Unhinged by the News? Stress, Media and Mental Health with Dr. Shila Patel Transcript

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Introduction and Dr. Patelu2019s background

Welcome to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr Amy Cooper-Smith, a doctor prepared nurse practitioner, and this show is about empowering you to live a radiant, healthy and balanced life.

Dr. Patel has worked as a licensed practicing psychiatrist for over 25 years and is the author of Us Unhinged 1 and 2 and US Fractured. So welcome. I really want to thank you for being here today.

Thank you so much, Amy, for inviting me. Your journey started in India or your family's journey. How did you come from where you grew up to be a psychiatrist in the United States?

Interesting journey. My parents were born in India when England and the UK was still, India was in British colony and so they were British citizens. And so British students could move to any of the other British colonies.

So they moved over to Kenya where I was born. Then my father was the Minister of Finance and he ended up in Zambia and then I ended going to England as a British citizen for further education.

So that's where I went to medical school. I registered as physician in England. And then my parents wanted to come to this land of opportunity. Let's face it, United States is a whole country of immigrants.

Everybody wants to have a better life. That's what my father wanted. And I could practice as a physician in this country if I worked hard and spend a lot of hours building a practice, doing as well as I can to get where I couldn't.

In England, it's still a very pyramidal system. And so the doctors at the top are very few, and so you really have to work a lot on the underside as far as senior house officers, registrars, before you can ever become a consultant.

Here in this country, you become specialist and then open up your own practice and be a consult right from get-go. So I and my husband, who was a neurologist, moved over when we finished our training And then both of us needed residencies and my husband got into residency in neurology in Augusta, Georgia.

I could get into psychiatry residency and that's what we did. And we had private practice. And we both were very big fish in a very small bowl in North Florida, South Georgia area.

Very, very busy practices. And it was my niche. I loved child psychiatry. Right from the get go, I wanted to be a pediatrician, but that kind of, during my training, it all baby clinics, crying immunizations, dealing with parents who are always very worried and I just couldn't handle that.

So I had a training session in child psychiatry and just fell in love and never regretted my decision and enjoyed my work for 25 years. Wonderful. I lived in that part of Georgia for about four years, I was in the army.

Oh, three years? So, so I live in Fort Stewart. My husband actually worked in Valdosta for Oh, okay, great. A little while. So we moved down here to Florida, as did you.

Well, my parents got frail. And so my partner decided to move down to take care of parents after I retired. Yes. Many of my clients here have a similar story that their parents came here first and then they followed, but now they're Floridians.

Florideans, right. So I have the opportunity to look at a couple of your books to read some excerpts. And you talk about a lot of really amazing topics.

How news headlines affect mental health

But one thing that really struck me was the news headlines and how it affects our mental wellness. Right. Well, you know, any kind of negative news or sensationalized news gets the most attention.

And so that's what the news outlets focus on. So what does it do to our psyche? You know there has been such an uptick in depression, anxiety, loneliness, because of all the issues that come up with You're constantly bombarded with negative news.

So what happens? We feel hopeless, we feel helpless, We can't do anything about it. Everything is doom and gloom. And until and unless you have a really strong foundation where you can really think about these issues in a more realistic manner, then only you're going to be able to put aside.

Let's face it, even all of us who have a good mental health status still get despondent when we hear constant negative news. issues that come up that are going to affect us health-wise.

And so, you know, your heart rate goes up, You have irritable bowel syndrome, and you feel sick. You don't cope. you tend to isolate because you don t want to meet up with people that re constantly talking about these kind of issues.

Especially if you're in conflict. Let's face it, half the country is for one side and the other half of the countries for the And the animosity and the anger that all this has generated over the last year has been very worrisome.

Let's put it that way. I feel like it almost seems that it's intentionally polarizing when I see the headlines and I think, you know, do they want us to be fighting with each other?

And, I try to encourage even, if I have someone, even if we don't agree, that's okay. We can talk about it or not, but it doesn't make you a bad person if you don' agree the way I agree.

You know, all of us have learned how to negotiate. We have learnt to listen to each other. Let's face it, there is no two people in a relationship that are going to agree to everything.

And as a team, approach to my practice, I believe that what's happening in the country right now is that the Republican and the Democrats are like two parents and they're constantly fighting.

So what is happening to the children, which is all the citizens of America, they are all going to be upset seeing these constant fights all of the time.

And so we all have to learn to show respect, to get respect. The politicians have to be better role models because what's happening right now is, like you say, they're causing so much anger and frustration and irritability that that is really overflowing into what the citizens are feeling.

And then when the citizen are like the politicians are not listening and they're not doing what the American citizens want them to do. And that's why in my last book, The U. S.

Fractured, I said, let's go back to the basic American values. The Americans by heart are hardworking people. They care about their communities. they care, about the families.

