I watch a good show. A lot lights me up. I really, really, really like life.

Shohreh: I think that's really beautiful that there's so many things that you're able to mention, too. Because of course, we as humans have our biological negativity bias, and so sometimes people can really struggle to be like, wait, what are the things that make me happy and bring me joy?

I do a lot of work with my own clients about trying to get more clear about what those things are. And lean into those things to try to combat that negativity bias that we have that's ingrained in us. Because it is so easy to not focus on the things that light us up and to really get bogged down in the things that stress us out and frustrate us that we don't like.

'Cause as you mentioned, the world has so much shit that is going on in it at all times that you can just really fall into the pit of despair very easily if we don't take some time to be like, wait a minute, there is purpose and meaning and life and light here in my life as well. Even with all of that other crap.

Danielle: Yes, and I will say—I mean, one, I could easily default to just talking about my own four children and the way that who they are lights me up. And two, as many people do, I have mixed feelings about labels, but just to put language to it, I am a lifelong complex PTSD wearing individual. And that negativity bias, or as I tend to think of it, a scanning

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for safety, is pretty significant in me for sure, without a doubt. And yet, also, my scanning for beauty is—you know, I'm a highly sensitive person, I'm all kinds of, like acronyms—but my sense of beauty and pleasure is also pretty potent and sensitive, and one doesn't always negate the other.

As much as I'm with you, like, there's, like, an antidote to the negative bias by cultivating, leaning into, acknowledging, recognizing the things that are a particular flavor of joy or turn-on or whatever gives us that access, sometimes they can be right side by side, at least for me.

Shohreh:

Oh, absolutely. I think that they have to co-exist. And sometimes people get caught in thinking that these are destinations, or like, planes of existence that we get to, right? Like, I am happy on this day or in this moment. And then it's like, but I am sad or I am angry in these other moments. And I've found more often as I've allowed myself to feel more and not push things down that I can feel all of those things and any other things at one time.

Like, there's so much nuance to the way that we feel as humans. And it's rare that actually we're feeling, like, one single emotion in a moment or a day or a week. It's usually like a wide mix of different things.

Danielle:

For sure. And I think at this point, it's pretty safe to say everyone is in the midst of or processing the trauma of the last year plus, year-and-a-half plus. But if you're someone that even before that carried traumas, sometimes those positive, light-up places can actually even trigger more anxiety. And that can be really confusing, right?

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So, like, the leaning into those positive feelings can awaken a feeling of—oftentimes it's just fear, right? Like, whether it's, oh my gosh, I'm realizing how good things can be, but will it ever be that way for me? It can just feel so risky to feel good, depending on who you are.

Shohreh: There's a lot of that waiting for the other shoe to drop kind of feelings. Of like, okay, it's good now but does that mean that it's going to get bad? Because, you know, again, past history, trauma, and everything else that has led you to believe that good may not always be good. So I agree completely. I know a lot of people experience that.

Danielle: Yeah, and if the body's familiar place, if home feels a little scary, like in your internal home is kind of the baseline, then when you go to joy or peace or whatever, that can feel, like, so somatically unfamiliar that it's unsettling.

Shohreh: Alright, that was an enjoyable tangent that we got on, and I want to bring us to your specialty, which is visibility. And I think the first thing I'd love to know is what initially called you to focus on visibility in your work?

Danielle: Oh, that's a great question. Photography as I've done it over the last seven, eight years is something that arrived because I was in a place where I was going through some body things, and there was just this kind of non-negotiable reckoning of, I can't do anything that isn't working for me right now. And photography was essentially what was left. That's that.

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Brand photography sort of came—I don't know if by accident is the right way to say it, but it just all sort of came together. Partly because who was wanting to be photographed by me was creative entrepreneurs with presence in the world. And so they would get photographed and talk about it, and then other people would say, "Oh, I like what that person did and I like who that person is. I trust them, therefore I want who they worked with." So there was, like, a natural momentum there.

What worked for me about it was photography had always been a deep love of mine, but something that I had struggled with seeing as a profession. Because one, I didn't see myself as creative. So that was one block. And then the other was that I had a really strong resistance to anything appearance-oriented being the lead. And I had a limited kind of perspective on what my possibilities were. So when I thought photographer, I mostly thought sitting in a studio with families in khaki pants and white button-downs [Shohreh laughs lightly], you know, that kind of thing.

Shohreh: Yeah.

Danielle: And I was like, never gonna happen. This is not for me. So there were other types of sessions I was doing and still will do from time to time. But what I fell in love with about branding is that it was centering women—and I say that term very broadly, very inclusively I suppose is a better way to say that—in context of their work, in context of their contribution, in context of their expression of their work on their terms.

