

# Conjuring Up Courage

## #125

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Ariella Serur

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**Shohreh Davoodi:** You are listening to episode #125 of Conjuring Up Courage. Today's guest is queer dating coach, Ariella Serur, who is on a mission to disrupt traditional dating advice and transform the dating pool into one folks enthusiastically want to jump into. We discussed some of the unique challenges queer folks face when dating, how to shift your mindset around expectations and success while dating, what makes a great profile on dating apps, and more.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/125](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/125). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/125](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/125).

[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 Ariella! It is so lovely to get to have you on the show. How are you doing today?

**Ariella Serur:** I'm great. I'm so happy to be here, thanks for having me.

**Shohreh:** Yay, of course. I'm super excited to get into all things queer dating with you today. But first, can you just tell me a little bit about who you are and what kind of stuff gets you out of bed in the morning, both professional and personal?

**Ariella:** Yeah, totally. What a big, great question. Who I am...I'm a lot of things. I'm a queer dating coach, obviously. I'm an actor. I'm a composer. I'm a traveler. A creative enthusiast, curiosity enthusiast. I'm a partner, sibling. Lots of things.

And right now what's getting me out of bed in the morning is sinking my teeth into a lot of different areas at one time. So my partner and I just wrote a musical and that's felt very exciting and meaningful, kind of about dating. So it has been, like, a really interesting blend of a lot of the things I'm passionate about. And I'm also moving this weekend. So these are kind of the things that are floating around in my world in this moment.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, when you said you were a composer, my ears perked up 'cause I was a music major in what feels like a different life at this point in time [laughs lightly].

**Ariella:** Totally. What kind of music major?

**Shohreh:** I was an oboe performance major.

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- Ariella:** Wow, oboe! What an interesting instrument.
- Shohreh:** [Laughs lightly] It is an interesting instrument, and I was thankfully very talented at it.
- Ariella:** Wow!
- Shohreh:** But I just could not fathom a life of just practicing for hours and hours by myself every day.
- Ariella:** Yeah, and that would have been very classical, huh?
- Shohreh:** Yeah, it would have been super classical. I was not doing anything, like, fun and modern at the time. And, like, I loved performing, and that's, like, my big takeaway from my time as a music major, is that I was like, oh, I love being in the spotlight. Like, I love to be, like, with an audience, like, putting things out there. And obviously this now translates into things like having a podcast, doing Reels, all those business owner type stuff. But I was like, I don't love all of the other things, so maybe not the right career track for me.
- Ariella:** When you say you played oboe, do most people know what that is?
- Shohreh:** Oh my god, no [light laughter]. Which is so weird for me.
- Ariella:** Yeah, that's like a really niche instrument.
- Shohreh:** And it's like, having grown up a huge band nerd, and, you know, I started playing when I was in sixth grade, and then I was, like, around music people for years and years, it's still strange to me that people don't know what the oboe is.

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**Ariella:** Totally.

**Shohreh:** And most people, I think, think that it's like a clarinet and just are very confused by it. And so I'm like, okay, we're just—it's fine, everybody. You don't need to know [laughs lightly].

**Ariella:** Yeah. Oh my god. Hysterical. That's amazing.

**Shohreh:** [Dramatically sighs] I know. It's tragic, but that's okay [laughs lightly].

**Ariella:** It is a lot of transferable skills, though. I feel like any kind of arts background is so transferable to creating content and starting one's own business. That's cool that you've kind of noticed that trajectory as well.

**Shohreh:** It really is. Like, there's so many great creative elements to being a business owner, I think, especially if you want them, right? There's a lot of things you can kind of sink into if that's something that is for you. 'Cause for me, like, I was also a lawyer—again, another life. I've lived a lot of lives. And when I was a lawyer, one of the things that I despised was that there's not as much opportunity for creativity, really, in that career.

**Ariella:** Totally.

**Shohreh:** There are some. Like, for the lawyers out there listening, I'm not trying to say your lives are completely devoid of creativity. But for me, in my job, I just found that there were not as many opportunities to be creative as there are as an entrepreneur where I'm like, I get to make a lot of decisions, so I can make it as creative as I want it to be.

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**Ariella:** For sure. I can totally see that.

**Shohreh:** Alright, well, let us chat about all the things queer dating, and that is your specialty. And this is not to say for folks who aren't queer that you won't also benefit from this episode because I am positive that you will. But in the vein of talking about queer dating specifically, one of the things I'd love to start with is, what are some of the unique challenges that you think queer folks face when dating compared to straight folks?

**Ariella:** Yeah, it's a great question, and it's a question I get a lot. Real quick, I wanna go to what you're saying with as far as like, if you're straight and you're listening to this—kind of how I talk about my work is that there's a lot of content out there and a lot of dating coaches out there whose work is not applicable to queer folks; it's really rooted in gender norms, I mean, basically colonization that we're trying to move away from and unlearn. So my hope with what I'm creating is that it is, like, truly dating advice that can work for anybody. Whereas a lot of dating advice that already exists just doesn't work for queer people based on the molds that we're trying to break and the new arenas, like, we're trying to forge in the dating world. So, just a little thing about that.