Uh, doing volunteer work, you know, when we have a hurricane or we haven't been natural disaster, we don't stop to see what color they are or what nationality they or, or whether they're legal or they illegal.

You know? We're going to help people out. Americans are very, very generous people. I've been an immigrant in this country for 40 years, and I have really.

appreciated when I first came how encouraged I was with the hard work I did, the reception I got. I never felt like I

as a foreigner. Never felt I like was Indian.

Always felt an American and I have always put myself forward as American first as most people do in this country. And the divide that is happening right now is you're supposed to see color, you are supposed see what nationality you, are you supposed what language you speak.

But majority of immigrants have contributed tremendously to this country. And that's what the politicians need to understand is look at your own roots where you come from.

It's a very interesting analogy to compare the politicians to parents. Do you think that the conflict being caused is intentional or is it just an unfortunate side effect of behavior?

There is so much concentration right now on power, and then there's a big concentration in the corporations on greed. So what they're doing is they are forgetting how to take care of people.

The politicians are so focused on I mean, you know, when the president of this great country says, I should win the Nobel Prize. I shouldn't be given.

It's that sense of, that they deserve it. And so that's how the politicians are ruling right now, is that, they deserved to be heard. They deserve to the right people.

And sadly, the Democrats didn't do anything when they were in power. They are slow to react, they're slow take action. And on the other hand, we have somebody who is like a bulldoze going through the Constitution.

sadly breaking a lot of the rules. And let's face it as, again, as an analogy, I talk about being good role models. The thing that the children learn from is watching parents.

They do not learn by listening to parents, they learn watching the parents how are they reacting? What are the saying? How are supposed to behave? And sadly, that's what the two fractions with the citizens is happening, is that each party is really kind of modeling on what politicians are modeling.

Right. So I think that is our reality right now. But how can we, the citizen, respond to that so that we are not getting sick both mentally and physically?

Well, you know, one of the things I always say is you have to limit to what you're listening to. So don't get overwhelmed. Do not ever open your phone or laptop first thing in the morning or last thing at night, because you don't want to start off your day feeling anxious and feeling angry and feelings hopeless.

You don' want end your days where it's going to disturb your sleep, you're going sit there worrying about all these things.

Staying informed without getting overwhelmed

Don't continually listen and doom scroll You know, basically what was said, what happened, you know? What did they say now? what did he do now. Don't get away from that, because all that does is it increases your anxiety.

And when your inside increases, What are you going to do? You're either going drink more, You going too smoke more. You are going either, uh, withdraw and not talk to people.

So what I say is look at Just the headlines. And then be choosy about what you want to read more about. Don't read everything that's out there. Because let's face it, the news outlets put out the new as fast as they can.

They don't fact check. Any retractions are very small and maybe a few days later. But the first thing they report, who is the fastest person out of the gate?

So the use are not always accurate. So one of things is get two or three different sources that you believe in. So that they're respectful. Like, you know, BBC News are pretty much not involved.

And so they report pretty good news. So choose two or three outlets that are good-news outlets and get the facts. Learn to scroll through different headlines so that, like I said, read those in depth and then make up your own mind.

what you think is the truth and what is just sensationalized negative news. The other thing that I always say is try and pick a few topics that you're passionate about.

To me, freedom for women is a very important aspect. I think that, I was horrified as was the rest of the world as the freedoms that the women are losing in this country.

Men never have to lose any freedoms. We are not going around doing vasectomies or we're not telling them to abstain. It's always the women who, you know, can't have birth control pills.

You can have abortions. you can do what your own body could dictate what you want to do. And so that is a very passionate project for me, because having seen how much women have struggled all through the centuries, and that's why my first book, The Us Unhinged, is all about women.

It's all About relationships. it's All about improving how males and females can interact. what women have had to overcome and how far we have come. But now I feel like we're just being drawn backwards.

So pick a few topics that are important to you, write to your senators, right to house representatives, make your voice known, talk to people who are organizing these meetings, who out rallying like the no king rallies, whatever you feel passionate about, but do it in a respectful way Learn to listen to people on the opposite side and then make up your mind.

If you go in talking to, people being very defensive, People are not going to want to Listen to you. So you have to start with yourself. You have To start With what's going To ground you first before you can start making a change in the community.

And I think you have a good point about empowering yourself, because if you feel hopeless and helpless, I that's going to contribute to despair. But if say, OK, this is what I can do.

I could write this letter and that control that we take. Right. Like AARP, you know, let's face it, almost 70. And so I belong to A. A. R. P. and they're always putting out stuff for seniors.

So I'm always doing the surveys. Always giving my input. into what needs to change, what we are passionate about. And so every generation has to decide on what is important for them.