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And that felt like I could get my head around that. I could get behind that idea that like, this wasn't about women in relationship to someone else. And this wasn't about using women's bodies or beauty to sell somebody else's product. That's the primary relationship that we see.

Shohreh: Mhm, yeah.

Danielle: Especially women's bodies and women's beauty being used to sell things. And then second to that I would say—and maybe this isn't a hierarchy, I don't know—but it seems to me that the second way that we see women in photographs is next to their spouse or with their children.

Shohreh: Yeah.

Danielle: And nothing wrong with that, but I want something different. So that is where it really felt like, oh no, this is me getting to center these women on their terms in context of their work.

So the sessions, they're just really powerful, right? Because it's also that what happens with that is that you identify what is the story I want to tell? Who am I? What am I living into? What is the expression of me that's most coherent with my work? All these different variables and things. And how do I meet my own gaze and love what I see there?

You know, all the things that most women have to confront when it comes to photography and photography in terms of their business. Am I too attractive? Am I too sexy looking? Am I not attractive enough? Am I too this? Am I not enough? I mean, it's all there.

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So, so much happens with these photos. And then there's the experience of the session and tolerating being seen, which is profoundly uncomfortable. And even for the women that I've worked with who are professionals in front of the camera, it's very different when you're working in a way where you're still being asked to not use your typical posing and masks and things that you've learned how to do.

And then you also have the experience of seeing those photos. And then you have the experience of sharing those photos and watching them being seen. So there's a lot of layers.

I mean, I've always had one-on-one work that I was doing in a consulting or coaching or mentoring kinda way. And in 2018 and 2019, in particular, I really wanted to start naming what was happening behind the camera and bringing it forward and making that transformation accessible to people who weren't doing photo sessions with me.

So in a way, it was this act of, like, you know, bringing the "invisible" parts of my own work and making them visible, while simultaneously, that is also the offer, right? We're learning to see and be seen. We're showing up. We're taking up space. We're naming and claiming. So that's kind of the trajectory.

But in 2018 and 2019, I was on the road a hundred days a year.

Shohreh:

Oof.

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Danielle: I know, it was nuts. So I just didn't have bandwidth to build anything outside of that. Yeah, so then, but 2020, everything stopped. I mean, my last session, my last photo session was March 11th.

Shohreh: Wow.

Danielle: And then we started quarantining March 12th.

Shohreh: Wow, that's a big shift.

Danielle: That is one version of how my work has come to be.

Shohreh: It sounds like you're one, as a photographer, you found your kind of sweet spot of what felt good to you in that work, and you found that in doing branding work specifically for women. And then two, in your discovery of that, you basically realized, oh, well, here's this problem, which is that my clients are coming in and they're struggling with this concept of I'm going to be in front of a camera.

And I think about times when I've been photographed in the past, and you come in, like you said, with all of this baggage, almost, of, like, what are other people going to think about these? Like, did I choose the right photos? Am I doing the right poses? Do I look awkward? Like, all of this list of questions that's all coming from the external of how is this going to present to other people.

And it is this interesting juxtaposition because most of the time for branding photos, they are intended for other people. You're going to use them for marketing. So there is this relationship between you and

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audience. So it makes sense that people are having this kind of external viewpoint when they're thinking about putting those out there.

But as you know because of the work that you do, when we're focusing on pleasing all of these external voices, then that's not going to give us the photos that we want anyways. Because they're not going to be representative of who we are internally and who we are bringing to our businesses.

Danielle:

What I know is that one of the most attractive times to see a person is when they're doing that thing they do. Whatever it is that they are. Like, when we're in the flow of our work, kind of self-consciousness and pretense and whatnot falls away when we're just doing the thing that we do, like, whatever that is.

And you're absolutely right, when we're creating branding images there is definitely, oftentimes at least, a thought of intention around what am I communicating to the other. But I would say as much or more, there is a dropping into who am I when I do this work? Because if I can help you drop into who you are when you do this work, that's going to tell the story. That's going to create the signal that you want to create.

Shohreh:

Yeah, and I think people do really struggle with that dropping in because the dropping in is a vulnerable space to show to other people. And for me, like, I tend to attract a lot of folks, for example, who are in the middle of career transition or particularly those who are interested in starting their own businesses.

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And we do end up talking about this and talking about visibility a lot because they are, rightfully, scared [laughs lightly] to put this piece of themselves, this vulnerable, shiny piece of themselves out there. Especially online because that is a scary place to be.

And in your experience, I'm wondering why do you think this fear is, like, nearly universal for women and marginalized folks?

