

117. PART 1: Unraveling the Patriarch, Past, Present, and Persistence

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Welcome to the Empowered brain, the only podcast using science, psychology and coaching to help you rewire your brain and create a life you love with your host, Dr. Vanessa Calderon, a Harvard grad physician, master coach, and mother of two.

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Hello, sweet friends. Welcome back to the podcast. I am so excited for these next three episodes because it's really nerdy of me. But I love diving deep into the why historical context why things developed the way they did. And you guys see the title of this podcast, we're talking about the patriarchy. And the reason why I started creating this podcast episode was because I was coaching one of my students, and actually all of my students on impostor syndrome. And, you know, the thing is that many women, especially women of color, or immigrants, or if you are in a new sort of socio demographic class now, because of your job, or whatever it is, you might experience imposter syndrome, this sense that you don't belong there. As we were coaching on impostor syndrome, I realized that a lot of my students were internalizing the sense of insecurity, like it was their fault. And I had to just stop and break it down.

Because again, I had a ton of compassion from my students, because I've experienced the same thing, there were so many times when I felt insecure or not smart enough or not good enough in certain spaces. In fact, I've been a practicing clinical physician for geez, close to 15 years or more now. And for the longest time, I never thought I was smart enough, or I was good enough to be a doctor, because I wasn't white, because I wasn't a man or whatever it is. And that right there, that's imposter syndrome. And where does it come from? Well, if we're really going to unravel impostor syndrome, we've got to go way back and really understand the systems of oppression that have set up impostor syndrome, and why it exists. And that's the patriarchy. And it's also, you know, the internalized racism that we experience. And I did a whole episode on decolonizing your brain, I think it's back in episode 80. I think there are three parts to that.

So I recommend if that is something that you want to do your own work on to go back to my decolonizing, your brain podcast series, I think it's in the 80s. Okay, so today, the patriarchy. So, I'm gonna break this down the following way. Today, we're going to talk about the historical context of the patriarchy. In the next episode, we're going to talk about the intersection of women and your identities, and how that plays a role in the patriarchy game. And then in the last part, we're going to talk about how we can all do our own part, whether you're a man or a woman, if you're an ally, or if you're experiencing this yourself to really start doing the work to dismantle the patriarchy.

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Okay, so just a quick story before I get started. So I, you know, moved to Atlanta recently. And I just got back from this really beautiful, lovely walk with a girlfriend of mine, who also just happened to move to Atlanta from California, just like me, she got here maybe a year before me, and has two kids, my kids age, and they're both girls. And we both happen to work for the same organization. That's how we know each other. And she's just an incredible just like lovely human being.

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And it was so interesting, speaking to her and talking to her and hearing the way she thinks she's this really well-accomplished woman and just caught me thinking how the patriarchy and a lot of the things that we think and feel are so subconsciously, we don't even realize that they are affecting us. So if you're listening to this, and you're wondering, oh, I don't have that problem, or I have a lot of masculine qualities, whatever it is, I just want you to be open to the possibility that you could also have been affected by the patriarchy because in all honesty, I have yet to meet a woman or really even a man who has not been affected by the patriarchy. Okay, so let's talk about the patriarchy. So we're gonna first talk about how it sort of developed and there's a few different theories. So for those of you that are like if you want a simple definition, let me just make this as simple as possible. The patriarchy is the social construct.

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The social, this the social identity, social thoughts, where a man is smarter, better, more powerful, you know, and that women should be subordinated to men. So that sort of very basic level with the patriarchy is. Alright, so how did the patriarchy develop? So there are a few different theories on how it developed. And I'll share the three of them. So one way is this thought about, you know, evolution, the evolutionary theory, where some scholars believe that, you know, early human societies developed the patriarchal structures, because of the difference in biological and reproductive differences between men and women. Women needed to give birth for their species to survive and to thrive. And men because of their physical strength, were able to go out, hunt, gather, and bring food home and protect, which started this sort of establishment of male dominance, protecting the tribe or the herd. Therefore, should they be powerful should they be revered?

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As you know, we started to continue to evolve and we shifted from this nomadic hunter-gatherer into more of an agricultural role. The agricultural revolution, for example, in the patriarchy continued to develop with, you know, the advent of agriculture and societies becoming more hierarchical, and the concept of private property, you had to own your property to grow crops and so forth on it. Men started becoming the primary landowners and cultivators of that property. So men were the owners of the property and women were not amendment women were not allowed to own property, which gave men now not just physical power, but also economic power, which translated into social power, and political dominance.

