

Conjuring Up Courage

#114

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Sabia C. Wade

Shohreh Davoodi: You are listening to episode #114 of Conjuring Up Courage, and the talented and dedicated Sabia Wade is on the show today. She's a CEO, revolutionary doula, educator, reproductive justice advocate, and financial activist elevating the voices and experiences of marginalized communities. Sabia and I discussed some of the inequities in reproductive healthcare, helpful info for pregnant people to have, the importance of using gender-affirming language, understanding money and more.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/114. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/114.

[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 Sabia! I am so appreciative of you sharing your time with me today.
How is the week starting off for you?

Sabia C. Wade: The week is good, but I think the week is also that because I'm going on a little getaway on Thursday, so my week isn't really like a full week [laughs lightly]. So I'm like, oh—I'm like, you know, I've been sashaying through the week because I'm like, oh, one day closer [laughs lightly].

Shohreh: Yes.

Sabia: But how are you?

Shohreh: I am doing alright. I was just telling you before we started recording that I can't believe it's almost October, and time has no meaning. And I feel like that's been my refrain for, like, two years now, and I'm starting to sound like a broken record. But also that is the truth.

Sabia: I'm always like, what is time? What is it, really? 'Cause a day has now become a month, a month is like, almost the whole year is done. Like, I just try to be in the moment as much as I can.

Shohreh: Exactly. Because if I ask myself that question and go too deep into it, then next thing you know, it's like existential dread city [laughs lightly]. So better to just be in the moment and see what's happening right here, right now.

Sabia: Mmhm.

Shohreh: Awesome. Well, to start, I would love for you to share a little bit about you and what you're feeling especially passionate about these days.

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Sabia: Oh, wow. What am I feeling especially passionate about these days? So many things. I guess the basics are I'm the founder and CEO of The Black Doula Incorporated; it's also my brand name. I'm also the founder of my non-profit, For The Village, which is based in San Diego, where we give—we train people in the community to take care of people in the community.

And I also am the Founder and CEO of Birthing Advocacy Doula Trainings. I wish sometimes I didn't name it Birthing Advocacy Doula Trainings because we, like, train more than doulas at this point, but here we are [light laughter]. So we provide all different types of trainings from like, full-spectrum trainings, doula support, to abortion trainings, to birth and disability, to queer and trans. Like, it's a whole bunch of everything.

And yeah, I mean there's probably a lot of other things that I could name, but let's see. What am I feeling passionate about now? Well, I'm in the process of writing my book, *Birthing Liberation*, so I'm starting to feel passionate about that again. I was kind of like, not as passionate because I had too much going on, but I'm clearing out my calendar. Um, I'm actually taking, like, a sabbatical-ish. It's not a real full sabbatical, but I'm like slowing down until January. So there's that.

I'm very, very passionate about money. And not just making it, but like, understanding like, where it goes, why is it going there, what does it influence, and how I could use my money to be most helpful to my community and to the causes that we advocate for.

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And I'm really feeling passionate about Black luxury, like I like to call it [light laughter].

Shohreh: Nice.

Sabia: And that is just, like, radical rest. If you follow @TheNapMinistry on Instagram—

Shohreh: Mmhm, great account.

Sabia: Yes. It's not always about, like, luxury meaning, like, these expensive things, but luxury as in the small things. So like, one of the things, like I bought this cuticle oil like a month ago, and it's on my table in my living room, and like, when I put it on, I feel like I'm like, having a moment of Black luxury [Shohreh laughs lightly]. Like, I'm taking my time to be like, I'm gonna put on this cuticle oil and I don't care what else is going on because I'm gonna use this for five minutes for myself.

And I feel like there was like, one more thing. What was the one thing I was gonna say? Just my regular, you know, reproductive justice, what's going on in the world, who's trying to ban someone else's body. Like, you know [laughter], that kind of stuff.

Shohreh: Right, just that.

Sabia: The regular, what the fuck is goin' on type of shit. And I'm feeling passionate about—I'm currently workin' on a building a wine brand.

Shohreh: Ooh!

