

# Conjuring Up Courage

## #132

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi & Jad Jaber

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**Shohreh Davoodi:** You are listening to episode #132 of Conjuring Up Courage. This is the second and final Pridepalooza episode for this year's Pride Month, and I'm very excited to share this conversation with y'all.

Today's guest is Jad Jaber. Jad is the Founder of Marginalized Majority, a non-profit focused on Global South queerness, mental health, and community support. Jad is also currently a member of Toronto Pride's Board of Directors as well as a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ Advisory Board for Toronto City Council. Jad and I had a moving discussion about their experiences as a queer Arab person and immigrant, intergenerational trauma and healing, the impact of white supremacy in the queer community, and so much more.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/132](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/132). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/132](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/132). I also want to give a content warning for this episode for descriptions of homophobia, violence against queer folks, and racism.

[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.

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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]

Hi, Jad! Thank you so much for making the time to be here today. I know how full your plate is, but as a Persian queer person, I am so excited to get to be in conversation with you.

**Jad Jaber.:** Hi, Shohreh. Thank you so much for having me here. I’m super excited. This has been a long time coming. Super happy to support you as a Global South knowledge producer and knowledge disseminator. And I support you, and I can’t wait to hear more from you.

**Shohreh:** Yes! Alright, before we even get into it, you started off with the term “Global South.” So I actually would love for you to just describe who you’re talking about when you say, “Global South,” and why you’re using that term specifically, just so people know off the bat.

**Jad:** Sure. First, I want to give credit to where my knowledge is from, because it comes from a very powerful Arab woman. Her name is Dr. Charlotte Karam. I learned these terminologies and I’ve learned these understandings, um, and knowledge production through Dr. Charlotte Karam. So when we talk about Global South and Global North, originally, they were speaking about where knowledge comes from, who represents it, and who listens to it, and where it ends up, in a sense.

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So, many times, you'll hear about queer stuff happening in Tunisia; queer stuff happening in different parts of North or Central or South Africa; queer stuff happening in the Arab world; queer stuff happening in the gulf. But so many times, the person representing this knowledge would be Adam Smith from Harvard, or, I don't know, Karen something from somewhere [Shohreh laughs lightly]. It's so rare that you'll see highlighted local authors talking about their own local experiences and you'll see that knowledge being validated and disseminated.

Most of the time, local authors talking about their own knowledge get ignored, and others speaking about them get highlighted. So, this is why it's very important that we always highlight Global South knowledge production, that we always try to look to Aboriginal and Indigenous sources of information. If we want to know about anything, we should go directly to folks that are from that specific culture who have a complex understanding and have also paid the emotional labor and the living price of being in those spaces.

Dr. Charlotte Karam, for example, is one of those people. She is what is known as a feminist economist. She looks at barriers that face Arab women in Arab world and all over the region over there—S.W.A.N.A. region, that's a good term for it. She is a person that is basically talking about Global South versus Global North.

Now, in more flexible knowledge, usually some people talk about Global South and Global North kind of to describe these invisible barriers between the haves and the have nots, culturally. So, if you're saying that, well, you know, why don't you support some Global South

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knowledge? Or why don't you support Global South food? You want to support folks that have been seen as marginalized, as having less. And Global North is seen as an imaginary line where folks have accumulated and have come from more privilege.

**Shohreh:** So, in some ways, it's kind of like a line, as well, between, like, the colonized and the colonizer.

**Jad:** 100%. Beautifully said. We can see that in Canada and the U.S. I mean, colonizers. All sources of power that you see today, from banks to judicial systems, they are the products of colonizers.

**Shohreh:** Mhm, exactly. Well, I love that term.

**Jad:** Yeah, and I know you love to speak about, um, racial inequity, so, yeah, and equity in general. And no one loves to speak about it, it's emotional labor to, but I know at least you, you like to delve deeply into it.

**Shohreh:** I do. And I also love talking about language and continuing to make my language more inclusive and affirming of all different people. And especially when we're talking about regions in the globe, this is an area that really fascinates me. So, for instance, you were talking about the S.W.A.N.A. region, which is a term that may be unfamiliar to people because they're more used to hearing, you know, Middle East and other terms that, when you actually dig a little bit deeper, what does that even mean, right? The Middle East?

I've done a lot of this myself from—because my dad is from Iran, so I was looking into this and I was like, oh, what are we talking about? Middle of where? You know? East of what? And the way that these

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terms themselves actually uphold white supremacy. And that's why you're getting terms, like, S.W.A.N.A., that are kind of reclaiming those regions.

**Jad:** Beautifully said. I couldn't say that more. I do feel, though, that Iran, for example, somewhere that has a very specific history, it's had its own niche history that has worked as part of the Arab world, for sure, but also is not homogenous and part of it. So I always kind of, you know, when I'm talking about Arabness, I always want to make sure that I mention Persian as well. Persian, Arab, it's important to mention these specific groups because many of them go unseen. And I know that, for example, with the queer work that I'm doing, that when it comes to disseminating queer knowledge in English, in Arabic, in French, there's also a need to disseminate queer knowledge in Farsi, speaking of language.

**Shohreh:** Absolutely.

**Jad:** Yeah.

**Shohreh:** And I think probably some of my listeners don't even realize that Iran is split in terms of how people identify and lineage and things like that. So many, many Iranians identify as Persian, and then there are many Iranians who identify as Arab, and some of them don't have that crossover with those; they identify as one or the other.