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So, as cultures continued to develop, what we started to experience is religion became a thing and we started developing religion and cultural ideologies. And what we saw in religion and culture is that they justified male superiority and female subordination. Think about what if you are religious, for example, think about the people that you see at the pulpit, who are leading the religion who meet for religious meetings, it's usually men. And the beliefs were often based on ideas of divine or natural order. And this is where it starts getting tricky because we started using religion to justify the oppression of women. Similar to how, you know many sort of colonizers used religion to justify a lot of races X, almost all races X.

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All right. So that's sort of the theory of how the patriarchy developed. When you think about where the patriarchy developed, the truth is, if you look at ancient civilizations, you can see examples of the patriarchy almost everywhere. In ancient Mesopotamia, you could see it in ancient Greece, where they had a very sort of predominantly patriarchal society, where men were the people that both, you know, had control publicly and privately. Look at the artists that we revere, that are from Roman or Greek times, the philosopher's moment in Greek time. They happen to be men, not because men are smarter, not because men have, you know, the ability to think more thoughtfully or have more deep conversations, not because of that at all. But because women's rights were. They were eliminated, and limited.

The women had limited legal rights and were primarily confined to domestic roles, just like we experience now. Women were not allowed to go to school, they were not allowed to sit in circles where men would gather to philosophize, and they couldn't be active in politics, in warfare, or really in public life. We saw the same thing in other ancient civilizations as well, like ancient China, for example, they had a patriarchal structure where the Confucian teachings reinforced gender roles and emphasized male authority. And women were expected to be subservient, to be obedient, to be wives, and to be mothers, while men were given the right to govern society to have jobs to lead financially.

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So yes, all of that is sort of how it developed, and how does it persist? So I'm going to shift now and I'm going to talk a little bit about how we continue to see the patriarchy now

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Because here's the truth, the truth is, is that we've made a ton of strides towards gender equity. But we still experience so much oppression, and so much sort of kind of residual beliefs subconsciously most of the time about these gender roles. So if you're listening to this again, and you don't think you're affected by this, I want you to just be open to the possibility of pretending maybe you are that maybe you are affected by this. Because even the most well-meaning men and the most well-meaning women continue to believe thoughts about the patriarchy. And when they do that, they reinforce patriarchal structures. And it's not just women who suffer the consequences of the patriarchy, it's men too. So the more you can be open to the possibility that perhaps you might be experiencing this, the more you can create that awareness, and then shift. Alright, so let's talk about some examples of how the patriarchy still exists now.

So I'm just going to go through a few different examples and talk about how they exist and how they continue to be perpetuated. So the first is a super obvious one. And that's the gender pay gap. So you've probably heard about this yourself. But in many parts of the world, women continue to earn less than men for performing the same job or the same work of equal value. And it's not just some parts of the world, it's many parts of the world, including the United States. I know many of you are listening from the United States right now. And it's definitely happening here. The pay disparity is a clear manifestation of the patriarchal system, where a woman's work and her contributions are undervalued compared to men, for many reasons, but historically, think about the jobs, women had women had jobs at home where they were caretakers or caregivers. And that kind of work was undervalued.

And now when women try to speak up to get equal pay, they are labeled as certain things like selfish, greedy, or pushing, which means the patriarchy and the societal norms that already exist, make it difficult for women to advocate or to negotiate for themselves. So oftentimes, I get arguments that the gender pay gap doesn't exist anymore, or it's because women have babies, and they leave the workforce, or the data is not capturing all of these things. And the truth is that the gender pay gap is incredibly complex. A large part of it is this right here. It's the historical context where women have historically been undervalued and paid less. And it's also because a lot of women don't feel safe advocating or negotiating. They don't feel entitled to negotiate. They don't feel like it's the right thing to do. They don't want to be seen as selfish, what is the worst thing you can call a woman selfish? The worst thing you call a woman, especially a woman of color, who is supposed to be all about her family and her community and giving back is selfish. After that, you call them greedy or pushy when they negotiate.