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- Sabia:** So I've been having to, like, put together kinda like my wine mood board for my consultants. And it's just interesting because I'm looking at, like, what do I want my wine bottle to look like? And what energy do I want this to give? And like, where do I want my wine to come from? So it's just like, a lot of exploring. And I love to, like, learn. So those are my things.
- Shohreh:** It sounds like you have your hands in a lot of different things right now [laughs].
- Sabia:** [Laughs] Yeah.
- Shohreh:** Not surprised you're trying to take a sabbatical so you can focus on the book. And congrats, by the way, on writing a book. I'm sure that's super exciting.
- Sabia:** Thank you. Yes, it is. It's very exciting. And also kinda unreal and also kinda stressful, but all good.
- Shohreh:** Yeah, I have to imagine the pressure of writing a book.
- Sabia:** Yes.
- Shohreh:** Like, I've always wanted to write one, and it's, like, it's not a project I've started yet. And I'm just like, ugh, that's gonna be so anxiety-inducing [laughs lightly].
- Sabia:** [Laughs lightly]. Yeah, I mean, it's good 'cause I'm like thinking about, like, my thoughts could be in one place. Because there's so many things I want to expand on but I haven't been able to do so, like, publicly and

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with my community because, you know, new people come in so I have to, like, catch people up to, like, where I'm at. So I'm kinda excited to be able to say, like, oh, here's the one place for you to start. Now I can start expanding on these ideas even more.

Shohreh: That makes a lot of sense. And what you were saying about money, too, like that really resonated with me. And trying to figure out, like, where it comes from, where it goes, because I feel like a lot of us don't understand money at all. It's something I'm continuing to learn more about.

But also what you said about figuring out how you can effectively use your money. Because I think sometimes we get this messaging that, like, obviously capitalism is terrible and money is the worst, and what I always talk to people about is how, like, money in the hands of certain people is the worst.

Sabia: Yes.

Shohreh: And we've seen, like, what can happen to our society when people with a lot of privilege have money and use it to keep their power. But if we can increase the access to money for everybody else, specifically for marginalized people, like, everybody I know, what they would do with their money is very different from what, like, all of the billionaires are doing with their money, you know? And it's a lot more community-centered.

Sabia: Exactly [laughs]. Yes, you get it. And I think, like, for me, specifically in the last two years, like, I have went on a cool kind of, like, money

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journey. And it's still going. Like it hasn't stopped. But in the last two years, I've become more financially secure than I've ever been. And it still comes with a lot of, like, feelings of, like, is this bad? Is this good? Like, what do I do? How much do I, like, save for myself? How much do I invest in my community? How do I divest and invest in the right places? You still have to play the game, right? Like, there's still capitalism. There's still these things that are existing. So you're like, okay, retirement. Like, what do I do about that? [Light laughter] It's just, like, so much to think about.

But over the last couple of years—and I would say really over this last summer, I've been able to be more intentional and I've learned a lot. I also did an internship with my financial firm that I actually use, Abacus Wealth. And I was able to kinda go on the inside of, like, how are people with lots of money—like, what are they doing with it? And like how much money is it? Like, and it's so much [laughs]. It's so much. That's why I'm like, so passionate about it because I'm learning too.

Like, even when we talk about the abortion law that just happened in Texas, which you know is, like, a wreck.

Shohreh: Yup.

Sabia: Like, it is a complete and utter wreck.

Shohreh: It's a dumpster fire here in Texas most of the time.

Sabia: Exactly. There's a firm called Adasina Social Capital and I met the founders of it. So what they do is actually, like, look at who's investing

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what where. So they did some investigation into who actually put their dollars into making that pass. And like, when you look at that—and I'll try to pull up the actual, like, who it was and maybe I'll be able to remember this at some other point, but when you look at that, right, like, what actual companies have put their money behind it and why, it just changes the whole game of how you think, how you approach the things that you're advocating for.

So for me, it's just like, I don't know, I'm calling it kinda like, financial activism. And especially being, like, a black, non-binary, queer woman, to have some type of money and to be able to start, like, thinking about it and having these conversations with people that have a lot of money, I want to use that access in the best way that I can.

Shohreh:

Right. In a past life, I was a wealth planning attorney, so I helped very rich people do estate planning. And it definitely opened my eyes to all the different ways that people can basically hang onto wealth, legally. Because it's written into our laws of how people are able to hang onto their generational wealth and make sure that the government doesn't take it and that nobody else gets it.

And it was so depressing. I mean, I didn't do it for very long [laughs lightly] before leaving to start my own business. But it was good information to have because I didn't know the extent of it before I was actually in it and seeing it on the other side. And I was like, wow, this is very scary to think about.

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- Sabia:** Yeah, it's wild. And it's like, while—I know for me, especially while working with the firm doing the internship I just did, one is just like, I often feel like I'm in these, like, two different worlds because I know that \$100 is a lot of money, right? But then also I know that in some spaces, two million dollars is nothing.
- Shohreh:** Yep.
- Sabia:** [Laughs lightly] Right? It's just wild.
- Shohreh:** It is. And it's hard to wrap your head around if you've never seen or been around that kind of wealth, which is most people. The vast majority of people in the U.S. have never experienced or been around people who have that kind of wealth and it's so hard to imagine. You know, I always like when people show the difference between a millionaire and a billionaire and how, like, staggeringly different that is 'cause that's when I'm like, no one should have a billion dollars. Absolutely no one [laughs lightly].
- Sabia:** Yeah, and it's like also too, when I'm looking at, like, the racial wealth gap, which we know is obviously a big issue—
- Shohreh:** Yes.
- Sabia:** —I never thought about just the disparity in inheritance.
- Shohreh:** Oh my gosh, yeah.