**Jad:** 100%, beautifully said. Many identify as both. Many identify as none. Many identify as one of the other. Many Arabs also don't identify themselves with being Arabs. I said this in a post when I first moved to Canada: I love my culture. I love all the details of it. I love the art, the

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creativity. I love everything. But I think there's a very fine line between adoring your culture and adoring where you come from, but being critical of it. And there's also a fine line of *who* is critical of it.

So, I might want to speak crap and shit about my culture [Shohreh laughs lightly] 'cause I have the right to 'cause I've paid shit tons of burdens coming from everyone involved in my family, from my school growing up in the Arab world. I just moved to the Global North two years and a half ago. So I have paid all the burdens for being a queer Arab growing in that part of the world. So I do think that, like, we need to address these issues.

The other thing that's also really overlooked is the issue of immigration and how part of that intersectionality lens, how important it is for us to acknowledge the trauma of immigration. And the oldest proverb about immigration, which our great, great ancestors used to say, which is, no one immigrates unless they have to. That is something so important that everyone understand. That humans do have a propensity to explore and to feel curious, but it's not as powerful as our need to have a sense of belonging and to have an idea of historical rootedness.

So with issues like immigration is a major cause of trauma. I really don't feel that even second generation, first generation, third generation folks here—and again, I'm a newcomer immigrant—but I really don't feel that they have dealt with the trauma of their family.

**Shohreh:**

Yeah, that intergenerational aspect of that trauma being passed down, whether it was you who immigrated, or, like you said, a parent or a grandparent. All of that kind of comes into play. And I definitely want to

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keep talking about this conversation, and I also want to back up for folks who don't know your story of a little bit about why did you immigrate and how you came to do the work that you're doing today, for people who don't know you.

**Jad:** Thanks, sure. I was doing my PhD. My parents wanted me to do my PhD in business-related issues. I always knew I was queer. I think it's weird to say that; it's very inaccurate. But I just want to say what I wanna say, which is, I've always known I was queer. [Light laughter] I was a queer fetus, people. [Shohreh laughs]

So, I started off by wanting to pursue something queer-related for my PhD. I always knew that it was my calling, and I knew they wouldn't let me do anything art-related. So, I lied, and for almost five years, I was showing them the HR work, but in the meantime, I was doing my PhD in queer work and gender dynamics in the Arab world and in North Africa. 'Cause I was on scholarship; I wanted them to pay half of my university. So they didn't discover until my dissertation came out—

**Shohreh:** Oh my gosh.

**Jad:** —which was called "Queer Arab Martyr," and my dad looked at it, and he's like, this is not a business title [Shohreh laughs]. And this was after I had shared a fake 350-page dissertation with them and had people sign it.

Finally, I got my dissertation, I passed my defense. At that point, it was too late. I think that they had noticed that it was too late. But, at that point, the power of denial is much stronger than our parents' sensory capabilities. So, even if they've seen you play with a Barbie, even if

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they've seen you queer it out as a young kid, their personal narrative will override their perceptions. And so many people think, oh, my dad knows, my mom knows. They've seen me do that. They've caught me in that. They don't. Because their worldview is stronger, and their intention to not see and ignore is stronger.

So, with that happening, I graduated cum laude. I was one of the top people in my university. And the director of the university owns a publication house, which is well-known in Dresden, which is in New York City. And he said, I want to publish your dissertation. My first thought is, if you publish it, I'm gonna get killed 'cause my dissertation includes my research in all of the Arab Gulf. And it's hyper religious. It's really all about emotional ethnographies, just telling you the stories of people, really, with an underlying semantic and philosophical understanding.

So, I said no at first. Then, he convinced me, so I said yes. As time passed, I put my dissertation into a book. And, two years later, after having worked with Dr. Charlotte Karam, I sent in the book and I got an e-print, like, an e-copy for approval. I sent in the approval, and when I sent in the approval, three days later, I get a Facebook message from an anonymous profile telling me in Arabic: What's up, sir? Didn't know you were an "F-word," which is synonymous with the word gay; trigger warning, everybody. I didn't know you were that. And I didn't know you had a book about this stuff.

My immediate reaction was, what are you talking about? That's impossible. And then I went on Amazon, typed in "Queer Arab Martyr," and saw my book on Amazon.

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**Shohreh:** Ohh.

**Jad:** I was still in the middle of Beirut at that moment. I was still around family, and I was still also in the middle of my post-doctorate. At the end of my post-doctorate, actually. So, it was very, very awkward and very scary for me. My dad had a very extreme emotional reaction, and my family just wanted to expedite me. Everyone was freaking out, screaming. I had lawyers calling me, telling me that based on the publication laws of Lebanon, that if this book ever reached to anyone, I wouldn't be even allowed to leave the country. So, I freaked out. I booked a one-way ticket to Manhattan, to New York City, and spoke to a lawyer over there to apply for political amnesty as soon as I get there.

And two days before my flight, which was a one-way flight, my Canadian immigration lawyer calls me. And I had honestly given up on getting my PR. And he tells me, congratulations, you got your permanent residency. It was, like, pretty much a calling from the universe. So, he said, well, you have eight months to leave. And I laughed. And he said, what? And I said, I have less than a week to leave. He was like, you can't wrap up your whole life in a week. I'm like, well, watch me. So all that mattered to me was to take my dog, because he's the love of my life.