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I know it's a very fine line, when you're coming up against something like this, and you want to ask for more. It's a really fine line, you're told women are often told to be happy with what you have, or you should be grateful for what you have, or money doesn't matter. You can be happy without money, money doesn't buy happiness. And yeah, of course, it's true Money does not buy happiness. And you definitely should, and could be happy without money, you shouldn't be looking to money to make you happy. But that's beside the point. The point is that men are socialized to negotiate and are socialized to ask for, quote-unquote, what they're worth. And when a man negotiates, it's just expected. And because of all of these things, it further propagates this gender pay gap. So the gender pay gap is a problem. Definitely, I've seen it firsthand in the work that I've done. I know it exists.

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So this is a huge example of the patriarchy. In part three of this series, we're going to talk about all the ways to dismantle the patriarchy. So we'll go deep into how we get rid of the gender pay gap. All right, the second one is under-representation and leadership. Okay, another obvious one, Women are often underrepresented in positions of power. We all know that look at the CEOs you are more likely to have a CEO named David than you are to have a woman CEO. That is, that's a fact. You can go look it up

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So women are definitely underrepresented in positions of power, both in the corporate world and in politics, look at politics. And here's the thing. Yes, we currently have a vice president who's a woman, hallelujah, a woman of color. Incredible. That's amazing.

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And that doesn't mean that we've solved the problem of women's representation. Absolutely not. If you were to count all of the other women versus men in politics, just looking at Congress, you would see the dismal numbers that still exist.

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So despite progress, men still dominate high-level decision-making roles, which reinforces the patriarchal notion that men are better suited for leadership. Now, this is a problem for so many reasons. The very first issue is that if you are a woman or a woman of color, and you don't see other women in those roles, it's hard for you to understand that it's possible for you because what's happening is you are getting societal cues that are embedded in your subconscious, that tell you that those rules are for men, or men are better at politics, men are better at leading men are better at becoming CEOs.

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Those are the rules. Those are the subconscious kind of cues that we get. That's what women are socialized to think and believe, because of what we see by example.

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And when women do make it into those leadership roles, the culture can often be incredibly toxic for a female, or just half female friendly, maybe it's not super toxic, but it's just not friendly to females to be in those roles.

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Often, when you're in those roles, what you will experience as a female is that the men in those roles, may have partners that are stay-at-home partners, they may have wives that stay at home and take care of their kids full time, where they might have different expectations at home, like maybe they're not expected, even if their wives work, they don't have the 50 expectation at home. Or, you know, there's a bunch of other ways that this plays a part which makes it more possible for men to work longer hours because they have somebody at home with the kids. Plus, if you think about the sort of gender stereotype, which we're gonna get into in a bit, where women are supposed to be home, you can imagine the guilt a woman feels when she has a working partner, and she's not at home with her kids.

Even if she doesn't have a working partner, even if the partner is at home, there's still so much guilt that's socialized into being a woman, if you're working a certain amount of hours. The other reason that these roles tend to not be female friendly, whenever there's a large number of men in the roles before females get there is that the business decisions often happen in conversations that are not free, female friendly, are in locations that are not female friendly. In the bathrooms, for example, I remember I sat on a board where I was one of the only women on the board. And we would take these long bathroom breaks 15, 20 minutes and people would disappear. And I'm like, Where's everybody going? They were taking their time walking slowly to the men's room having all of these conversations side conversations

from the boardroom continuing the conversations in the bathroom, and finalizing the conversations on their way back. So guess who wasn't a part of those conversations? The women, the women that were not going to the men's room. So men bond over these topics, you know, in traditionally again, in conversations that are you know, have ascribed to be male-gendered conversations like sports, or cars or locations like the man's bathroom.

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The other big reason is success is often defined in these roles as a way that is really hard for anybody to have a fulfilling life. And when you think about these leadership roles, and how we have defined success in those leadership roles in the past, or now to date, how do we define success, we define success by overworking. By always being available, by you know, showing up early, staying late working on the weekends, saying yes to more and more work, prioritizing work over anything else. That's how we define success in a lot of these organizations, a lot of these corporate jobs, and a lot of leadership. And when you think about it, what does that mean? That means it's really difficult to have a life a fulfilling life, a wholehearted life outside of work. So it's hard for you to say yes to family and still be successful. It's hard for you to set boundaries and not feel guilty. And it's hard for you to continue to get elevated in these roles if you're not constantly playing the game, overworking all of the time.

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And then the last thing here is leadership style. So last thing I'll say about underrepresentation in a leader trip, is I have a lot to say about underrepresentation in leadership, I should have created its own podcast episode because I was a female leader and I am a female leader in a primarily male-dominated roles. And it was really lonely at the top, and I did my best to continue to pull women up. Because you know, we are facing so many biases. Here's another one that you've probably heard. And this is the last one I mentioned, Women in leadership positions often face a ton of scrutiny over their leadership style.