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Sabia: Like how some people just, generation to generation, they just get these big-ass inheritances. Like, they just got money. Like, it's just there.

And like, I was listening to this podcast yesterday, and they were talking about how, you know, like on HGTV, it'll be like two white people, and they're like, you know, one is a part-time teacher, the other one is like, I don't know, he works as a construction worker or whatever. And they'll be like, oh, what is your budget? And it'll be something that just doesn't even make sense to you.

Shohreh: Yeah, several million dollars usually. And it's like, wait a minute.

Sabia: How is this happening? But like, a part of that is inheritance. So part of that is these other pieces that sometimes we don't think about in the realm of, like, forming wealth or having wealth. And so I'm like thinking about that, like, how do we create this for people of color? And it's, like, maybe because I'm getting older too, I'm like, dang, like, having, like, fucking insurance and all that other stuff and if you die, whatever, is really important because that really could be the only money that's gonna maybe help to create some type of ongoing financial security for your family. Which is wild. But I'm just like all in it now.

Shohreh: People don't understand that, like, when we're talking about wealth, that this—of course, this bootstraps idea of like, everyone can just work hard and gain money—they don't realize that people aren't starting from the same place. Like, when you have literal generations and generations and generations of people with privilege and, uh, finances,

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and you see how that all builds on itself over time, and then you have folks who are literally kept from having, like, any financial resources for centuries, like, nobody is starting from the same place. Like, we have not addressed that as a nation.

And so without doing something systemically, like, people cannot catch up. People of color in this country will always be “behind” white folks, which is, you know, how people in power want it to be.

Sabia: Exactly. But I’m tryin’ to make some new shit happen [laughs lightly].

Shohreh: Yes, that’s why we have to have these conversations.

Sabia: Yes. And also I found out who it was. So the organization or company that contributed to sponsoring of SB8 in Texas was UnitedHealth Group.

Shohreh: Good to know. And distressing.

Sabia: Yes. So Adasina has, you know, contacted them and tried to have some conversations. Because Adasina is like, if you’re not gonna do shit we do, then we need to exclude you from our index. So that’s how they move money. They’re like, hey, we have people that are invested in you, but we can also stop that shit [laughs lightly]. Like, we can try to move some things around so that you feel pressured to divest from whatever bullshit you invested in. So yeah, money [laughter].

Shohreh: We went on an awesome money tangent and I enjoyed every second of it [laughter].

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Sabia: Same.

Shohreh: Alright, I'll bring us back to the topic at hand. And I think a good starting place is that I feel like the word "doula" is much more in the public lexicon these days than even a few years ago, but there are probably some people listening who are like, what is a doula? What's a birthworker? Like what the hell are they talking about? So if you wouldn't mind just, like, [Sabia laughs lightly] giving a brief description of that.

Sabia: What the hell is a doula? I ask that question often [laughs lightly]. But let's see, a doula on the, like, very basic definition is a support person, and that support person is usually trained to help a birthing person before, during, and after birth, but also with any type of reproductive experiences. So, you know, that could be anything from birth to postpartum to any form of loss to surrogacy. I was a surrogacy doula for a while. Um, so anything that has to do with reproductive experiences, a doula can be present for.

Shohreh: And I had recently heard about abortion doulas as well, which I thought was super cool.

Sabia: Yes, so abortion doulas are so dope. At BADT we have a four-week course around that. But we really talk about, like, abortion doulas being there for education, for support, for, you know, aftercare, whatever is needed.

And also, like, if we're thinkin' about specifically things like SB8 in Texas, which is outlawing "abortion access" after six weeks—which

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most people don't find out they're pregnant until six weeks or more— then you're talking about an abortion doula being the person who is helping you understand where are your resources?

And one of the things I was just reading yesterday was about nearby states having such a huge increase of Texas, you know, people comin' there saying, "I need help."

Shohreh: I'll bet.

Sabia: Yeah [laughs lightly], like, I need help, right? And I need it pretty quickly. Because with abortion, um, you also have other laws that are in place as far as, like, when you come to get an abortion, you have to wait 24 hours to actually have the abortion. And so now you're talking about travel expenses, you're talking about how much of the cost of the actual abortion 'cause it depends on where you are and that experience. And also, like, if you're gonna need childcare, if you're gonna need a day off from work, will you be able to get that? Will you be able to get the money back from that?