Danielle:

Stripped down, like, at its core, it's about belonging, and it is both deeply personal, in terms of what your experience is, what the state of your nervous system is, what your history is, and then it's also cultural. We're not living in a time where we've been nurtured or conditioned or practiced at truly being seen for who we are.

So very often when we're coming out with some kind of work, it's coming from a pretty intimate place. Or it's coming from a deeply thoughtful place. Or there's something that feels confronting or controversial or exposing or just centering of the self. So it can be about the content. It can also just be about oh, I'm drawing attention to myself.

I would say this is one of the really deeply common threads for anyone, essentially, who isn't a white male, [Shohreh laughs lightly] really. And there's a spectrum and there's layers. And that isn't to say that someone who is a white male can't have some experience of this either. But the truth is, we're not supposed to draw attention. We're shamed for drawing attention. I mean, what a huge insult of, she just wants attention.

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So that is one of those places where it can feel like ugh, I'm centering myself. I'm going out there and I'm saying, hey, here's my stake in the ground. I got a thing to say and I got a thing to offer you and I'm gonna put a price on it and, like, sell it to you. That can feel so counter to all the messages we've gotten about, you know, don't speak until spoken to, look pretty, don't ask, don't seem needy, don't be demanding, don't be loud, don't take up too much space—all of those pieces. And it's also how we gain power, and we're definitely not supposed to have power.

Shohreh: [Laughs lightly] Ain't that the truth.

Danielle: Right? So we know, implicitly, that we're going against something that we're not supposed to do. And that is terrifying. That piece I feel like is so significant because when we can remember that and acknowledge, like, okay, this is a fear that exists because of a cultural system, a cultural structure, a cultural dynamic, it actually isn't about my self-esteem. It isn't about my needing more confidence. It's, like, redirecting where the problem lives so that we don't loop into endless self-improvement. Endless self-loathing, really. But rather be like, well, it's a real pain in the ass out there and this is really real.

And the truth is, there are risks. I can't self-confidence my way around the risks. I can't mindset my way around the risks. I can get real about, like, oh yeah, right, I'm not supposed to have power, but I will go fucking get some. [Shohreh laughs lightly] And I'm gonna do these things to protect myself along the way. I'm gonna do these things to resource myself along the way.

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And one of those I think that we need to do, for almost all of us, is I'm gonna promise not to turn on myself. I'm gonna promise to look for what's really happening here and not default to it's my fault.

Shohreh: Yeah, so really placing ourselves within those wider structures, these wider areas of oppression and really, like, unjustness to be able to see that, hey, even though I've been taught to blame myself and blame my body for just about everything, like, it's actually not any fault of my own. And I'm fighting against these really horrible, oppressive systems, and that's an uphill battle. And recognizing that just because it's hard doesn't mean you made it that way, but that is the reality of the situation.

Danielle: Yeah. The self-blame piece is very, very, very, very, very effective for capitalism, right?

Shohreh: Mhm.

Danielle: I'm the problem. If I just do this... It just keeps us spending. It keeps us striving. It keeps us thinking that the answer is around the corner. But the other thing about the self-blame is it's often something we learned to do very young, particularly if we grew up with a lot of chaos. I mean, this could be as simple as a divorce, which relatively speaking, isn't necessarily that chaotic, but it's so much out of our control.

So much, if not everything, is out of control when we're a child. But if we blame ourselves, there's some hope that we could maybe make it different. So we oftentimes develop that habit very young because the alternative is if it's not our fault, we're powerless.

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Shohreh: It's almost like a matter of soothing ourselves. It's a coping mechanism, in a lot of ways, to deal with really difficult situations. I see this a lot, of course. I've worked with a lot of clients on body image and things like that where when things are out of control, we blame our bodies because we've been taught that we can control our bodies, right?

Danielle: Yes.

Shohreh: We've all been taught that if we just work harder, if we eat the right stuff and work out in the right way, then we can control our bodies. The reality is much, much more complicated than that. And so much of our bodies, from health to how they look, is out of our control. But because we've gotten that messaging, it can feel like an "easy" thing to grasp onto when other things in our life are feeling like they're out of our control.

And so I think we do, of course, have that natural inclination as humans. Like, we want to control. We want to have agency, especially if we grew up and we didn't have a lot of it. And we do have way more agency as adults. But we also have to be realistic about, like, actually, I can't control this thing. And the blame is going on the wrong part.