**Shohreh:** Aw.

**Jad:** So, yeah, that's all that I wanted to do, was just focus on taking my dog. Other than that, honestly, possessions and stuff like that, it didn't matter. I felt so unsafe in that last period. And I was so stressed, add it was such a traumatic experience.

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But I got out. And then, my book got out, my book got published. Honestly, I felt like the book came at a time, which was 2019, where it was still not so okay, especially back there, to talk about this stuff. So, it went a little bit under the radar.

But it's an art illustrated book, and it's a very—it's really, you know, like when you say you put out something and then you can die now? That's how I feel about this book. It has my work, my art, and it's sort of the first ever queer Arab publications from a person that's Lebanese, from a person that did the research across all these spectrums and all these different people in the Arab world. And based on emotional ethnography. It's based on my story, to a certain extent, but it's based on these hundreds of people that I spoke to.

**Shohreh:** I mean, clearly it was important to you if you went to the trouble of creating a fake dissertation [Jad laughs lightly], and, you know, hiding it from your family. And literally releasing it, even though you knew the risks. And that it ultimately led to you being forced to immigrate. As you said, no one immigrates unless they have to. And, in your case, you quite literally had to immigrate.

**Jad:** 100%. I work with an amazing healer called Talia Khalil, and she works with us, as well, as part of our non-profit. She's a Global South healer. And, you know, we hold all of these traumas somatically, so we hold all of these traumas in our bodies. And today, she was just telling me, like, you know, some people have a weak throat. Some people have a weak kidney. Some people have a weak stomach. But we hold these

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emotional traumas in our body, and they play out physically, depending on what our Achilles Heel is. Yeah, it's been an interesting journey.

**Shohreh:**

I think especially for folks who live in the U.S. and Canada, it's really easy to ignore the fact that in many countries in the world, it is still illegal to be queer. That people are still killed on a daily basis for being queer. I mean, I think just last year, there was a story that hit the U.S., finally, about, you know, an honor killing in Iran. And people were like, oh my god, I can't believe this. I'm like, it's everywhere; it's not just in Iran. I mean, we're in some ways really lucky that things aren't as bad in the U.S. as in other places. But it is still the norm across the country that, you know, homophobia is rampant and that you can be killed.

**Jad:**

I completely agree with you. And thank you, by the way, I feel like I've only been speaking for a few minutes, but I do enjoy talking to you and I do feel like you always present so much wisdom. There is a need for a lot of folks in the Global North, especially if you come from immigrant families, especially if you're a cultural body, especially if you're a racialized body, there is a need to acknowledge your privilege as being as part of this world. And look, the privileges for being queer aren't that much, and it's important for people to say that. The privileges here lie in corporate culture, the fact that, you know, there are certain governing laws that protect you at work, that protect you within judicial spaces, that protect you within legal systems.

But within that conversation, it's so important to talk about safe spaces for queer people and say that both safe spaces and non-safe spaces for queer people exist in *both* the Global South and the Global North. And

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it's so important that we don't see as one being a covenant for queer rights and the other being the exact opposite. Because that is 100% not the case.

The Arab world and North Africa, and many parts of Africa, have disseminated and pushed a lot of very pro-queer agendas, historically. And specifically, for example, in feminism work, you'll see that in a lot of corporate spaces, there's a lot more respect for women's autonomy, for women's needs. So it's very, very controversial to say this, but it is very important to know that there's all gradients of gray in this conversation.

So, trigger warning for listeners, I have been spat at and called the "f" word and beaten up and called cultural and racialized slurs in the middle of the gay village in Toronto, on a rainbow painted street. Like, the irony, people. Listen to the fucking irony of coming to Toronto to be spat at, pushed, and called the "f" word in the middle of the gay village on the rainbow street without a single person reacting around me. So safe queer spaces are contentious.

When you bring queer Arabs into Canada and you give them a \$200 stipend a month to live, they are not safe; they're dying. And they are more safe back home where they have a [Arabic word], or a cousin, fourth cousin, sixth cousin, related, great auntie, who would actually bring them a plate of food. While over here in Toronto, they would die. And I would know this because I've faced both housing insecurity and food insecurity as a post-doctorate in Toronto who is running an organization.

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And, of course, because I'm Arab and I had shame towards this, at first, I didn't tell anyone. But then when I thought, okay, I'm gonna die alone while doing this work, I'm like, I need to reach out for help. But the safety is contentious. Is Grindr safe for queer people? Is going on Grindr over here, where you'll have people in their bios saying, no Asians, no fats, no Arabs, no non-binaries? That's not a safe space in the Global North. I've been attacked so many times for my background. I've been attacked for wearing nail polish. For representing as a femme. Especially in this part of the world, in Toronto and in the U.S.

So, again, we can also speak about policing, and we can also speak about how queer people are often ignored by judicial systems. They go under the radar. How trans women are killed under the radar. And it happens superbly often as well in this part of the world. So, there's a lot of work that needs to be done over here. And also, there's a big need to highlight the grassroots, rights-based initiatives that are happening in the Arab world. There's a big need to highlight these amazing, courageous organizations that are doing the work over there.