So abortion care and abortion doulas have a very big job. But it's really based in community-based care, which is, like, what I love the most. Because there's so much stigma, there's so much unnecessary bullshit that comes with accessing an abortion. So abortion doulas are just amazing.

Shohreh: And for those listening, I recently, uh, did a post about the new Texas abortion law. I am a Texan, I'm here where this is happening. And in that post, I listed a number of organizations that are doing everything

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they can to help folks get abortions even with this law. So paying for those things, like, getting people out of state, paying for their lodging and everything that they need, or getting people abortion pills and all that good stuff.

So I will link to that in the show notes in case you want to donate to any of those organizations. If you've been like, "Ah, what can I do to help," that's a good place to start 'cause there's a lot of folks who are doing good work around this. I wish they didn't have to be, but thankfully they're stepping up to help people here in the state.

Sabia: For sure. And you know, the one thing I emphasize is always, like, abortions don't stop because there are some laws in place tryin' to make them stop. We're always trying to make sure that access to healthy, like, safe abortions aren't impossible. 'Cause they happen either way. And they've been happening forever, so.

Shohreh: Exactly. Well, and I know that one of the reasons that the role of a doula or midwife or other birthworker is so important is because we do have so many inequities in reproductive health here in the U.S. in particular. Can you talk a little bit about what those inequities are and what are the things that, like, reproductive justice advocates are fighting for at this time?

Sabia: There's so many things. So, one of the reasons that I created my doula training organization was because at the time when I became a doula, which was in 2015, I was a volunteer full-spectrum doula with The Prison Birth Project. And so I started off my work with incarcerated, formerly

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incarcerated people in recovery and sometimes actively using. And, yeah, that was an inequity within itself, right? [Laughs lightly] You know, like, incarceration and their treatment. And most of the time, we were like, I mean, still, dealing with the no-shackle law, with that, and people were not even really following it. It was just a whole bunch of bullshit. So there's that.

And then as I kinda got more into the work, you know, I learned about Black disparities in reproductive healthcare, one being Black birthing people are dying two to three times that of white birthing people—actually three to four times that. And then our infants being around two to three times that depending on the area. So, I was like, okay, dang. Like, there's some shit happening.

And then I decided to, like, navigate actually into the "professional birth space." And I say that because, you know, getting out of the non-profit kinda life and, like, rolled me into how people were actually doin' this as a career. And I was like, okay, wow, this is wild, one that this is a career, because I never thought about that my first two years being a doula. But two, also, as I was, like, navigating into learning about different organizations who were doing doula trainings and all of that, I wasn't really seeing a real clear picture of what we call disparities and inequities.

And when we think about reproductive justice as a whole, everything is connected to it. And reproductive justice says, like, we should be able to have or not have children based on our own decisions. We should also be able to live in safe and sustainable communities and just have

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access to the things that we need. And if you think about that
[laughs]—

Shohreh: Right, that brings in every system of oppression and all the problems
[laughter].

Sabia: Yeah, exactly, right? So, like, it goes from everything from nutrition,
right, like food deserts and things like that. It goes into fuckin' real
estate, gentrification, people being pushed out of spaces. Like, I mean,
it goes into everything. Everything is reproductive justice. So when
people ask me about the inequities, I'm like, it's everything [laughs
lightly]! Like, you know, more or less, if you can think about it, there's
probably some disparity or inequity that is, like, within that topic that
you're thinking about.

Shohreh: And I know that some of the research that's been done on, like, Black
maternal health outcomes in particular has been fairly damning in terms
of, like, the medical industry and the racism that's within it—

Sabia: Yes.

Shohreh: —and how Black patients are treated versus white patients. And I think
that's one of the biggest ones that always comes to mind for me and
why, again, someone like a doula or birthworker could be really
important as someone who can advocate for you when there is this
power differential between the medical staff and the birthing person.

Sabia: Yes. I'm writing about this in my book, *Birthing Liberation*. It will focus
on the history of Black disparities in reproductive care as well as, like,

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the present of where we are now versus, also, like, where we wanna go. So, for me, getting to where we wanna go takes a few things, one them being understanding the history. Like, we gotta understand what did we do before? What got us here? What is influencing how we got here? What have we tried before that maybe worked, maybe worked a little bit, maybe didn't work? [Laughs lightly]

Um, and then we also have to have, like, this acknowledgement of what is. And we can say right now that in a lot of spaces, like, medical educational spaces where physicians are being trained and different medical providers are being trained, they aren't really being taught this, right? Like these disparities and what's causing it. They aren't really taught enough about our own bias, our own, you know, racism. You know, these things that are super important. So, because of that, there's, like, a lack of self-awareness, right?