Because a lot of times, that control comes as a matter of punishment, and that's where I see the real issues, especially in thinking about bodies, right? It's, everything is out of control, I'm gonna, like, punish my body and whip it into submission and that's how I will handle this situation. When, you know, I would argue that being compassionate and extending our bodies grace and kindness is a more effective way to

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deal with it when things are feeling out of control than trying to, like, grasp for straws on things that ultimately make us feel like shit.

Danielle:

Let's just talk through the health piece for a second. So when we have a health situation that isn't being either influenced or changed by our behaviors, right—and this is familiar for me—you go down the path of doing all the things that you're being told that you're supposed to do. And being told could be internal or external, right? These are the things that you're gonna do and you're gonna get this result. But you don't get the result because there is a mystery element. It could be, quite frankly, terrifying, because this is our body. It's linked directly to our actual survival.

So that feeling of I'm putting in A, B, and C, which is supposed to get me this result but it's not, that can be very, very, very hard to tolerate. And one thing that we haven't culturally been really taught to do or very skilled at is tolerating uncertainty. We're watching it right now. That's why there's binary after binary in the moment whether it's around the vaccine or whatever. It's such a hard thing for us to tolerate uncertainty.

Which is understandable. It sucks. Uncertainty sucks. We want to know; we want to be safe. We just want to be safe, right, but we're living in an unsafe world. And being alive has risk involved, right? But it's tipped to a point that is outside of what we can tolerate, and so we grasp like you said.

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And it's kind of, like, this ironic looping because when we're unsafe, when we're scared, we grasp. But the more we grasp, the more dysregulated we stay. And so like you said, so often, really, the answer—almost always the answer is radical compassion. And I would say grief as well.

Again, going back to the body, when you come to this place of, like, I can do textbook everything I'm supposed to do but my body is doing this thing that I don't like or that's causing me pain or suffering or discomfort or just disappointment but I can't change it. Then you sit with that and bring the compassion and bring the acceptance and grief so you can then say, okay, but what can I do? And even that's a little bit of a rushing to the next thing, you know, so that you can be with the wholeness of you, so that you can see all of you.

Shohreh:

And grief truly has no timeline. Anyone who has ever grieved, which is all of us in various ways, knows that, like, it doesn't matter how sad you are and how much you want it to be over, it's on its own timeline. And we try. Again, this is another area where we try to control, right? Because grief is scary; it feels unsafe. And so when we feel it and it feels like it's going to swallow us, then we distract, we push it down. We try to be like, nope, I'm fine, all is well, instead of allowing ourselves to feel it and move through it.

Because you're right, in a world where we've received very specific messaging about a lot of stuff, bodies being the topic we're on right now, you've been told this, this, and this equals this result which is rarely the case, but it is the dominant messaging. That's a lot of grief.

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That could be, depending on your age, decades and decades of being told one thing and now learning, wow, I dedicated a lot of my life to this idea and I'm learning that it's not true. Or it's not true for me in this moment. Or it's not true in quite the way that I thought.

Danielle: Or it's not true anymore.

Shohreh: Or it's not true anymore, yeah.

Danielle: Which is what happens to so, so, so many women in mid-life. What worked for me with my body up until this age doesn't work anymore.

Shohreh: Yes, our bodies are the ultimate agents of change. We are told, especially as women, that they need to stay the same and we need to stay young and can never show any signs of aging whatsoever. But of course our bodies do change, just like everything else in our lives. And when you've been told, like, it shouldn't and you can handle it and you can be on top of it, like there's absolutely going to be a grief component in there.

And I'm glad that you named that because I agree, I think sometimes people try to skip over that part, or they're just like alright, well I'm adopting this new mindset and everything is fine. And the grieving really does have to happen to fully move in whatever direction you feel like you want to move in after that point.

Danielle: Yeah, and it'll keep tugging on you. It's not going to go away, so don't worry [light laughter]. But the thing is, it does have its own timeline. It's not linear. I've seen people who maybe they did have decades and

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decades of feeling a certain way and then coming to that realization and it transforms really quickly. Right, we're all different. There's so many dynamics at play.

But I think my hope is that we can really understand wholeness as wholeness, right? It is the *wholeness*. It is the entirety of who we are. It's not just the light, it's not just the ascendant. It's also the dark, it's also the descendant. And we can see the beauty of that too and expand to meet that wholeness and allow for that.

So to bring that all the way down to something as simple as, like, how do I post on Instagram? [Shohreh laughs lightly] Which, I want to be clear, when people hear visibility work, they oftentimes think that I'm talking about marketing or social media. And those topics absolutely come up. But that is not the work. I work with lots of people who aren't on social media.