**Shohreh:** Thank you for saying that because, you know, this is also a conversation often in disability, whereas, like, if we make things more accessible, it benefits everybody, not just disabled folks. It's the same thing where when we have resources that are relevant to specific communities, like queer folks, they often benefit everybody as well.

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**Ariella:**

Totally, yes. Completely agree with you. So as far as the challenges of queer dating, I mean, we have a lot of challenges that face everyone, right? I think some of the unique things that come up with queer dating is potentially a blurred line between what is friendship and what is romantic and what is romantic friendship and what is dating.

There's something else that comes up. With clients, this is typically something that comes up when I have a client who's a woman who's dating other women. I was on a podcast called The Relationships Show, and Cindra Banks said this, like, coined this term, so it's not mine, but it's "getting stuck in the chat." And she's got an Australian accent, so she says [attempts Australian accent] "getting stuck in the chat."  
[Shohreh laughs]

So, this is, like, when two women, or it could be folks who were socialized as women, or it could be non-binary, vulva-owning people. This is kind of a unique challenge where someone might have a challenge, or it might be challenging, to make the first move. So, this basically comes up when we've got folks that are trying to break out of heteronormativity and gender roles and not knowing how to make a move on someone else or not knowing how to express that you wanna be more than just friends. Because a lot of these rules are kinda ingrained in us in a lot of ways. So that's another particular challenge that comes up with queer folks that I've seen.

**Shohreh:**

Mm, yeah. And with that one in particular, something that I see a lot on the interwebs is this idea of, like, not wanting to perpetuate sort of the

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predatory nature of what a lot of, like, cishet men do in the dating world.

**Ariella:** Totally, totally.

**Shohreh:** And so, almost, like, taking too many steps back and, like, being too cautious about that because if you've been on the receiving end of that, of course you're gonna be like, well, I don't wanna make anybody else feel that way.

**Ariella:** Absolutely. But it's like an overcorrection where a lot of us weren't the ones that overstepped in the first place.

**Shohreh:** Right.

**Ariella:** So it's like we're taking a note that wasn't exactly meant for us, though there are obviously things that we can learn from those experiences if we've been on the receiving end. It can be really challenging to move through experiences like that when we don't have a roadmap for those types of things.

**Shohreh:** So this getting stuck in the DMs I think is a very common thing that I have heard from a lot of other women as well, especially when they are new to queer dating andnd it's like, okay, this is a whole new world, what am I doing here? And it's like, one of you is gonna have to break that. It's like, if you wanna go on a date with this person, like, you're gonna have to say something at some point.

**Ariella:** Yeah, totally. And, okay, so you said "getting stuck in the DMs." Yes, this could be a thing where, like, you have to say something. Or, this

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can also be a type of thing where you're with someone already on a date and you don't know who should make the move, like, literally physically, too.

**Shohreh:** Ooh, yes. Yes.

**Ariella:** That was Cindra's, like, getting stuck in the chat was like, she was in person with another woman and being like, wow, we are literally just talking for hours and hours and neither of us are making a move. So this is something that can come up at all different levels of dating, in the beginning stages where you're talking to someone, or, when you're actually on dates and wanting to make a physical move. So it can be really scary to actually do those types of things.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and I think, of course, a lot of what this boils down to is the fear of rejection and the, oh gosh, if I do something, like, what if the response is bad? And, you know, obviously I have done a lot of self-work and mindset work and self-trust things around this. So for me, I'm always like, I would rather know sooner if someone is going to reject me because then I know that I am no longer wasting my time. Not to say that it's a waste of time to have been there, but now I have a plan of intention for moving forward than to just be like, well, let me spend lots and lots of time hoping that maybe someone else is going to do something. But also I'm a Sagittarius [laughs lightly], so, like, I'm a very forward person in the first place.

**Ariella:** I totally agree with you. And I think some folks feel that way. I think this particular, like, getting stuck in the chat issue I think can boil down to a

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fear of rejection, a fear of making people uncomfortable, like we mentioned before. And also, like, this is a thing I've never done before. How do I do the thing I've never done with no map for how to actually do it?

**Shohreh:** That is a good point, right? And like with all things, it's like, the practice of doing it is the thing that makes you get better at it. But getting started is always the hardest part. Like, it's just, you can sit in your brain for months before finally being like, okay, okay, I think I can do this thing.

**Ariella:** Yeah, for sure. I completely agree.

**Shohreh:** So I think what this also plays into is something that I've learned at least, in life, and in love, is that, like, having unrealistic or undefined expectations can really be the death of you. And I feel like this is something that is a big problem for people with dating as well. So I'm curious how you've seen that with clients as far as, like, how the expectations you have can play into the experience of what dating is actually like for you.