And I also think that when we think about racism—and this is kinda like where my book will really be laying in [laughs lightly], is that when we think about racism, it's a trauma. It's a trauma for everyone. Um, and I think it is very easy for us to see it, obviously, in people of color because we are the victims of racism. But it's also a trauma for white people, right?

And one way that that shows up is, like, their incapability to be around anything that's different. Their, you know, incapability to see beauty in something that's different. Their need to be on the defense any time something is "different." Or, even like the sensitivity, right? Like, anytime someone says something to you about what you could have

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possibly did wrong to this Black patient, you can't even, like, absorb it [laughs lightly]. Like, you're already in, like, whether it's white tears, defense mode, whatever your trauma response may be, right, like, flight, freeze, you know, fawn, whatever it is. That has to be worked through.

So even though we are doing, like, these big stretches right now to do, like, implicit bias trainings, to do, you know, all this kind of stuff, that's good and that's a part of working towards a solution, but then the other part of that too is who is keeping people accountable after these trainings?

Shohreh: Yeah.

Sabia: No one [laughter].

Shohreh: No oversight.

Sabia: Yeah [laughs]. And then two, it's like, what is the personal work that we all are accountable for doing as we try to continue to work on this issue. And it's all very personal. But we can look at systems and say, like, this medical system is fucked up, and, like, it is. But systems are just people. They're communities of people [laughs].

So we have to look at the individual and say, like, how is racism as a trauma affecting you and the way that you care? Whether it's giving you a bias, unconscious bias, whatever it is. Like, these are the things we have to be willing to work on together in order to actually do

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something beneficial. And that also includes that we can't cancel everyone that makes a mistake, right?

So, like, it's a lot of pieces. And doulas are definitely helpful, right, but we are somewhat of a band-aid [laughs lightly].

Shohreh: Yeah.

Sabia: Right, because we can work with a client at a time or whatever it is, but we're not reaching—I think it's like we're still not reaching, like, 90% of the births that are happening in the U.S. So if you think about that [laughs lightly], like, we can help where we can, right, but doulas are not the answer. We're part of the solution, but we also need everyone else to jump onboard to actually have a, like, sustainable, longstanding solution in place.

Shohreh: And I think, speaking of people and kind of what we can do as individuals, I'm curious if there's any specific knowledge from, you know, all the learning that you've done and your experiences that you want folks to know in terms of their agency in pregnancy and the birthing process. 'Cause I think sometimes people don't have a doula, they don't have someone who's advocating for them, so they don't know, like, what they're allowed to ask for or request or insist on versus what they're not.

Sabia: Mhm. Yeah, because everyone is not gonna have a doula. That's just—it's a matter, it is what it is. It'd be beautiful if everyone did, but it's not possible. Not right now. So I think there's a few things. The funny thing about birth and being a doula is that I never thought about

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birth or anything prior to being a doula. Like, I never wanted to get pregnant, so I really didn't care.

Shohreh: Same [light laughter].

Sabia: So I was, like, okay, people have babies, that's what they do, ain't none of my damn business. But one of the things that, like, really could be helpful if someone ever plans to have a baby or if they're just curious, like, just learn about the process of birth. Most people do not learn about birth until they're pregnant, right, or until they're expecting.

Shohreh: Or until someone really close to them has a baby and then gives you all the details [laughs lightly].

Sabia: Well yeah, unless someone really close to them—exactly. But like, at that time, there's this level of emotional, like, I don't know, emotional connection to it where it can be hard to both consume information and not be emotionally affected by it. Does that make sense?

Shohreh: Mhm.

Sabia: So it's like, when you do it when you don't really need it yet, you're more kinda into like, let me see the logics of like, step one, step two, this can happen, these are things I should be aware of, so on and so forth. So if you can, just educate yourself even at the fertility stage.

And then I would also say a really important thing is to understand what are your options? And so that can be done on Google. Are you in a place where you can have a home birth? If you had a home birth, what physical things would you have to have present or not present in order

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to be in the home birth space, if that's something that you are interested in? If you're going to be in a hospital, what hospitals are actually in your area? What options do they have?

Then, also, like what are their policies? Call them up. Hey, is it possible for someone to get access to your policy around C-sections? Your policy around this or your practices around that? I just wanna get some information. Look up their C-section rates, right? Like, look up these things that could just give you a little bit of snippets into how they may deem birth.

Some people see birth as a very like, you know, it's happening, it's not someone to save something from. Even though it may look painful, it's a part of the process. Where some people see it as something I must intervene into because there is pain, because there is discomfort, because there is this super medicalized way that I learned about birth.