**Shohreh:**

I very much appreciate you putting a spotlight on the shades of gray and how we can't put either the Global North or the Global South into a box, right? There's a lot of nuance here. There are a lot of different things happening. I mean, for you, one of the things that was coming out to me, that you were speaking, was how at least when you're in your home country, right, one of the things that you aren't dealing with, to the extent that you are here, is the racism and that added piece on top of the queerness.

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And because you're at the intersection of both being queer and being Arab, and then you're coming to Canada, North America, where there is a lot of Islamophobia, there is a lot of issues around that, all of the sudden you have this new issue compounded on top of the queerness when you're supposed to be in a space that should be freer for you, should be more comfortable for you. And then there's this added problem. And I think it's really important that we not ignore that. Especially as you said, if Canada is like, hey, we're inviting you in, but they're not providing the supports that you need to thrive, then is it the most helpful thing?

**Jad:**

Yes. This is something that I think a lot of people love to know, and I also put this in my book. In Saudi, there's a lot of queer spaces in Saudi, you know, a lot of queer spaces in Kuwait. A lot of queer spaces in these supposedly hyper-Muslim, very conservative countries. And it's so important to acknowledge that these queer spaces exist. They exist in privacy of people who are socially connected. There's a class issue here. So, if you're privileged, if you have enough money, you can get away with being queer, to a certain extent. And if you have enough medical connection. But it's still very important to say that these spaces exist, and they can hold thousands and thousands and thousands of queer identities and their narratives and their storylines.

There are a lot of house parties that happen in Saudi, that if you know the right person, you can go in. And trust me, in that space, you are safer than many of the spaces, as you mentioned, that you are told are safe here, in the Global North.

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And let me tell you why. Because in the Arab world, and in these parts in North Africa, in these parts when you travel where queerness is not that publicly okay, queerness is always there, but it's about maneuvering, right? So you know, okay, here's a space where I have to be masc-acting. Here's a space where I have to behave that way. Here's a space where I have to brace myself, where the arc of my hand needs to change, where the walk of my feet needs to be adapted. But then you know, oh, here's a space where I'm free. Here's a space where I can belly dance. Here's a space where I can move and sway. And within these safe spaces, they are so safe.

Of course there have been crackdowns historically. Very rarely, and I will say that—very rarely. Because Arabs, we as Arab and people in that part of the world, we're very smart about that stuff. We know how to hide, we know how to maneuver, we know how to go around. So—'cause we have been doing it our whole lives. Also, these spaces are high in passion, they're high in magic, they're very intentional once they exist, because they're existing in secrecy. They're existing almost like harems.

And, yeah, it's very different when you're over here and you're in a gay pub in New York City, for example, and you notice that a white bartender is not serving any of you or your Arab friends. And then after 15 minutes, the guy says something, like, aw, you all look like each other. So, you notice that, well, wait, and then when that moment happened, all of my friends were looking at themselves. So they were looking down at their chest hairs. They were looking at their shoes. They were seeing, well, why did he identify me and why did he call me

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like everybody else? And why did he have that—because we all sensed that that was the meaning of what he was saying. We couldn't have all been going crazy. And so these things happen over here.

And I always say, again, that implicit discrimination is much more insidious and affects you in very different ways than explicit racism, explicit discrimination. When someone explicitly dislikes you or calls you out for what they don't like you for, you then have an idea, you can heal from that moment. But with implicit racism, what happens, and with implicit discrimination, which is systemic, what happens is that your imposter syndrome kicks up as a marginalized person.

And our imposter syndrome is intergenerational trauma. It has been passed from our grandparents to our moms. Our grandparents who told our moms, I'm not gonna teach you Arabic now that you've moved here because, you know, it will help you integrate better into school. It will make your language better, your English language. And then our own moms, for example, who basically taught us that, hey, you know, don't bother with the systems. Don't raise your hand like that. You're not part of this fabric. You keep your head low and work and do the right thing and everything will come to you. But don't fuck with the system.

And so these notions, then, are internalized by you. There's your imposter syndrome kicking in in that moment when you're facing insidious discrimination and insidious racism. And then what you're thinking is, I'm not worthy. I'm horrible. I'll never make it. And so when these types of incidents trespass on your internal narrative, this is the

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ultimate violence. And this is what is known as internalizing the violence.

**Shohreh:** Yes. One of the things that I'm really hearing you say is the sheer amount of layers that there are to these experiences and to the trauma that we go through. So, one of the first things you mentioned is the way that queer folks, on a spectrum from having to do this less to having to do it more depending on where you live, the ways that we have to pretend that we're something that we're not, right? We have to get really good at hiding certain aspects of who we are. And this depends so much regionally, too. So maybe it's even more so always in the Global South and the Global North, but then you look at a country like the U.S., for instance, which I can speak to, where I live in the state of Texas; not a super queer-friendly state.

**Jad:** No.

**Shohreh:** I live in Austin, which is a more queer-friendly city. But in a state that is overall not. There are absolutely places in Texas where my guard is up, I am very careful, you know, that I wouldn't want to be seen holding hands with my girlfriend, for example. And so, all queer folks deal with that to some extent, no matter what.

**Jad:** Yes.

**Shohreh:** So there's this layer. And then, when you're speaking about the ways in which, you know, you can go out to a space that is supposedly safe, but then the intersection of your racial identity comes into play.