You know, that's not what it's about. It is about being seen. It's about having the capacity to be seen. It's the ability to see the other. It's about taking up space. And when we show up online and we show up in these little ways, in order to actually give an expression of wholeness, the answer isn't to get one specific message right, which we can do and then we loop on and we don't get anywhere. But it's to create a bigger body of work.

Right, like, with your podcast, I would imagine that if somebody sat and listened to all of them, they'd really have a sense of this thread. And I don't just mean bigger as in quantity. I do think that there's something

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to be said for some loosening up in terms of quantity, especially if you're the person that tends towards—that gets gripped by perfectionism, then I would say yeah, let's go with quantity. Because ultimately, that golden thread is there, and the more of you that shows up, the more that we're going to feel it and find it and feel it and find you, right?

No one image, no one post, no one podcast episode could ever be vast or deep enough to hold the multiplicity of any dynamic, multifaceted human.

Shohreh:

No. And what's interesting too, is of course my podcast—so it's been going on for just over two years now—is also, in a way, a living history of my development and evolution over those two years. And I mean, a lot has happened in my personal life and in my business over those two years. But even beyond that, you know, if you went back and you listened to the beginning, right, there's language that I've used that I wouldn't use now. There's, you know, ways of being with people that I have improved on that I would do differently now.

And because of the internet, these things get to live on. And there is this record of, this is a person growing in real time. Which is something that I think is so cool as a business owner and having a body of work, whether it's the podcast or my written work on Instagram or anything else, is that you have you have this cool thread that you get to see. Where you say, oh, that's where I started. But look at where I am now. And it's just something that's really special that I've found. And you can't have that unless you're visible.

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Danielle: Right.

Shohreh: You have to put it out there in order to get this benefit.

Danielle: And that you have it in you to tolerate that you're, like, oh, some of those first podcasts, or maybe the first three-quarters or whatever it is, there's some language and some ways that I wouldn't do now, but they still exist. That's, like, capacity to be visible, right? Like, it takes some roots to be able to do that. And to see it the way that you're seeing it, which is, like, what a beautiful story this tells of evolution. What a beautiful story this tells of iteration. We're allowed to change. We're allowed to grow. We're allowed to do it out loud.

Shohreh: Yes!

Danielle: It doesn't actually make us less credible, less worthy of taking up this space or of putting a price on our offer. Whatever it means that you're alive and you're striving and you're working at it, in a beautiful way.

Shohreh: And it took a long time to have that perspective on it, especially as someone who grew up with a lot of perfectionist tendencies and who grew up really feeling like I needed to craft a narrative of how other people saw me. Through my own work and my own self-work really realizing that I don't have control over how other people see me or view me or judge me has been really important for me.

And then also with my work, really realizing that I have to walk the walk on what I talk the talk with, with my clients. Because I can't go and tell them, hey, it's okay to make mistakes, it's, like growth is important,

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blah, blah, blah, and then not represent that in my own business. And that's what it would be if I went and was like, welp, I'm just gonna take away these episodes or edit them or whatever. I don't wanna do that. I would rather have those out there to be able to say no, here's an example of this.

And I think especially right now, this is important because I typically attract very, like, thoughtful, social justice-oriented people to my business. And they have this real fear around visibility specifically about saying and doing the wrong thing from a social justice standpoint. And I totally get that fear. And I also, you know, tell them, you will say and do the "wrong" thing. You will fuck it up. Because that's what it is to be a human who is learning in real time and trying to figure out all of this complicated stuff in the world that we live in. But that's terrifying to people.

Danielle: It is terrifying. And the climate makes it even more terrifying. And the truth is, we're in such a liminal time and I don't even think we have all the language yet. There's a lot of stumbling and there's a lot of getting it wrong in order to find what's better. I don't even know if it's what's right.

Shohreh: Mmhm.

Danielle: Sometimes it is, in terms of that sense of right relationship, of resonance, of truth. But oftentimes, it's like, can we just do better? I don't know that we have the right language yet. It hasn't been born. I don't know if it will be in our lifetimes.

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Shohreh: And better is certainly a more achievable goal. And when you also consider that these topics are so complicated and so nuanced that there is rarely a best one right answer, or way to be, or way to talk about something. And let's say you're coming from a place of privilege, the marginalized folks who you're looking to and learning from, they're gonna disagree on what is the best right solution or the thing to do as well.

And so it is scary to navigate that. And I think the way to do it is to know that. Yeah, of, I'm just always gonna try to push myself one step better. And be open. Be open to getting that feedback. Thinking about it critically. Listening. Learning. It's when people close themselves off, and they shut down, and they say, oh, well, it seems way too scary that I could get canceled or this or this thing could happen so I'm not going to try—this is where we run into the bigger visibility issue of, well, I'm just going to shrink and not show up and not participate in this.