**Ariella:** Yeah, expectations are so tricky. 'Cause our work is to really balance, like, hope and desire and reality [light laughter], which can feel so complex and like a really painful process. I just wanna acknowledge that that can be a really difficult part of dating, if you keep getting really excited about these first dates and then they're not going the way that you want.

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I have found in my work that people tend to show up in two primary ways on first dates. Some folks really lean in and they make it all about the other person, and their focus is to be impressive and to be liked and to be interesting, whereas group two kind of sits back with their arms crossed and their goal is to more be impressed, and they're a bit more jaded and focused on, like, what can this other person bring into my life? Where I think that we really want to strike this balance of kind of like sitting right in the middle of those two places where we are super calibrated in what we're experiencing and also really curious about where this other person can fit into our lives.

And I think that that can be our expectation of first dates. Like, I don't think it should go beyond that. I think first dates we should lean into a sense of openness and curiosity and wonder and see where these other folks match up with that, or don't. And kind of allow that to be the reality as well. I saw something that Ali Jackson of Finding Mr. Height posted a couple of days ago where she was talking about maybe the only desire, the only expectation of a first date is, like, do I want to go on a second date with this person? Like, that's the only thing we need to be evaluating for.

I would like for our expectations to be that there are many people in the world that we can connect with and many people regardless of what the "outcome" of the relationship winds up being that can enhance and influence our lives, whether they wind up being partners or friends or people we never see again. And I would love for our expectation to be openness to how our lives can be changed by even

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brief interactions with other folks versus our expectation of finding someone we want to “spend our lives with” exclusively. Because I think that when that’s our focus we’re really missing out on a lot of life and a lot of learning that can be happening through the process of dating, not just through finding someone that we want to be in a relationship with.

**Shohreh:** I love what you said about how these small moments can really affect us or we can learn from them or different things can happen. One of the mindset shifts that I had for myself when I was going into queer dating for the first time, slash dating for the first time in years and years because I had come out of a divorce and I was gonna be dating for the first time in a decade and I was like, oh my god, this is, like, [laughs lightly] a thing. But what I told myself was, I was like, alright, we’re gonna go out there, we’re gonna have fun, and the worst-case scenario is that a date goes horribly and it makes for a hilarious story later, right?

**Ariella:** Totally.

**Shohreh:** Like, I can gather some funny stories that will be great fodder when I’m talking to friends. And, like, that for me was just, like, a more enjoyable way to think about it, is that, like, no matter how badly the date goes, like, there is always something to get out of it, even if it’s just the story of how bad the date was.

**Ariella:** For sure. I completely agree. And I’m hesitant to, like, label dates as bad or good. I’m hesitant to label dates as bad. I reserve the label of bad to dates that are something scary happens or if I don’t feel safe or, you know, something legitimately bad happens.

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I think it's important that we can kind of keep bad dates kind of off the table because if we label every date where there's not, like, a connection as bad, then the group of bad dates becomes larger and larger and the group of good dates becomes smaller and smaller. When, just like you were saying, maybe something really funny or embarrassing happens or whatever, maybe you don't connect with this person, but it doesn't mean it's a bad date. Like, you have something to take from this, some kind of learning, some kind of funny story, something that you can hold onto that, like, this was still an experience that was part of my life that will inform future experiences, and for that, I can be grateful.

**Shohreh:** I really like that reframe. I also, generally speaking, try to stay away from terms like bad and good and anything that's super black and white.

**Ariella:** Yeah!

**Shohreh:** And there's no reason not to apply that to the dating context as well. Because I do think they're easy terms to reach for, when in reality, there's sort of this long spectrum of things that may be better to describe the actual experience you had. And you're right, if someone is saying that, like, any date that basically didn't turn into a second date is a bad date, like, all the sudden it's like, well, what do you really mean by that?

**Ariella:** Yeah, and then you're just collecting data for an outcome that you don't want to have, but that's the only data that you're collecting. Like, you're

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only measuring the success of your dating life based on the relationship's progression versus evaluating the success of your dating life based on your personal progression, based on your own comfort or your own goals in interpersonal relating in general.

**Shohreh:** Yes. I think that word *success* is one of the ones that trips people up so much. Because there's a big difference between success at finding a life partner, *per se*, and success at dating. Like, those can mean two different things, and yet people tend to equate them.

**Ariella:** Totally. A lot of the reason why I got into this is because I love dating and so many people hate it, and I was trying to figure out how to give people what it is that I'm working with so that people don't hate it so much especially when so many people do it. It's very hard to continue to do a thing that you hate. So, my hope is to, like, kind of bust down some of the doors and some of the constraints as it relates to dating so it can feel like there is more—I'm, like, moving my arms in really weird ways as I'm explaining this over a podcast—but, like, more cold air that can kind of rush in and be like, ah, like, there is goodness and possibility to be found here.