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And what that also brings up for me is the whiteness of beauty standards that we have—

**Jad:** Yesss.

**Shohreh:** Particularly for gay men or masc-presenting folks, where there's this very intense standard of what is expected of y'all. Of what your bodies are supposed to look like, of how you're supposed to present for the world, of how you're sexualized. And so you can't change that, right? If you're not already white and buff and whatever the other standards are, it's like, you can't do anything about that.

And so you're automatically singled out, even in a space that should feel safe for you, where you should feel comfortable, because you're not conforming to a white supremacist standard that the community doesn't even often realize or acknowledge that it has. 'Cause they're like, oh, well, we're queer, so that automatically makes this safe. And so they feel like they don't have to look at the racism and these other pieces.

**Jad:** Yes. I love what you're saying. Absolutely, well said. So the first point that you mentioned is about performativity. And I think that when we perform something that we are not, first, we need to acknowledge the emotional labor that's involved in that. So, hey, queer person, if you're listening to me now: If you're going out to dinner and you felt like you were performative for your family, then acknowledge your emotional labor. And after you do that, after you say, oof, that took emotional labor on my part, the next step is you need to re-resource.

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And I know there are two “re” in this [Shohreh laughs lightly]. But it is. You need to go back, and you need to find out what gives you your queer zhuzh. What gives you back your queer energy. Whether it’s a book, it’s a reading, it’s art, it’s yourself, journaling, it’s music. That is the antidote of the emotional labor of performing non-queerness as a queer person.

Another thing that might comfort a queer person who is forced to perform, and many of us do in corporate, in society, with our families, is that you know that in all your performativity, there’s still authenticity. So there’s no need for you to internalize that schism, that space, that gap, between who you are and what you perform. Because only you can perform what you perform. And only you can perform gender the way you perform your own gender, whether it’s masc, femme, or in between.

So don’t cause that schism within. Also acknowledge the authenticity in your own performance; give yourself credit for that. While also, as I said, re-resourcing back to who you believe you are.

And as for the whiteness of beauty standards, it’s very interesting. I call it, like, the duck imprint effect. You know, how, like, baby ducklings see a boot—

**Shohreh:** Mhm, duckling.

**Jad:** Yeah, if they see a boot instead of a duck, they will follow the boot. So their first image would be that the boot is their mom [Shohreh laughs lightly]. And so, with queer people, or the gays as I like to call them, with the gays, what happens, and with queer folks, is that our first

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imprint of queerness, and even for queer women as well, was whiteness. That was the first magazine cover. The first Hello or Okay Magazine. Or the first, I don't know what cover you saw. But for me, at least, it was the image of those two white muscle-y men in their suits in some park in New Jersey [Shohreh laughs lightly], or in the States. And, you know, it's saying something like "Adam and his doppelganger, Arim," I don't know, Adam and John [Shohreh laughs lightly]. And basically, so these are the imprints that we, as Global South folks, got.

So right now what is happening is we are fighting back. And it's good to acknowledge the fight and be part of it. I know that for a lot of gay folks, I do fit into that standard, to a certain extent. But I fight back in my own ways. For example, I was told my whole life that curly hair is disgusting 'cause in Lebanon, we were colonized by the French, so curly hair was always seen as unruly. It was always seen as non-professional. It was also seen as, how could you leave your house looking like that? So I spent, you know, 15 years of my life keratin-ing and straightening my hair. And then when I finally got here, I'm like, I'm just gonna let the curls flow, and I'm just gonna let them do whatever they want to do.

And the same thing goes with body hair. It's so important, and so many of my friends fight back by showing femme. They fight back by showing fat. They fight back by showing proportion. By showing armpit hair. By showing whatever they wanna show. I'll give you one of the best examples, which is Habibitch, who is a Tunisian, de-colonial, non-binary artist based in Paris. They are fighting ten of—30 of these standards all at once.

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So it is important that all of us do that little work and push ourselves a little bit out of what we think is safe in terms of representation when it is safe enough, of course, for us to do so. And be part actively of that fight of representing something that hasn't been represented for a really long time.

**Shohreh:** Yes, and I think that you're right, there's so many people now who are doing great work in this area of making sure that we are having visible representation of a variety of bodies, a variety of abilities, sizes, colors, all of that.

**Jad:** Yes! Yes, abilities.

**Shohreh:** Yes, that's a super important one.

**Jad:** Super important, thank you.

**Shohreh:** Yeah. A good friend of mine, Alex Locust, who goes by @glamputee on social media, has been on the podcast several times. And last year, for Pride, we actually did an Instagram Live talking about disability at Pride and the way that a lot of Pride spaces don't have accommodations and aren't actually accessible to queer disabled folks. And how that's an area of the community that often gets forgotten.

And so I think this will continue to be such an important conversation about, like, when we think of queer—or when we think of gay, right, what pops into your head? And you're right, that imprint, for most people, is still that. It's the flamboyant, but very attractive, white gay man, has, for a long time in the Global North, been, like, the icon of what queerness is and what the community is. And that's a piece of the

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community, but there's so much more to it. And there's so many other people who need to be represented and need to be visible because queerness is not one look or one person, it's a total variety; it is everything you can think of, is represented in queerness. And not enough people envision that when they think of the community, unfortunately.