And if you are someone who is coming from a place of privilege, which we all have privileges, it's on a spectrum, then that for me is where I want to push people to see that not doing anything is not the solution.

Danielle: Right. A couple of key questions that I try to ask myself and encourage the people I work with to ask themselves is one, when I'm doing this thing, who am I actually talking to, right? Who am I speaking to? And am I speaking well to them? And then if I don't do this, so if I go the route of, like, shutting down, who wins?

Shohreh: Mmm.

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Danielle: Because here's the thing: the predatorial voices are not going away. They are not going to sit there and decide that, you know, maybe I shouldn't take up so much space. It's just not gonna happen. It's just not the design of the predator, period. So when we go away, we just make that louder.

But when we show up, even when it is imperfect, even when we get it wrong—I certainly don't want to say that flippantly, right? Like, I really think we need to be—depending on what we're doing, and where we're showing up, and how we're showing up, but kind of pretty much across the board because you know, we're all influencers. We're all influencing somebody. We're all influencing somebody whether it's around our dining room table, or in our neighborhood, or our 50,000 followers or our 200 followers; it doesn't matter. People are listening to you. They care. We're all listening to each other. We all care.

So we need eldership. We need mentors. We need thought partners. We need peer supervision. We need to be doing the work of, hey, I did this thing and I think I got it wrong. Can you help me stand in it and work through it and stay in the game? Or I'm about to do this thing and I don't know how to do it—can you help me?

We can't function at the individualist level that we have. We just can't. And it gets tricky because when we feel shame, when we feel these fears of needing to get it right before we show up, that just pushes us more into our own heads, more into our own vacuum, island kind of thinking.

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Shohreh: It does. And just like you're saying, when we fuck up [laughs lightly], the natural inclination is, I need to go hide under a rock and just, like, wait for this to blow over. I'm never going to show my face again. I don't want to deal with this.

And I understand that. That's so human to have that feeling and to have that shame start to rise. And like you said, this is a piece of the, like, who am I letting win when I do that. Because it's not pushing forward when we don't kind of claim our mistakes.

And I'll also agree with what you said that we all need people in our lives who we can safely go to and say, I fucked up, duh, duh, duh, duh, duh, here's what happened, and, like, not have to be worried about telling them that. 'Cause it can't be everyone in your life. Not everyone has reached this level. But like, Kelly, for example, she's this person for me. If I fuck up in my business, I'm going to Kelly and I'm saying, "Hey, so I fucked up. Can we talk about this? Can we discuss?"

Danielle: Right.

Shohreh: And that has been crucial for me. Like, I need to have someone like that. I think all business owners, in particular, need to have somebody like that.

But even if you don't run a business, even if you're just a human trying to exist and trying to do this thing, like, you need people who can be a sounding board for you. Who can step back and objectively look at the situation. Who can check you and are like, oh, yeah, it seems like you did kind of mess that up. Let's figure out what we want to do about it.

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And so I encourage anybody who's listening who you're like, huh, do I have a person like that? Like, really think about that. Think about who that is in your life. Do you need to go have a conversation with a friend about this and be like, hey, can we be this for each other? Because, yeah, we cannot do this as individuals.

And I think especially when we run our own businesses and it's like a solo business, it can feel like that; it's like us against the world. But you cannot grow nearly as much if you're constantly like, I'm gonna do this on my own. I'm gonna, you know, just be in my head and figuring it out. Like, we really do need other people who we can go to. And if it's not built into the work that we do, we have to create it.

Danielle:

Yes, and I do think that there's different roles. Like, in some ways, it's like building your board of advisors. So, I, for example, have a small handful of people that I work with very intentionally around making sure that I am doing the best that I can to be a really solid facilitator in group work.

I also believe strongly that one of the things that we need is to land a felt sense of safety in our bodies. You know, we've talked a lot about the world and kind of the scarier parts and the harder parts. And yes, we need to orient to joy, and we also need to have the capacity to, like, tolerate the joy and find a felt sense of safety even when the world isn't safe at any given moment.

And there's different trainings that I do, but then there's also individuals that I work with because I want relationship. I want people who are

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more ahead than I am on a particular field or even in life, which is why some of the people, for me it's important that I have elders, like true elders that have a longer lived experience that can help shape me. And, yeah, I've had to create it because that's just not really how we function. And I think it's also being able to circle with a group of other entrepreneurs that are pro-social.