And then also, another big thing that I would say is even if you don't have access to a doula, childbirth education is really, really helpful for many reasons. One, you're gonna get educated on, you know, the before, the birth, the process of birth, and after, as well as just being in community with other people who are experiencing the same thing [laughs lightly]. Like, sometimes it's just nice to have someone to talk to about what you're goin' through. 'Cause pregnancy, even being a partner, like, that is a lot.

And I would also say too, think about in the worst-case scenario, right, like, mentally, where could your mental health go? And just set up for

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that. [Laughs lightly] Just like, set up for it. Don't assume that it's gonna happen, but if it does happen, you already have your team in place.

'Cause obviously birth is a physical thing, and babies are beautiful, and, like, blah, blah, blah, but me being a doula, I'm gonna be honest with y'all [Shohreh laughs lightly]. Babies bring a lot of change, a lot of shifts, a lot of feelings. And, you know, sometimes you can't even recognize yourself, right, and then you have this little thing looking at you, like, I don't care what you can't recognize.

Shohreh: Depending on you [laughs lightly].

Sabia: Yeah, like, I'm hungry [laughs lightly]. So it's really good to have, like, your family for support, if it's like a therapist. Whatever it is, just having those things in place in case you need it. Those are my top things. I mean, there's many others, but those are my top things.

Shohreh: No, that's an excellent list of things for people to be thinking about. And thankfully now with, like, the internet, I feel like there is so much information that's accessible to folks, so it's easier to find a lot of this stuff for free or low cost than it was before.

That was making me think of another topic as well that—I've heard it talked about a lot in the birthing world lately, and that is around inclusive language when we're talking about pregnancy and birthing. And also gender-affirming practices in reproductive work in general. Like, I'd love to hear what you've been seeing and thinking about that lately.

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Sabia: Yes! So, so funny. So one of the shirts I was hearing yesterday, which is, like, one part of our, like, BADT swag, is “inclusive language is not exclusive.” And it’s just kind of like, I struggle. I personally struggle when people are just not open to using inclusive language. ‘Cause I’m like, why? [Laughs lightly]

I mean, like, when I think, like, part of the big debate, and maybe even some of your viewers may have this in mind, is I think that when we talk about inclusive language, people think that it’s an erasure of more gendered language, like mom, dad, whoever. And the thing is, it’s not. It’s really just saying to a birthing person, hey, I’m gonna give you this general label right now, and you tell me how you would like to be called, right? And so some people are gonna say mom, some people are gonna say dad, some people are gonna say other things.

Um, I think it was, like, Elon Musk, his wife/girlfriend—I think they’re kinda broken up now, I don’t know [Shohreh laughs lightly]—but it was, like, interesting ‘cause she was saying that, um, with her son, I think, that she doesn’t like being called mom; it just doesn’t feel comfortable for her. She would just rather him use her first name.

And like, it just gives the option. It just gives the option for hey, before I assume what you wanna be called or how you like to be referred as, let me just ask you. And then, once I know that, I can call you by that, whether that is your pronouns, whether it’s your first name, whether it’s, you know, how you identify as a parent. It’s all about really coming from a trauma-informed space, right? Like, if we think about, like, trauma-informed care principles, you wanna build trust. You wanna

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relate to people. You wanna give them the power to be who they are, right?

Because as a doula or even a physician or any type of provider, there is that power dynamic that is there. So with that, how can we, like, just make the power kinda equal, right? How can we shift that? And a part of that is just being inclusive. A part of it is just asking and being curious about how someone wants to be named or seen or whatever.

So I guess I just don't understand [light laughter] why people have a hard time with it. 'Cause I'm like, no one's erasing moms. I call my mom "mommy," okay? She's my mommy, and like, I'm 32 years old and that just is what she is. But if she by some chance tomorrow said, "I don't want you to call me that anymore; I prefer this," I'd be like, alright. Okay. Like [laughter], I respect you, and like, if that's gonna make you feel good, if that's gonna make you feel whole and seen and cared for and make you feel safer in this space, let's do it. That's what it's all about: just being inclusive of everyone and not being exclusive of anyone.

Shohreh: What came to mind was that it's not erasure, but it is expansion.

Sabia: Yes!

Shohreh: You know, we're just, like, making more room for different peoples' experiences and identities. And I'm with you. I did an entire podcast episode with Maxine Ali about using inclusive language, which I'll include a link to in the show notes, and we talked about this, about how

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people cling to certain language, one, probably because people just don't like change, right?

Sabia: That's definitely one, mhm.

Shohreh: I think two, there's this sort of knee-jerk reaction of, if I agree to change my language, like, I'm admitting that what I was doing before was wrong, and people hate to admit that perhaps what they were doing before was wrong. And then yeah, people just get attached to words, which I get, you know? People are like, but I like this word. Or someone will be like, hey, when you use that word, this is how it feels for me or for this community, and people will be like, but I didn't mean it that way.