**Jad:** 100%. And I really love what you're saying. First of all, within the disability conversation, it's also very important to mention queer seniors. So these are also a very marginalized group, and the issue of disability is definitely something that needs to be much more brought up and spoken of and brought to the forefront. I am seeing much more activists working in this. I see, as well, some activists, as well, who are working in disability and sex and sexuality and fetishization and even involving the world of sex work into it. So I also think it's very important to bring upon the conversation of, you know, sexualizing disabled bodies and seeing them within that light of sex and sexuality and so many other things that a lot of queer disabled activists are really pushing to bring to the forefront.

And another thing that I do want to bring up is gay, the G in the LGBTQIA2S+. Many times when I type the term, LGBTQIA2S+, I start with 2S at first and I also make all of the letters capital except for the G [Shohreh laughs lightly]. And many people ask me why, and I say, because when you haven't done that and you're just throwing it the way we always do, the truth is the way that people perceive it, the only capital there is the G. Because when the G is there, the T goes away, and the 2S goes away, and the IA goes away.

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And unfortunately, that's another thing that gay, cis gay men really need to acknowledge, is how much fucking space they fucking take in the queer fucking conversation.

**Shohreh:** Yes.

**Jad:** They need to back off. They need to know when to be silent. They need to know when to take a back step for trans folks, for non-binary folks, for all of the other millions of categories other than that one single limited category of what it is to represent that popular archetypal successful, white, global gay man.

**Shohreh:** Could not have said that better myself. I love that that's something that you've actively chosen to do, is to give that a lowercase. One, it's a great talking point, but two, it really just gets this idea across that you're saying, which is that, yes, you're part of the community, and you're not the only ones who are here. And you have a tendency to perpetuate, right, the other systems that were learned and taught. If you are a white, gay man, then you still grew up with whiteness and you still grew up with male privilege. And so those things are gonna color how you interact in the world and in queer spaces, too.

I have seen that so often. I mentioned it already in this podcast, "I can't do wrong because I'm queer," right? "You can't call me out on these other things, 'cause I'm queer." And that's not true. Intersectionality is a thing. We all have to be aware of the areas where we do have privilege and where we don't so that we make sure that we're not stepping on other people in our communities.

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**Jad:** Beautifully said. And especially at this point because I think a lot of the harm—and I recently as well, um, posted something about this, about—and I learned this from Ej Kwandibens, who is our Indigenous, I want to say conduit, he's our Indigenous conduit. And he runs our monthly Indigenous, um, drop-in space for Marginalized Majority, which is a registered non-profit in Toronto. And all of these spaces are open to anyone from around the globe, anyone in the world, and they are free.

So Ej is always speaking about horizontal violence because it's affected the Indigenous community so much. All of this external systemic violence and all of these harms that were done from the residential schooling system to violence to, really, an indescribable list of violence. What happens eventually is all of this violence was internalized by marginalized folks themselves. And then, this violence starts to spread horizontally. It starts to spread to your own community.

And many times I say, queer folks in queer spaces become violent because we all haven't done the individual healing which is really needed. All of us as queer Global South folks especially, and even queer Global North folks, because there is a system there. So there is a system that invalidates us

So all of us, early adulthood, late adulthood, have to start going on that very difficult journey of speaking to our queer child, of looking back to our queer child, our inner queer child, which was unwitnessed, unheard, maybe harmed, maybe violated. We have to visualize that child. We have to look into that child's eyes and make sure that child is looking into our eyes and seeing that we have become what they dreamed of

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and that we protect them. And we have always protected them. And we have to, also, go through the trauma of that child and give time for grieving and healing.

Many of us have not done that. And I did not do that in the earlier part of my queer journey. And that's why I harmed other queer people. I can't tell you who or how I harmed, but I know that I did because now that I have done this journey, I see others who have not done it. And I see how the harm is spreading left and right.

**Shohreh:**

That was beautifully said. Thank you for that call to action, really, for queer folks who are listening. Because the reality is, no matter what our experiences were, like, if you grew up queer, then you have trauma. We all have trauma, whether you've looked it in the face yet or not, whether you've dealt with it or not, like, there's so much that needs to be understood there, and to work on healing that.

And it's ongoing work, right? I don't know that 100% healed is even a state that exists because as you're going through, and you may remember new things, or something could happen that sort of triggers that hurt child again. And then you need the tools to be able to cope with that and move through that.

And it's active work. It's active work that unfortunately, and we didn't ask for it, right? None of us asked for the homophobia and the discrimination that we grew up with and that we internalized, but we're also the only ones who can do anything about it now. And so that's the unfortunate reality of it, is it's not our fault that we have it, but because we do have this trauma, we are the only ones who can work on it and

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make it better so that we don't perpetuate it on other people. And I think that's really important life's work for all of us.

**Jad:**

Yes. And thank you. You know, it's an honor to listen to you speak, and I really hope that the message that you're spreading goes as far as the furthest reaches of the universe. And to just reiterate, you know, that last point which I think is so important, is that healing is ongoing work. I always say, it's never linear. And if you ever feel that you are on a linear track of healing, you are already setting yourself up for failure because you're putting yourself on a one-way track. And there's that train right behind you going, like, choo-choo! [Shohreh laughs lightly] And you're just runnin' and runnin' and runnin'.

So this work is always cyclic. It's always related to habit formation. It's always pattern focused. For me, for example, many times I would just pray and say, well, you know, why don't I wake up at level three? Why not even zero? Why does it have to be a minus two? And so I used to blame myself for that. But then I noticed that almost—many people around me wake up at these fluctuating levels and everyone brings their own levels up to zero every morning. And that is just the nature of life.