And this is why visibility medicine is set up this way. I want us to do this visibility work in relationship, in witnessing of and with each other. Because that's part of the skill building is intrinsically built into that. There's also one-on-one work and that's an important place for sure, but we've got to get off our islands. It's killing us, first of all. It's so exhausting; it's so brutal. And it doesn't move the needle forward. It's not helping to build a world we want to live in.

Really, it's one of the many lies that we've been sold, is that individualism and individual wins are the way to thrive, but they're not. They're not.

Shohreh:

No, and we have so much to learn from one another. And I, too, am called to group facilitation for this reason because not only are all of the group members learning from each other, I'm learning from each of them. And it's such a nourishing experience for me because my clients constantly say things in a way that I hadn't thought of before. Or come in with a lived experience that I don't have that then shapes how I want to teach or talk about something going forward.

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And I feel so lucky that as part of my work, I get to surround myself with a diverse group of people regularly who are doing amazing things in the world and who then come and share that with me. And it's really beautiful. Not everybody has that in their lives. And so, again, this idea of, like, we have to create it, and this is where we have to go to community. We have to make sure that we are learning from people of different backgrounds, different lived experiences.

Because you only know what you know. You only know what you've been taught or what you grew up with or what you've seen. And this, of course, ties into visibility. The more that folks, especially women and marginalized folks, are visible, the better that it is for all of us because we have all of these different stories and experiences that we can enjoy.

And something that always breaks my heart is that I'll have clients who will say that they're afraid to put themselves out there because they fear that they don't have anything new or special to offer. And there's a very serious conversation that we have where I'm like, yes, you do. By the very nature of being you, you have something that is unique to offer the world.

Danielle: Yeah, and there are so many threads there. There's two places that my brain wants to go. One is actually back to when you mentioned that you spent a lot of your life learning to craft narratives that pleased the other. Do I have that correct?

Shohreh: Yes. I think that I had said I spent a lot of my life learning to manage the narrative about me that other people had.

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Danielle: Yes, which we ultimately realize is impossible and we can only control ourselves and whatnot. But that skill that you have of crafting a narrative and managing a narrative, I heard you do it when you talked about yourself. I heard you do it when you talked about your, like we said, the journey of your podcast and what's still out there and alive from the beginning that isn't totally coherent with who you are now, but you allow to be there. And the narrative you have around that is really beautiful.

So you've taken this skill and quality that you used to use in a way that maybe wasn't ultimately beneficial, but you learned that skill and you're using it for you. And I think this is a really interesting thing.

And I think there's a couple different ways that this happens and that we can work with it, is like, what are the skills that we've learned that we've maybe—oftentimes, we're other-focused, right? Again, especially as women and marginalized identities, we are managing the people around us for our own safety and out of our love for them and our desire to be accepted and belong and all of the things. But if we can take that skill and re-orient it, that can be really powerful.

The other piece is when we can look at the things that have made us feel less than. To make it really simple, it's oftentimes the things we apologize for. I think about this with mothers a lot, but it shows up in all kinds of things. I've heard Kelly speak brilliantly about it in terms of being a fat woman. But like, the things that we sort of apologize or mask or hide, they're actually the things that make us so fucking good at what we do.

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Shohreh: Yes.

Danielle: So, like, when I'm on a call with a woman and her kid comes in, instantly there will be an apology. And I want us to just literally explicitly and implicitly be unapologetic about all these things that we've been told and that we've been given messages we should be hiding or be making smaller, because actually, they are the things that hone our skills and make us so spectacular and so powerful.

Shohreh: Right. And so often, of course, I work with clients who have a lot of marginalized identities, it's that piece of themselves and their experiences with that piece of themselves that they are afraid to show. Because as we've talked about, there is real risk. They have been taught, like, the potential very negative consequences of showing that side of themselves. And for them, that ends up masking that they have so much power in that, right? If I have a client who is a fat woman who wants to become a fitness instructor, a lot of times the conversation is—

Danielle: Who's going to take me seriously?

Shohreh: Yeah, who's going to take me seriously. Because everyone wants, like, a thin, white yoga instructor, whatever it might be. And, you know, my encouragement is always, I'm like, that's exactly—that's *exactly* why we need you. Because people who have had experiences like yours, who have bodies like yours, they need to see that this can be for them too. And this is true across any marginalized identity.

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It is why I am loudly gay across all of my shit. Because it's who I am. And because I need to put that out into the world to show that it is not only okay, it's wonderful and it's celebrated, and that this space is safe if you identify as queer. And maybe if you can see me being loud and proud in my queerness, then you will feel safer to do that for yourself. And feel like, oh, if she can do this, maybe it's okay if I do it too.