What are the freedoms that they wanna fight for? Freedom of speech is one that's being really squashed right now. I would think that the young people should be out there in social media, full blast, dictating that this is what they want from Americans and their politicians.

Yep. So we need to pause for a break from our sponsor, but we're going to come back to this because it's important. Everyone don't go anywhere. We'll be right back.

Welcome back to Energize and Revitalize with Dr. Amy. I'm Dr Amy Coopersmith and my guest today is Dr Shaila Patel. Before the break, we were talking about the news, headlines, the polarization of our society, and what we can do to take control of how we respond to these things by being choosy, limiting what you might choose to listen to or what might we choose watch.

And so you mentioned, you know, being choosy, maybe scroll the headlines. One thing that I've struggled with as a consumer is that many of the headline seem rather inflammatory.

And even if I don't open, even If I press click, it's still affecting me. I'm still having an emotional response to it. So have you found that other people say that?

And what can we do? Oh, absolutely. Like I said, You know, that's what headlines are meant to be. They're meant be hooks. And what they do is they hook you in and they want you to read more.

Whether there's any substance to it or not, but that is what the meaning of the headline and the hook is. Is they won't to get your attention. The want to you get to that site.

their perspective. And that is why I'm saying it's going to be very important for you to say, okay, you know, is this really, really important to me? Is this what I really want to spend my precious time?

And when you limit, say you There's a good study, even if you have only been on the site and read negative news for 14 minutes, it increases the depressive and anxiety symptoms.

Only 14 Minutes. So limit yourself to maybe five minutes at a time and give yourself saying, OK, I'm just going to scan these headlines. What's going on?

So I am aware of what's happening. Don't bury your head in the sand and don't pretend like this isn't happening, because when that happens, and then people give up.

And that is why I do these radio shows. This is where I speak out on the podcasts because I'm very passionate about people needing to be empowered. America has so much to offer.

It has offered me so many in my life. And I want everybody to have that advantage, to be able to, be empowered. And the only way you empower yourself is through knowledge.

How do you get knowledge is reading and listening to the right sources.

Womenu2019s rights, family planning, and advocacy

Don't just, you know, sadly, the attention span of an American is very, very short. So people just tend to spout back whatever they're hearing or they are listening.

They don't dwell into it. And that's why, like I said, just pick two or three topics. Just have a very limited time and then look at what's important to you.

you make such a good point about having knowledge. And so I, at one point, felt really manipulated by the news and I said, I'm shutting it off. I am not going to watch it.

It won't let them manipulate me. But then I don't know what's going on. Right. That's very dangerous for all of us. We can't do that. So we do have to find that balance, figure out who can we trust?

And I still working on it, it's still very difficult. But like I said, you know, once you get into a couple of sources that you believe in and you think that for the most part, they are really reporting the right things, then you will automatically go to those sources and your automatically read a little bit more about what they have to say.

And then they will always have other sources where they're getting their information from. So when I was writing my books, that's how I ended up getting into all these different sources and different things.

Because when was I writing this, you know, all of my book are non-fictional. Of course, I had to have every every little thing. I mean, I have like over 600 footnotes in each book because basically I had to check out a lot of sources.

And I to make sure that what I was writing about was accurate. Yeah, and that's important because you want

people to be able to trust you and to back check yourself and be as accurate as you can.

Exactly. Which I enjoyed what read and I think our listeners will too. So you mentioned focusing on what you're passionate about, and you mention women's rights.

So has your experience by living in other countries and then seeing what's happening here, did your experienced from not being here originally influence how you feel now?

Well, you know, I grew up in Africa. And if you read a lot about how Africans treat their women, how even the mutilation that goes on. I don't know if your aware, but even in certain tribes, they cut off the clitoris of the women because they don t want them to enjoy sex, because the men are allowed to allowed to have sex for procreation and bearing children, and so they're not supposed to enjoy it.

So they can't go out and have affairs and, you know, be with other men or whatever. And so growing up in that kind of culture and reading about that at a young age, affected me.

Growing up and in Indian culture, which really almost All of them want a son, and they always say that it's the son that's going to take care of the family.

Well, let me tell you that is not correct. Now, I find in my experiences, it is the women and it the daughters that are always taking care the parents.

And a lot of parents are beginning to realize that. I have a lots of my mother's friends who are saying, we always wish we had a daughter because she would definitely be taking of us.

But I grew up with that culture. Even the serials my mother watches are all dictating where the women are downtrodden on. They are not treated right. And so it was a very, very personal issue for me to look at what women have struggled with and come through.

I mean, I came to this country. It was so freeing. that women could say whatever. I don't always agree with the, I'm still very conservative Indian. And so I didn't agree the way women go around dressed, half naked, you know, on the beach.