So I think that this success piece, it makes us miss out on opportunity if we're clinging too deeply to one view of success in that way. So, I think that's part of the things I am trying to bust down here, is alternative views of what success looks like. And for me, a lot of that comes down to personal growth metrics as it relates to dating. Like, am I doing the things that I've previously been afraid of doing? That's kind of where mine goes around the success conversation.

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**Shohreh:** That is awesome that you think about personal growth in terms of dating because I do think that is outside the norm of what most people are thinking about. Most people are thinking about this partnership aspect, the connection aspect with somebody else, which is a piece of it. But also, the experience of dating, of course, is just, like, ripe with opportunities for personal growth and for challenging yourself and for learning things.

**Ariella:** Totally, it's a huge place to practice courage. And I think that that's, like, an interesting piece to bring into our dating lives, is kind of like—and something I work with personally, too, of, like, okay, what's one little goal I can have for this date? And goal meaning something that is entirely within my control. So this isn't that the person asks me out on a second date, or this isn't that I, like, hook up with someone. This is like, what can I do to challenge myself here, that I can take stock in after and be like, okay, kiddo, you did that thing, that's great! [Shohreh laughs lightly] And hopefully the next time I do it, it becomes a little bit easier.

So that's kind of some of the equipment I like for us to go into first dates with so that the focus isn't entirely on liking or being liked.

**Shohreh:** So, when we were talking about that one of the things you mentioned is how a lot of people hate dating and, you know, you're kind of trying to bridge that gap between something that you love and you're trying to help people see it in a different light. And when you talk about hating dating, of course something that comes to mind for me is how so many people have such a hatred for the apps. The apps!

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**Ariella:** Mmm.

**Shohreh:** And so, I would love to talk to you about how can we hate the apps less.

**Ariella:** Yeah [light laughter]. So many people feel this way. Everyone hates the apps. Literally everyone hates them.

**Shohreh:** I literally met my girlfriend and found her on a dating app, and I still hated the dating apps. I'm like, I hate every minute! Except the minute where I met you [laughs].

**Ariella:** Totally. So I think here, this is just something where I would go a little bit deeper with the client to figure out what is it that they hate about the apps and then try to find solutions related to that. But I'll say, like, some of it comes down to we're spending too much time on the apps, we're on too many different apps. I would say be on less apps. Be on apps that you enjoy more.

There are a lot of dating coaches that are like, be on at least three. And I'm like, that sounds miserable to me, personally. Um, if you like the interface of one app the best or you like being able to like the photos versus sending a message first, like, these are all things you can have agency and choice around.

But more than that, I would say apps are just one way to meet people—albeit a really popular way, especially with COVID the past two years. So, like, absolutely they have their validity and their place, but they are not the only way that we can go about meeting people. And I think that

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there is creativity to be found in some of the alternative methods of meeting people.

**Shohreh:** And I will say as a queer woman who was on dating apps only looking for other queer women, that being on multiple apps felt like a necessity because, I live in a fairly big city, in Austin, and I would still run out of options fairly quickly. And I was like mmm, this is not great.

**Ariella:** Totally. Yeah, I can absolutely see that being the case where you need to be on multiple apps for that reason. And in that case, I would just say, like, to be aware of how much time you're actually spending on them. And if you're experiencing a lot of burnout around the swiping, that, like, it's okay to take breaks. And it's okay to, if you run out of people in the deck, to take that as a, like, okay, we're finished for today, instead.

**Shohreh:** Yes, absolutely. Well, and I'd love to hear about some of these creative alternative ideas because I do hear people constantly complaining now of like, there's nowhere to meet anybody organically, like, apps are the only place.

**Ariella:** Yeah. And in some places, that's true, right? Maybe in smaller towns or that kind of thing, like, apps can be a great resource in that way. Again, especially during COVID. But I think about how to meet people in four different quadrants. So we've got, like, our apps, kind of internet-y quadrant, that's one of them.

And we've also got what I call conscious communities. Conscious not meaning, like, enlightened, conscious, like, I literally know I go to these

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places, I know that I do these things. So that could be a matter of, like, looking at Meet Up or looking at Lex and trying to find some kind of meet up related to queer folks and your interests, whatever that might be.

Then there's also friends of friends, like, literally telling your friends, "I am looking for someone like this" and having them keep an ear out for you. Which, if you're in a smaller place, again, might be challenging related to how many other queer folks that you know, how many queer folks are actually there kind of floating around. So, again, caveats.

And then the last category is strangers. So that would be you're kind of like meeting someone at a bar or a party or a coffee shop—that kind of thing.