And my advice for anyone who is having trouble with something like this is when it comes to habit formation, set out as early as possible what helps you in your daily healing. So if, for example, cleaning your morning space does that, if lighting an incense does that, if doing 20 minutes of meditation does that, if going for a 15-minute jog does that, whatever it is that takes you back to that zero, you need to know it.

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And you need to put it on paper. You need to know what your 1-2-3-4 steps are so that wherever you are in the world, whether you're in a hotel, whether you're going through something traumatic, which we all go through at some point, you wake up in the morning and you know, okay, for me to recalibrate, for me to reach to the zero, this is what I do. I do 1-2-3-4-5. So this is my advice for anyone who is puzzling with something like that. Yeah.

**Shohreh:**

And I'll also say for those of y'all who don't know what that is for you, or you're struggling to figure it out, like, you don't have to do this alone. Like, therapy is wonderful. There are queer groups that you can join. There are organizations, like yours, Jad, Marginalized Majority, that put out programming a lot of times that is free or there are scholarships available.

So, I think sometimes we take so much of this on ourselves, like, something is wrong with me, so I have to fix it. And if you're struggling, you can get help from other people. Like, resources exist. Like, reach out to me, like, I will see what I can hook you up with. Because community is something that is so healing and necessary for us as queer folks, whether that means getting a therapist who is in the community or joining the groups of some of these organizations. Like, you don't have to keep suffering alone. Like, if you've been doing that for a while and it's not working for you, it's time to try something else.

**Jad:**

Thank you so much, Shohreh, I couldn't have said it less. And again, for anyone who is listening, we, Marginalized Majority, have been doing this for almost three years now. If you're Arab, join us on Saturdays at

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12. If you're Indigenous, and of course, this is all plus queer—we're adding plus queer to everything. If you're Arab, join queer Arab spaces. If you're Indigenous or you're interested in understanding Indigenous knowledge, then join our Indigenous once a month space. So, it's the only once a month space, everything else happens on a weekly basis. If you are Khaleeji or Persian, we have every Saturday, and it has not stopped, and there's a collective there and there's a healer, and there's a Khaleeji person managing the space, operating it. Join on Saturdays at 1pm EST. And if you are trans, non-binary, join on Sundays at 12pm EST. If you are the parent, if you are a Global South parent of queer youth and you're not knowing how to deal with your youth, join on Sundays at 1pm. We've also been running this space consistently for almost two years.

The only space that ran for a while but then stopped operating and will go back to resuming is a space that is specific for POCs and Black folks. And the reason that is, is because we would never operate a space that is not being held by a Black facilitator and not being completely operated or in partnership with a Black organization. And when that facilitator was unable to work with us anymore, we of course stopped the space because we would not culturally appropriate or anything like that. And once we are in partnership with this new organization we're currently in communication with, that space will resume.

**Shohreh:**

I am so glad that y'all have so many programs like that. I especially love hearing about the one that is for parents of queer youth because there are a lot of parents out there who are trying to do right by their queer children, but they don't quite know how. And so programming like this,

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that can kind of help bridge that gap for them, because so many of us queer folks have family issues. And I would love for that to become less and less of a thing in future generations. Like, that's just—I'm so glad that program exists from y'all.

**Jad:** Thank you so much. Thank you. If anyone needs anything, our posters are there, on Marginalized Majority on Instagram. So it's every weekend, 11, 12, 1pm EST. Every weekend, Saturday, Sunday, 11, 12, 1, EST. All of these different groups have one hour.

**Shohreh:** Awesome. And I will put links for your organization, all of the social media in the show notes as well for folks if you want easy access to that. And, alright, I want to ask you one thing just for fun because we've had a very serious conversation today. It's been beautiful and I'm so glad that we did, but I want to end it on a high note for us. So, I'm a huge Drag Race fan, and I believe that you are as well [laughing lightly].

**Jad:** I am. But I didn't watch the second episode of the newest season, so no spoilers.

**Shohreh:** Okay. I would not ever give any spoilers on the pod.

**Jad:** [Laughing] I know you wouldn't. You know too much.

**Shohreh:** I am obsessed with this new season of All Stars, for the record. For those listening who don't know what we're talking about, there's a new season of All Stars 7 that just came out, and it's an all-winners season. So everyone competing has won a season in the past, and it is amazing. You're gonna have a blast when you do watch the second episode [laughs].

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- Jad:** Yes, it is. For me, it just gives me so much life. Also, you know, in educating my mom for three, four years about queer issues, nothing educated her better than watching drag show, believe it or not, Drag Race. [Shohreh laughs] Last time she was over visiting me, I woke up from a nap, and she was crying. And I was like, what's wrong? And she's like, [fake-crying] Simone! Simone won! [Shohreh laughs] She's like, I knew she was gonna win! I was like, okay, so that's good.
- Shohreh:** Oh my god, that's so cute. I just went to DragCon in L.A. last weekend with my girlfriend, so I got to meet a bunch of the queens, and it was really fun. But, so I wanted to ask you, who are some of your favorite queens? And I've watched, like, all—anything that's ever been on in the U.S., I've watched. I've also watched Canada and U.K. So, anyone who's in there, I will know who they are if you mention them.
- Jad:** Sure. I definitely—Simone is on the top and Monét X Change is on the top.
- Shohreh:** Monét!
- Jad:** Simone is amazing because she really represents real cultural drag. And very strong political and social statements, they just give me life. And she also has those legs! Like, hello! [Shohreh laughs]
- Shohreh:** I know!
- Jad:** Legs for days! And they're, like, shining from space. So, um, and Monét, Monét is so witty and so funny. And whatever she does is just oozing with talent and oozing with hilarity.