Sabia: Exactly. And the thing is, like, people have to get over themselves [laughs]. Like we just—

Shohreh: Amen!

Sabia: When we, like—and that's myself included. Like, when I first started comin' into the work in 2015, it was a whole new world to me. I was comin' from the medical field. It's super gendered in the medical field. I didn't know as much as I know now.

And I remember I went to this event, to the CLPP Conference. And it's at Amherst College in Massachusetts. And so they had, like, gender-neutral bathrooms. And I was like, oh, okay [laughter]. Like, I was just like okay...alright, this is all, like, new to me, right? But like, for me, it's

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like, I have the ability to expand. I can grow. There's always something for me to learn.

So if that comes from, like, you know, whether I was being not very inclusive before and now I'm stepping into some newness and I'm practicing using more inclusive terms, then that's what it is. Like, I can give myself the ability to learn. And it's not even about necessarily being wrong than it's like, we kinda do what we can with what we know at the time.

Shohreh: Yes, exactly.

Sabia: But once we learn something new, let's just implement that, you know [laughs]? Like, let's just work around it and also give ourselves times to not be perfect.

And then, you know, the bigger thing for me is, like, when we're talking about Black disparities, or we're talking about disparities for queer and trans people, or whatever it is, like, if we're talking about wanting equality or equity for people of color, for all these marginalized communities, we want to do the work, a part of the work is getting over yourself [laughs]. Like, a part of it is being like, you know what? This bothers me, but this is about me.

Maybe I'm being a little selfish in my thought process right now. Maybe I want to be addressed as a woman, and somebody's not gonna do that from the beginning and they're gonna say "people" or "person." And then I can just say, hey, I'm a woman, and they can say, okay, great, I'll keep you that way, you know [laughs]? You know, it's like, we have to

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get over ourselves if we're really talking about creating, like, a just world for everybody.

Shohreh: It may be a bit challenging for you at first to be thoughtful about language and to change it.

Sabia: Absolutely.

Shohreh: And, like you said, we're not doing it for ourselves; we're doing it for the benefit of other people. And it's like, if you are an empathetic human, like, if you care about how you make other people feel, why the hell would you not want to use language that is gonna make them feel good and seen?

And that's why I hate the whole, like, "people are just too sensitive now" thing. And I'm like, that is such a dismissive thing to say when we're talking about the core of people's identities and who they are. Like, if someone is not a woman, is not a man, identifies as non-binary or gender non-conforming or any other thing, then it's not being too sensitive for them to ask for you to use language that is inclusive of that.

Sabia: Exactly. And you have to question, why does that hurt *you*, right? Because if you know your identity and you are feelin' good about that and your identity is still being seen 'cause someone is asking you, "well how do you identify," like, why is it bothering you for someone to choose to be something that they are? Where is that coming from, right? And work on that [laughs lightly].

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So when we think about it, it's not really the inclusive language, per se, or the erasure of the thing. What is it about you that is unsettled by this? What is it about you that feels triggered by this? Is this related to some trauma that you have experienced around feeling erased? Or maybe just having, you know, some negative feelings around your gender, your this, your that. Like, work on you and see, like, what that brings up versus trying to change your external spaces to fit what's hurting you.

Shohreh: I could not have said that better myself. Exactly.

Sabia: [Laughs] It kills me. I'm like, listen, we can't build the world to respond to your trauma.

Shohreh: [Laughs lightly] Yes.

Sabia: You know, we all wish we could create, like, this beautiful, easy way of navigating through the world 'cause it just goes along with the ups and downs of our trauma and so we don't have to think about ourselves because our external is always changing based off exactly what we want and need at the moment. That's not gonna happen. [Laughs lightly]

Shohreh: No.

Sabia: So you gotta work on you. So that way when you are navigating the world, you are navigating it using the tools that you can to keep yourself regulated. It's difficult for me too. But, like, this is self-work we have to focus on.

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Shohreh: Yes, exactly. If the ultimate goal is that we wanna make this world more just and equitable and inclusive for everyone, like, this is the kind of individual work that we have to be doing to make that possible.

Sabia: Exactly, you get it. We're on the same page.

Shohreh: I get it. [Sabina laughs lightly] Hopefully some other people listening will now get it too, having heard it explained in this way. [Light laughter]

Well, thank you so much for being here. This was such a wonderful conversation. How can people find you, and is there any way that my listeners can best support you or your organizations at this time?