So when we talk about these four quadrants, I basically ask the client, like, what feels best to you? Like, which quadrant are you interested in exploring? And sometimes apps are the only ones that feel accessible to a particular person at a particular time, which in that case, we have to figure out which apps you want to be on, which ones are good enough. But apps are still just one of the ways. So if someone is really interested in conscious communities, it's like, okay, what queer sports leagues are around you, or what kind of niche interests do you have? Are there other people that have that in your area? How can we find those people that you can connect with? And then you're creating more queer community as well as putting yourself out there to find potential folks to date, which I think is really important.

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**Shohreh:** I'm just imagining the sheer number of listeners who, when you mentioned the strangers quadrant, were just like, nope, X-ing that out. Absolutely not. [Laughter]

**Ariella:** Yeah, it's funny—that was, like, my fave quadrant for a long time. And I'll say it is definitely more challenging in COVID times, particularly with masks on. It's just a little bit harder to read signals if you're connecting with a stranger. Like, we are kind of cut off from the input that we have as far as what we're receiving from another person. So it's a bit more challenging.

But there might be certain places—and I talked [laughs lightly] about this with clients, like, there might be certain places where you actually do feel open to connecting with strangers. A big one that's come up in the last round of my program that I run, the queer folks in this group tended to feel more comfortable having an openness to strangers in places like REI. REI was, like, a big one [light laughter] that kept coming up.

So the strangers quadrant does not mean that I am 100% open for stranger contact all the time. In fact, that's usually unsafe. So it's more of like, what spaces do I feel like I can kind of let my guard down a little bit and take in who's around me and see who I notice and see who I might connect with in that way. Which could be super context-specific.

**Shohreh:** Yeah. It's funny that you mention REI [laughs lightly] as a potential place that people could meet somebody.

**Ariella:** I love REI.

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**Shohreh:** Look, REI is amazing.

**Ariella:** I love REI so much [light laughter]. And when clients kept bringing it up, I was like, wow, you don't even know how much I love REI that this is, like, really tickling me that y'all are bringing up REI.

**Shohreh:** Oh my gosh, that is hilarious. Yeah, I mean, you know, there's always that question of just like, Ah! Like, how do I know if people are queer? Like obviously there are some potential signals, but like, we can't know for sure.

**Ariella:** Totally.

**Shohreh:** I absolutely love living in Austin, but it's funny because obviously, like, the look here is, like, tattoos and piercings and colored hair.

**Ariella:** Yes.

**Shohreh:** So like, that person may be queer, but also in *this* city, they may not be. Whereas in, like, some other cities, it's like, no, if someone is dressed in a certain way, they are, like, hardcore queer signaling and you can pretty much know that [laughs lightly].

**Ariella:** Yes. Totally. Totally. Yes, my brain went in two different directions here. How do we know if people are queer, I think is a great question. And I wrote an e-book about this, kind of, like, gathering visual cues from the community on Instagram of followers and whatnot. So this is kind of like a communal resource of how you're usually tipped off that people are queer, with the caveat in the e-book that, like, this could be a super exclusive thing. This is not necessarily an intersectional view of what

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queerness looks like. So that's something to be aware of. Also, like, femme folks really wind up getting the short end of the stick here as far as, like, queer looks go. Like, this is not super comprehensive. But it could still be useful to know this might tip you off that someone's queer.

But, ultimately, my stance on this is to try to connect with someone, don't worry about whether they're queer or not. See if they're picking up what you're putting down first, and then you can kind of, like, worry about queerness in the future. Because there are people that don't know that they're queer or aren't out that wind up being queer because they're interested in you. So this isn't a black-and-white thing where you have to only go for queer people. This is like, am I connecting with this person? Am I curious about exploring more? And obviously, are they connecting back? Are they curious?

But the other thing I want to kind of, like, de-mystify here, which is more of like a, you know, global, societal thing, is that, like, wouldn't it be great if people knew that queer folks thinking that they're queer isn't a bad thing? Like, wouldn't it be great if they're like, oh, thank you, I'm not queer, but, like, go off for approaching me [Shohreh laughs lightly]. Like, amazing, you know? And again, this is, like, super context-specific and place-dependent. But if someone does have a super "queer" look or lives in a liberal city like Austin or a combination of the two, where they have dyed hair and piercings and whatnot and live in Austin, chances are even if they're not queer, like, it's gonna be okay that you said something to them. And it's gonna be okay that you

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misinterpreted, you know, some visual cues. And it's probably not gonna be the first time that that's happened to them.

So I think with the reality of the world we live in and with, you know, legislation that's still against queer folks and particularly against trans folks, it can be really scary to go out on a limb if you don't know that someone's queer. But there are certain places where that can be safer than other places, and I would love for us as a society to move toward, like, if I accidentally think you're queer, you know that's a compliment.

And even today, if I say to someone, oh, like, I thought you were queer, I will be like, don't worry, it's completely a compliment, before they can even have a response to that. Just to kind of, like, help teach people how they should be responding to that kind of a statement. Because it is—it's absolutely a compliment if I think someone's queer. It means I'm recognizing some kind of breaking of the system. I'm recognizing that you are thinking for yourself in a way that I am not recognizing in a lot of other people.