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Oh, and I love Yvie Oddly, too. [Shohreh laughs lightly] Yvie is amazing because she's very humble and super real. Like, Yvie is real! Like, when you watch her, you feel like you're getting the full person, like, you know, all the details, the good and the bad. And just also, Yvie, I do believe identifies as disabled.

**Shohreh:** Yes.

**Jad:** So that's also very important that we see that representation of a racialized disabled person on TV as well. So important. Yeah.

**Shohreh:** Mm. Yes. I think that's one of the really cool things about both Yvie winning her season and then just this most recent season with Willow Pill winning, too. Both of them struggle with chronic illness, are in the disability community, and as we were just talking about earlier in this episode, right, we need more representation. So to have that on a major television show, the biggest queer show that exists in the world, arguably, is so important.

And same thing, I mean, I love—you picked Simone, Monét, and Yvie who are all, like, strong Black queens who bring activism into their work. Which, I love the intersection of art and activism, especially in drag. It is so cool to see the ways that they pull that into fashion. Simone, especially, has some really cool runways. I'll try to put one in the show notes where she had some of her activism. Because it's just, like, mind blowing to see when it's, like, oh, it's all fashion, fashion, fashion, which is great. But when your fashion can also mean something more, that's really special.

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**Jad:** I totally agree with you. I do like how drag is changing the narrative a bit. And, you know, RuPaul Season One, Two, Three, Four, is definitely not RuPaul the past five years or four years. We're seeing trans women, we're seeing non-binary folks, we're seeing cis-hetero males in drag. We are seeing a very wider, especially more POCs. So that is very important.

And also, there's been a lot more intention to educate folks. Before, you know, we had introduced to balls and categories without understanding the historical meaning of ballrooms and drag. And now, there has also been this intention in the past three, four years, to show us what the history of drag is and what the history of ballroom is. And how POCs and Black folks and marginalized majorities—not even minorities—brought these conversations and these rights to the forefront.

**Shohreh:** Yes, and that's something I've really loved. So I got into Drag Race only just over a year ago. And so I've watched, like, hundreds of episodes in a year. Like, I just got obsessed, watched all of the things. And so, I've literally seen it go from, you know, what it was in those early seasons, seasons that some people haven't watched, you know, since they came out, to what it is now. And there's been a distinct difference in the efforts to have historical context, to have inclusivity, to have this wider variety of queens, and to talk about their cultures and experiences. So the progress is happening. And there's always more to be done.

**Jad:** Shohreh, I can't wait for us to, at some point, chill together.

**Shohreh:** Yeah!

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- Jad:** I don't know if you drink, but maybe we can grab a drink.
- Shohreh:** I do.
- Jad:** Or just chill. Great! And so we can just watch some Drag Race and, like, maybe do, like, a seasons marathon.
- Shohreh:** Yes!
- Jad:** You know, just like, I love vegetating on Drag Race, it's just so healing [laughs lightly].
- Shohreh:** It is! I literally just sent, last week, to my newsletter, it was the weekend I was at Drag Con, I wrote, like, an entire essay about it. I was like, Drag Race saved my life. Because it just has been such a meaningful show for me, especially as someone who came out late, and, like, it was very disruptive in my life when I did. Drag Race was something that I held onto. So that sounds like my perfect evening, is getting drinks and watching Drag Race. So, I look forward to this in our future.
- Jad:** [Laughing lightly] I can't wait; it sounds amazing, Shohreh. I can't wait.
- Shohreh:** Well, thank you so much for being here and sharing all of your experiences and your wisdom with my listeners. How can people find you, and how can they best support you at this time?
- Jad:** Um, thank you also for, you know, hosting me in this space. And more importantly, thank you for your voice and for your wisdom and for your perceptions. People can find me personally on my own Instagram, it's called @QueerArab, very simple. And if you want to follow all the work that the Marginalized Majority is doing, um, to support Arab Global

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South and queer folks, follow @MarginalizedMajority. It's just @TheMarginalizedMajority on Instagram and also @MarginalizedMajority on LinkedIn and on TikTok and on Facebook. We're everywhere. And on Twitter. I'm also @QueerArab on Twitter.

And the best way you can honestly support is we've been doing this work for a really long time and we have been doing it without any government grants. It is an entirely volunteer-based body that has been operating these drop-ins and creating these intersectional workshops. We would appreciate any form of support. If you feel that you would like our work to continue going and you feel that this subject and these issues that we're dealing with are important and needing spaces specifically for queer Arabs and queer Persians and queer Khaleejis and all that is important, then we need you in any shape or way. We're also always looking for volunteers from anywhere in the world. So also, if you'd like to volunteer, we're also always looking for support. We already have the posts on our Instagram.

And yeah, that's it. Thank you so much, Shohreh. Thank you.

**Shohreh:** Perfect. I will put links for all of that in the show notes so it's really easy for people to find. Thank you again for making time for this. This was such a beautiful conversation; I'm excited to share it with everyone.

**Jad:** It really was. You're more than welcome. 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

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[Music fades]