And it sucks that we live in a world where that's even a thing, but we do. And that's why this representation and visibility is so especially important for anyone who isn't a white male. Because we are used to the people being most visible being white, in particular cis het men, and seeing them having the power. And we cannot learn a new narrative until we see it being acted out in front of us.

Danielle: Absolutely. And I feel inclined to say there is privilege in that and there is risk assessment that needs to be done.

Shohreh: Yes.

Danielle: So there are times where the reality of a person's situation might say, yeah, that's all well and good, but if I were to show up like that in my world, I would lose my paycheck and then I wouldn't be able to feed myself and my family. Okay, I get that and I hear that.

So that to me is even more reason why if we have the privilege to be able to push those boundaries, to be able to take up space and in an inclusive way—and I mean inclusive of ourselves as well, like, in the not apologizing for the parts of us that we think aren't supposed to be, but really actually centering them, letting them be a part of the narrative—

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we start to change things for those who maybe don't yet have enough faith in their situation or in their system to do that themselves.

Shohreh:

Yes, absolutely. It's such an important point, and I'm glad that you have addressed that. And the other thing that I'll say, and I've talked about this on the show before, is that we can't always be fully visible. Often, we cannot always be fully visible in every single area of our lives. There is an absolute level of privilege to be able to do that.

And sometimes, there is an in between where there's the spectrum between, well, I can't show up authentically at all, or I can always show up authentically. Or maybe there are some spaces or some individuals in which you can step into your power and show up authentically and visibly.

And so I think part of it too is for people who cannot just be fully openly in their identity and their authenticity in every space in their life, do you have spaces and people where you can do that? Can you create that? Because this is where we can take our agency and say, alright, I can't control the larger world or my work or these other situations, but do I have some other spaces where I can show up as myself to help navigate the shitty world that we live in?

Danielle:

Yeah. And at the very least, and sometimes at the very most, can you start with the mirror? Can you make a practice of looking in the mirror once a day and meeting your own gaze and calling in all of you and all of your parts and really seeing you? And really looking into your own eyes and saying, I see you. I accept you. I love you. Maybe even, I

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celebrate you. Maybe even a containment hold or some other practice to just really feel it all the way through your body.

And then maybe the next question is, where else can I bring all of me? Can I bring all of me to my family? Can I bring all of me to—you know, it's interesting, certain platforms we can feel more comfortable bringing a fuller sense of our self than others.

Shohreh: Yeah.

Danielle: Feel into that. If you feel like you can bring more of you into Instagram than Facebook, or more of you to your newsletter or more of you to a blog. Like, where is that? And can you build off of that? And then, of course, there's strategy questions and goals and practical, pragmatic things. And sometimes those don't all line up and we have to do the work to figure out what's true enough and real and how do we move forward.

This isn't, like, simple work. I mean, occasionally for some people, it is. But for many people, there's layers and complexities. It doesn't mean that we can't be wildly successful; we absolutely can. But even wild success has its ups and downs.

Shohreh: And wild success means different things to different people and that becomes part of the question too [laughs].

Danielle: I sure hope so.

Shohreh: What does it mean to you? What is it that you're trying to achieve?

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- Danielle:** What are your measures?
- Shohreh:** Yes, exactly. Well, thank you so much for being here, Danielle. I really enjoyed our conversation. How can people find you? And how can my listeners best support you at this time?
- Danielle:** Oh, they can find me either on my website, which is Danielle-Cohen.com, or they can find me on Instagram @DanielleCohenPhotography. And support me, that's a great question. I mean, learn about my work. If it resonates, then see if you wanna hop on my waitlist. And if you wanna share your thoughts with me, send me your messages. I'm always interested to hear how the work is landing and what you're up to. What's your biggest visibility challenge or your biggest visibility dream? I wanna know.
- Shohreh:** And with your work, do you mind just giving a quick little overview of Visibility Medicine for folks who might be interested in that offering?
- Danielle:** Yes. It's a six-month program. We begin next in January, but I keep the group small and I will probably open and close doors before the end of the year. Over that six months, we work pretty intimately as a group through a variety of themes. And some of those are very tactical things like branding and values, how we're expressing our values or not expressing our values, messaging and positioning, money. We're going to do a whole theme around money. And our visibility hang-ups and injuries, the personal ones, the social ones, and I also weave through all of it trauma work and somatic work and attachment work.

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Shohreh: Fantastic. Well, it sounds like an awesome offering for anyone who is looking to answer some of these visibility questions for themselves. I will link to everything that you just mentioned in the show notes so that it's very easy for people to find.

Y'all, go check out Danielle's work, and thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to record this with me today.

Danielle: Thank you so much, Shohreh. It was so fun.

[Music plays]

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]