Not to say straight folks don't think for themselves, it's just an energetic sense that we're picking up on, that there's something subversive here, potentially. So I think that's absolutely a compliment. So if anyone says that to any of you straight listeners, like, know it's a compliment.

**Shohreh:**

Yeah, it is a compliment. Look, queer people are the coolest people I know, so if I think that you're queer, I probably think that you're cool [laughs lightly].

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**Ariella:** Exactly. Totally, totally.

**Shohreh:** I'm like, take that and run with it. And also, you know, I have rarely ever heard any straight people worrying about, like, oh god, what if I ask someone out and they're not straight?

**Ariella:** Exactly, exactly.

**Shohreh:** It's like, they don't really think about that. And if it happens, they're just like, oh, my bad. So, again, I think sometimes as queer folks, because there's so many elements and extra stuff we have to deal with, that when we're dating, sometimes we can almost over-analyze ourselves to death in worrying about all these potential things that could happen.

**Ariella:** I completely agree with you, yeah. But straight folks don't. They're just like, oh yeah, I'll just say this thing to this person. And I think we can, within reason, and having an awareness of safety, take a page out of that book sometimes. And it's okay if we don't nail it all the time.

**Shohreh:** Alright, so I want to go briefly back to the apps quadrant because I wanna talk about dating profiles and what do you think makes for a really great dating profile? Or, alternatively, or both, like, what do you think makes for not such a great dating profile? Like, in what ways are people kind of shooting themselves in the foot, maybe, by how they're treating the dating profile?

**Ariella:** Yeah, it's a great question. Now, there's some dating coaches out there that have really specific ideas about what should be on a dating profile

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and are like, you should be wearing red because that's the color that blady-blady-blah.

**Shohreh:** Blegh.

**Ariella:** Yeah, so any hard and fast rules, know that, like, you're not going to find that with me. The general overview is, like, how can we give people a sense of, like, what you feel like, like what your essence is, and give people an understanding of what you were looking for so they can know whether to vote themselves out or in depending on if what they're looking for matches up with what you're looking for. So that's kind of like a broad overview.

I also think that you should have a dating profile that elicits question-asking. Or, you should tell people what questions to ask you. I call this a generous dating profile where we kind of take some of the beginning leg work off of the table so that people can really see your profile and be like, okay, I know what I wanna say to this person, instead of sending a hi or a hello or whatnot. We wanna start conversations that have the best chance of continuing in an interesting and/or meaningful way.

So I'd say essence of you, essence of what you're looking for, and some way to make a connection to ultimately bridge the two.

**Shohreh:** Something that I've seen with a lot of my friends, particularly queer women with their dating profiles—I'm like the friend where if my friend is like, "Ah, I'm, like, really struggling with dating," I'm like, "Let me see your profile!" [Laughs lightly] 'Cause I'm like, what's happening here? But there's, like, this desire for humbleness that is coming from a good

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place but I feel could be a bit misguided where I'm, like, looking at their profile and, like, they're this really super, amazing talented person and they've, like, watered down all of their things, 'cause, like, oh, I need to be humble.

And I'm like, no, you need to find someone who, like, vibes with your stuff. I'm like, if you don't put it out there, then no one can vibe with it. So, like, humbleness can really only take you so far on a dating profile when you're trying to attract people to you.

**Ariella:**

Yes, for sure. I think that's why I go more towards, like, essence, like, how can we feel you out a bit? Which would involve not being humble, it would involve being exactly who you are.

How did you make your dating profile that ultimately matched you with your now-partner?

**Shohreh:**

Oh my gosh. Um [laughs lightly], so my dating profile, I think exactly what you said—like, I just wanted to put the essence. It's kind of like the way I treat my website as well, where it's like, you know, my website, it's very gay. And I have the word "motherfucking" at the top of the website because I know that that means that a whole lot of people will immediately click off my website. 'Cause those aren't my people. Those people are going to be like "Mm, nope. This girl curses? Goodbye." And I'm like, great, 'cause you would never be interested in my stuff, you'd never become a client. So that is what I wanna throw out there.

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So, like, I'll give you an example of something that my girlfriend really liked, which is that I had this photo of me that was on there. And this was on Hinge, and so you can put captions to your photos. And the caption was something like, just your average, like, rainbow glitter bomb with a black emo heart. And she's, like, an emo kid. And so for her, like, that was, like, the thing that she was like, oh my gosh, like, I wanna talk more to this person 'cause what an interesting way to describe yourself. Like, so for me, I was basically being like, you know, my personality is, like, this very, like, rainbow, glittery, bubbly, like that's who I am. And also, like, I'm a total emo kid, like, grew up in that culture. And so, like, with a single line, I was able to kind of deliver that message, and that ultimately ended up being the thing that made her want to reach out, along with other things too. But that kind of thing.