But we can if we want to. That's exactly right. And we have the freedoms to be able to do that. But when I started, especially with this year, with all the limitations and the Supreme Court judges, instead of ruling what's right for the American people, they're ruling more conservative and siding with the conservatives as to almost like Justice Thomas wanting to even take away the birth control pills.

I mean, how backward can you think about this country? And what I cannot understand is why are women putting up with this? Why are young women who have enjoyed so many freedoms in this county putting it up?

They should be shouting from rooftops saying this is not what Americans stand for. I spent a good amount of my career working at the health department in our county and of course family planning is paramount for health and wellness.

Now I've even read about maybe even in Africa where there isn't access to family planting and what that does to infant mortality and maternal mortality by not spacing those pregnancies properly.

and not even to talk about the economic impact of having children when you're not ready. And you can't afford them. That's right. Right. So yes, I agree that I never thought in my lifetime that i would see things happen this way.

But what's sad is the people with lower socioeconomic status are being affected more. Because like you said, they're forced to have children they can't afford.

They can afford to get, you know, health care. That they have to drive ridiculous amount of distances to be able to

go to a state where they cannot have an abortion.

I mean, everything is just going crazy now. You're absolutely right. If a woman of means has a pregnancy that didn't that she didn't want to have, she could get herself someplace.

But a woman in a lower socioeconomic status wouldn't be able to do that.

Immigration, contribution, and closing advice

But so if we feel empowered about something like this, then we should figure out how we can help. Right. And like I said, main thing is that reaching out, trying to talk to your neighbors.

Like I say, first listening and try and organize things, try to reach out. And we've talked about reaching out to your senators, reaching after your politicians, making sure that they understand as an American citizen, you know, where your stance is.

And if enough people report this enough people reach out enough, people, you know, try and give their opinions as to how they feel about what's happening.

Maybe one day we may see some changes, but to just not do anything is not an answer. You're right. So also in the news right now, we have a lot of headlines about immigrants.

And as an immigrant, I was wondering about your opinion about things. Well, you know, one, that I came into this country legally. My father was an accountant and he got a green card on his profession.

I came over as a dependent on my parents, but I come over legally. So I did not agree seeing thousands of people just coming across. The Democrats really messed up there.

They should have definitely limited the number of the people that came across, they should come across legally, and they cannot just let anybody and everybody come every American person agrees with.

But the way they are treating people so inhumanely right now is just ridiculous. Because let's face it, our farmers rely on seasonal workers. If you see who are the contractors, who the land people, they're all immigrants.

They are very, very hardworking people. they add a lot to the American economy. And then people think that they can just round these people up and send them back.

Are there that many Americans that are actually going to fill those positions? No, I don't think so. And especially when you look at white middle class people, they're all looking for corporate jobs.

They're looking. For more blue collar jobs, there are not going. To be doing the yard work, you're not. Going to be. Doing the construction, not gonna be building roads and to just keep bad-mouthing immigrants who are very hardworking people.

And if you look at the other end of the spectrum, let's look all the big CEOs. Look at Google, look Pepsi. Who are the CEOs? They're all South Asian immigrants.

So at both extremes, the immigrants are really Contributing a ton of goodness to this country and to really down and bad mouth immigrants is intolerable to a person like me.

Oh, I can definitely understand that. And you really do a good job about presenting both sides, like one side screwed up initially, now the other side is making it worse.

So, so I hope that we do all start treating each other kindly. But it starts with people like you speaking out. Thank you. So we're almost out of time, but if you were to leave our listeners with one thing they could do to maybe help

navigate this dangerous space, what would that be?

Okay, take care of yourself first of all. Like I said, don't open the news first thing in the morning. Get some good sleep. Don't look at the new last thing at night.

move, dance, do whatever you need to go out in nature, you know, take some walks, get away from, stop looking at your phone. You know we keep talking about all the impact of social media.

Limit your time on social. That is so paramount, not only for your kids, but for yourself too. Yes, well those are very wise words. I really want to thank you for being here.

How can our listeners learn more about you and find your books? It's really easy, it's www.drshilapatel.com. So go to my website, they'll be able to get hold, and they're able read what my books are about.

Or they can just go on Amazon and put on the headline, books by Dr. Sheila Patel MD. All of the books will show up. They'll give you information about what's in them.

Sadly, people are not reading as much, but there's lots of different good information in all of them that would help their mental health. And that was the only reason I put them out, not to make money, because trust me, writing books does not make, money.

But I just felt passionate about giving out good, information and that's what they are about. Wonderful. All right. Well, thanks again. Thank you, Amy.

What insights did today's episode leave you with? And are there more topics you want to hear about? Send me an email to radiantpodcast2025 at gmail.com.

Check out past episodes on Amethyst Wellness YouTube. And I'll be back next Saturday morning at 730 with more expert insights to help you live a radiant, healthy and balanced life.

Until then, here's to your best life!