Sabia: Yeah. I can be found on Instagram, @TheBlackDoula. Just that, nothing special in between that. Also theblackdoula.com. I'm actually in the process of working on my new website, which is sabiawade.com, which I'm like super excited about because it shows, like, the expansion of me over the last two or three years. So it'll give, like—when people are like, what are you working on, it's a million things, I'm like, it is [light laughter]. But now people will be able to see that more and kinda like, understand how the dots are connecting.

Birthing Advocacy is on Instagram, @BirthingAdvocacy or birthingadvocacy.org. And For The Village is forthevillage.org. I mean, if you go to that, the website is kinda shaky right now [Shohreh laughs]. Umm, we're working on a rebrand. But we just got a \$100,000 grant from BlueCross.

Shohreh: Oh my gosh, that's amazing.

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Sabia: So, yeah. So great. It's gonna help our programs so much. And so yeah, those are, like, definitely the best ways to find me or something that is related to me. And then as far as support for me right now, it just looks like letting me take a break [laughter]. Um...

Shohreh: So don't show up in your DMs and pepper you with questions [laughs].

Sabia: Yes. Yes, please, like, when you are looking for me or want to do something, the best way is to like, go to my website and send an email so my assistant can see it so she can handle it. But for me it's just like, encouraging rest, encouraging me writing this book, encouraging me to do the things that I am passionate about is just really helpful for me. And, you know, also just like, sharing the ways that you are doing the work is really motivating for me. And just trying to make space for everyone to be themselves is really exciting for me.

Yeah, rest, writing, and just letting people be themselves is most loving and it makes me happy and yeah. I don't ask for too much. [Shohreh laughs lightly] I try not to.

Shohreh: I feel like the more that we give space for other people to be themselves, the more that we have space for that as well.

Sabia: Exactly.

Shohreh: And so it's this beautiful, congruent thing. And again, going back to what we were talking about with language and everything else, that's how I always view that. I'm like, the more that I can affirm other

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people's authenticity, the more I get my authenticity affirmed, and we all feel more joyful, which is a great thing.

Sabia: Exactly! That is like what the goal is. I always, like, try to tell people, what would you be doing if you didn't, you know, feel limited? If you didn't feel judged? If you didn't feel like, you know, your mom is gonna say this negative thing? Like, what would you do if you just had all the space and time to be yourself?

Shohreh: Hm. That is an excellent question.

Sabia: You'd probably do a lot of different things. [Laughs lightly] Yeah.

Shohreh: Yeah. Everyone, uh, write that down [laughs lightly].

Sabia: [Laughs lightly] Yeah, and like, it's a process, and it's something that, like, I am working on. Like, when people are, like—also, too, if you're into human design, I'm a manifesting generator. So I literally don't feel happy unless I'm working on several things that are myself. Like, you know, reproductive justice is myself wholeheartedly, but also, so is wine [light laughter].

Shohreh: That explains the wine brand.

Sabia: Yeah, exactly. And so is money. And so is, like, BDSM. And so is, like, you know, all these different things that make up who I am. And I remember, like, two years ago when I was kinda struggling with like, depression and all this other stuff, I was like, should I, like, put that on my Instagram, or like, should I not? Like, are people gonna say something about my mental health?

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And then I was like, fuck it. It's me. A bitch is depressed, okay?
[Laughter] I was like, a bitch is depressed, and it's just goin' through it, like—but the reason for that, it was like, yo, if I can be my full self, if I could be an example of that, if I could show the good and the bad, like, I can only imagine the space it will create for others to do the same.

Shohreh: Mm. Exactly.

Sabia: And so that's the goal for me: just be myself, do a thousand things, and, like, be happy, as much as I can be.

Shohreh: And that's how we help beat shame too, is by being examples of all the different things, being multifaceted people.

Sabia: Fuck shame. Listen, shame will have you in a situation not living your life the way you want to, depressed, doing all this extra shit trying to please people. My friend yesterday was like, something about first impressions, and I was like, listen, I'm showing up how I show up [light laughter], and, like, if the person don't like it, that's not a good first impression for them, you're not gonna shame me, or just even the potential of shame, into, like, being something that I'm not to make you happy. It's not gonna happen. Sorry.

Shohreh: Truth. So much truth. [Light laughter] Awesome. Well, I will link to all of your stuff in the show notes so people can go check it out, follow all the different places on Instagram. Not bother you [light laughter], but check out what's there.

Sabia: Send me love.

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Shohreh: Send love! Exactly, love and support.

Sabia: All, yeah, work requests, you can definitely send that to my email.

Shohreh: That goes to email.

Sabia: But everything else, I love it. Hit me up.

Shohreh: Okay, perfect. Well, thank you again, Sabia. This was such a lovely conversation, and I'm excited to share it with everyone.

Sabia: Thank you.

[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]