**Ariella:** For sure.

**Shohreh:** And I love Hinge, personally. Like, that's where we met. And one of the things that I like about Hinge as an app is that the profile is designed where you have to answer some prompts on your profile, and you can choose the prompts, there's all of these different options. I think one of the prompts that I had was, like, "I'll fall for you if...", and then you could, like, list some things. And I think I said some stuff about, like, Drag Race, and if you like making out. So I basically was like, here's a list of things that I like that I would love for you to like as well.

And then there was also a prompt that was, like, I think it was something like, "Things won't work out between us if...", and then, like, listing some things there. And I said things like, you know, if you're

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stuck in diet culture, if you're into small talk. So ways that I just immediately was able to put out there, if you like this, don't even bother, don't even need you to message me. And if you're into these things, or like, could see yourself being into these things, like, you know, come my way. So I just tried to be, like, as honest as possible.

My approach with being on apps was I don't want to spend a ton of time, like, DMing with people that it's never gonna go anywhere. So I wanna create a profile that, like, certain people just won't even bother to message me 'cause they're like, oh yeah, this person's not for me.

**Ariella:**

Yes, I love that! And that's such great specificity around that. I think that you did both things that I was naming very well as far as, like, having the essence of you being so honest and specific, and also giving people a sense of what you are and aren't looking for as far as interests are concerned. Because I think that that is exactly the goal, that people will vote themselves in or out. That it's not just on us to be making all these decisions, but we can give people the information that they need in order to make those decisions for themselves. So I think that those are really, really strong examples of both of those things, so good on ya!

**Shohreh:**

Yeah. And, like, my girlfriend had, like, a list of the things that she, like, loved the most in the world and that list was so intriguing to me. 'Cause there was, like, a bunch of stuff that I was into, as well as she had, like, freakin' quantum physics on there. And I was like, what?!? I was like, who is this woman who loves quantum physics and is really hot? I have questions [laughs lightly].

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**Ariella:** Totally, totally. I think those are all amazing examples.

**Shohreh:** So, you know, folks, that's like really—I think you and I have the same advice for this, which is basically just, like, the better that you know yourself, which is my whole thing with, like, what I do in self-trust coaching, right?

**Ariella:** Totally.

**Shohreh:** The better that you understand your essence and, like, who you are and what you want, the easier it is to put together a dating profile. Because at that point you're like, well, I just want this to be a representation of me.

**Ariella:** For sure. And I think the other thing that is interesting here, like, when you were talking about your website and how you say “motherfucking” at the top of it and people can vote themselves in or out, the voting out doesn't necessarily need to happen with “negative” language. So what I mean by this, like, yes, on your dating profile, you used a bit of, like, you're essentially—I'm butchering what you said, but, like, you're not for me if diet culture, blady blah. Like, those types of things? Which can be an example of, like, negative language in the sense of, like, not this. I approve, for what it's worth, of you listing those things if they're important values to you, so I think that's totally cool.

But sometimes what I see on profiles is a lot of, like, swipe left if you're just here for hook ups or that kind of thing, where the profile gets overtaken by the nots versus having enough for people to vote

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themselves in. And that it's actually your specificity around what you want people to buy into that allows people to also vote themselves out.

**Shohreh:** Yes, exactly. I definitely saw a lot of profiles like that when I was on there, where it was less about me learning about that person, it was more about me learning about what that person didn't want.

**Ariella:** Exactly, which becomes very difficult to vote yourselves into, whereas if you have specificity around what you want people to vote themselves into, then that inherently will allow people to vote themselves out, versus doing the opposite.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and the interesting thing is that, like, when I was on these dating profiles, like, I was not looking for a serious, long-term relationship. I was actually looking for something casual and for, like, hook ups, and ultimately ended up finding a serious, long-term relationship. Like you said, sometimes it's like you vote yourself out of something where, like, something could've happened there if it was just, like, the right fit.

And so just trying to be open to, like—you know, I would see things on people's profiles about, like, what they were looking for. Or the fact that I got on Hinge in the first place, which most people use for more, like, serious relationships. But I was like, well, I'm gonna get on it anyways because I've heard good things about this app. And so sometimes it's like, you've gotta—these hard and fast rules that people may have, it's like, eh, it can be a little bit more gray than people sometimes will think.

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**Ariella:** Totally, yeah. And having such strict language around that can be very difficult to recognize any kind of gray area. But also, it tells me that you've been burned by dating in a way [light laughter] that, like, a lot of us have been. But for a lot of folks it's still, I wanna latch on to what's specific about you, not to process of elimination where since you didn't tell me to swipe left I should swipe right. Like, I wanna swipe right because I'm excited to, because there's something that's interesting me.

**Shohreh:** Well, so one last thing then for profiles because someone's gonna be like, why didn't you ask this? Do you have any thoughts about photos and, like, what photos that people should use?

**Ariella:** For me, photos with your essence. Like, I'm not gonna say you need to have, like, a smiling photo. I'm not gonna say you need to have a photo of you with friends. Like, I think that if community is important to you and friendships are important to you, then you can have photos that reflect that. I think that if you, like, mainly spend your time with animals, you can have photos that reflect that. I think that, like, whatever it is that allows us to understand you best. So, just specificity and who you are in the photos as well is, like, my kind of blanket statement.

If I have a client that's, like, showing me their profile, then sometimes I have more specific thoughts about the photos that they're choosing. But if we're, like, going kind of broad strokes advice here, it's still your essence, photos that show you. And sometimes it's hard for us to pick those out, so it could be helpful, like what you were saying with your friends, if they're having trouble dating and you'll take a look at their

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profile. It can be helpful to have outside eyes of, like, does this kind of match what you receive from me with a friend or a coach.

I'd say that whatever it is that you are gravitating towards, include something along those lines in your profile, whether that's, like, a smiling picture or something out in nature, whatever it might be for you. And whatever it is that doesn't speak to you, stay away from that on your profile, whether that's a picture of you in sunglasses [light laughter] or, you know, something overly filtered and whatnot.

**Shohreh:**

At the end of the day with dating profiles, it's like, you only have so much space to get your message across, to get across who you are. And so just really being intentional about what you are trying to put out there with the words that you're writing and the photos that you are including is really the thing that I think is going to create the best results for people in terms of having just maybe more quality matches. If you don't really put a lot of thought into it, or, you know, you're taking all these external things into mind instead of being like, what looks like me in this profile? I think that's where it tends to be more of a struggle for people, where they're like, ah, I'm not getting anybody. And I'm like, well, let's see why that is on your profile.

**Ariella:**

Totally, and I think that's the other thing that we can remember here, is that all of this is an experiment in the sense that if you have a profile that's not working for you, we can shift these things around. Or if you introduce some kind of talking topic on your profile and you're realizing that it's starting conversations that are a bit too deep or vulnerable too early on for you, you can change all of that. Or if you're feeling bored

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swiping, then change your conversation topics on your profile or see what else people might latch onto if you switch up your photos, that kind of thing.

Like, all of this is malleable and movable and we can shift these things. So I encourage people to do that, especially if they're, you know, like your friend was saying, like, not having matches, or, you know, like, not having what "success" might look like in their dating life. All of this can and should shift.

**Shohreh:** And I think that expands to dating in general, right? This is all kind of an experiment in which you are able to gather data and see what you can learn from it and then adjust and make changes. Like, none of this is set in stone. There's no one right way to do this. It's doing it in the way that works for you and that's allowed to shift over time as you shift and as you have new experiences that make you be like, oh, I kinda wanna approach dating this way now.

**Ariella:** Completely. And I think that that's why I was so frustrated by a lot of dating advice out there, because it mirrors a right and wrong way in all aspects, as far as, like, what's on a dating profile. As far as what relationships should look like. As far as unspoken rules for dating. Where my work is like, I'm trying to elbow that all out of the way, kind of, so that we can just figure out, what is true for you? What is true for your desire? How can we follow a path that's led by that, that's led by your values, to create a dating life and/or relationships that really speak to who you are and what you want?

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**Shohreh:** I think that is a beautiful note to end on. Thank you so much for being here. How can people find you? And how can my listeners best support you at this time?

**Ariella:** Yeah, the best way for folks to find me is on my Instagram, @queerdatingcoach. I've got a website, [queerdatingcoach.com](http://queerdatingcoach.com), that you can also poke around on, and you can get on my mailing list that way if you're interested. The bulk of my working with clients happens in this six-week program called Date Better Bootcamp, where it has 35 video modules and live group coachings and an online virtual platform and guest workshops. And it's a pretty intensive experience to learn how to date, or how to date better, and folks that have been through the program absolutely loved it and found a lot of value through going through these things and learning these things alongside a queer community to help us realize that we're not alone in the questions that we have around dating or the struggles that we have.

So if that's interesting to you, by the time this podcast comes out, I'm not sure if I will have opened up sign-ups for my next round or if they will have closed. So if that's interesting to you, you can get in touch with me through DM on my Instagram account or you can sign up for the program if it's available or get on the waitlist. So those are kind of the potential options that you might be coming across at that time.

**Shohreh:** Awesome. And I will have links for your profile and everything else that we've talked about in the show notes for today so that if y'all are interested in it you can easily access it. And thank you again for taking some time out of your schedule to hang out with me today. This was

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great, and I am excited for folks, especially all those who are frustrated with dating, to listen to this and maybe come away with kind of a new perspective on some of the experience.

**Ariella:** Totally, thanks so much for having me.

**Shohreh:** [Music plays]

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](http://ShohrehDavoodi.com). Thank you so much for listening, and I hope you'll join me for the next episode.

[Music fades]