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So if they are assertive or authoritative, they're going to be labeled as bossy, or the B word bi Tch, or they're going to be labeled as difficult, or a hard ass, or a ballbuster. On the other hand, a man who does the Same exact thing, they're effective, they get just down to the point, and they're just no BS.

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So I want you guys to just notice how this shows up all the time. And I know that this is the way it rolls. You know, I know that because I've played the game, I had to be really careful when I had to coach somebody, especially a man when I was leading an organization and had to be really careful when I requested something that my department needed and needed to make sure that I was seen as approachable and collaborative, and kind and nice, but still decisive, and still able to get stuff done and strategic. It's a fine line to walk, ladies. And Alright, so the next one here is gender stereotypes and expectations.

So listen, we've talked a little bit about the gender pay gap. We've talked about under-representation and leadership, and I'm talking about gender stereotypes and expectations. So again, these are all somewhat obvious, right? So yeah, there's a double standard, we all know that it exists. There are

these expectations, that person is persistent in society, that pressure woman to conform to traditional roles, and also pressure men to sometimes conform to traditional roles and behaviors. So women may face some sort of societal judgment or backlash if they deviate from those expectations, especially depending on the culture that you come from, and what's expected in your family. If in your family or your culture, it's expected that you're married and have kids by certain age, and you haven't done that. There might be some bad blood between you and your parents. If it's expected in your family, that you are going to be kind and you are going to be deferential as a woman, but you are not you are in fact, assertive and you are ambitious, you might be labeled as being too much or speaking too much, or kind of being a problem.

You might have even heard things like it might be really hard for her to find a husband. Holy smokes. I I've heard that I heard that growing up. I remember I had this idea this and who brilliant woman philosopher was it was a PhD in this, this college, this really procedure College in Mexico. And she was at my house having a conversation with my dad. And I sat next to her and she was older. And I learned that she'd never gotten married, and she never had kids. And we were talking and I was just I was young. I think I was in high school. Maybe you might think high school or early college. And I remember just being so enthralled by everything she said and wanting to ask her more questions and more questions. And later I was like, Wow, Dad, that woman's amazing. I can't believe it. She's so smart. And she's accomplished all these things. And my dad was just my dad is one of the most progressive Latino men that I've ever met. I will say, my dad was like, Yeah, she is she's really smart. She's really accomplished. And then he said, and because of that, it was also hard for her to find a partner. It was also hard for her to find a husband.

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I was like, Wow, holy smokes like it just, you know, of course at that time. I'm like young and self-righteous. And I'm like, eff that. That's so stat Seuss Don buff of men should not be afraid of women that are ambitious. But the fact is that gender stereotypes and expectations exist, which causes sometimes backlash if we deviate from those expectations.

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Part of this also plays into the division of household labor. Again, another obvious one, is where a lot of women are expected to do more at home. So you might have experienced, you know, even if you've never had this conversation out loud, explicitly, implicitly, you might be the one if you're one

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On when organizing daycare, or nannies aftercare summer camps, or you know, the holiday parties or family vacations, that might just be that might just fall on you.

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And, you know, there's this sort of underlying current, that if it's just the role of the woman, and if they're not doing it, you might actually feel guilty if you don't do it.

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There's this imbalance, which also perpetuates the traditional gender roles, especially once anyone, like, if you are like a cisgender, man, cisgender woman, and you get married, and you fall into the traditional gender roles of husband and a wife, what you might start to see is you're also playing into the overall societal expectations of a husband and wife, where the husband is now trying to take care of, you know, anything that breaks in the house or fixing things, or the so-called quote, unquote, honey-do list, you know, like, the woman creates this list for the man to do things and you fall into these roles. Whereas before, that wasn't who you are.

So what happens when we have this imbalance at home? When we have this imbalance at home, and women are found doing more of the household duties, taking care of the kids making sure they're getting picked up planning things? For dinner? Eating? What are we going to eat? Where are we going to go on the weekend, what happens? It takes away time, all of that takes time. And time is incredibly valuable. And it takes away that time from the woman to do other things like advance in their career or pursue other opportunities. And it perpetuates the concept that women are responsible for traditionally, unpaid work. That's just what they do. They are just unpaid. And the same thing is true at work, by the way, not just at home. How many of you women have been responsible for the holiday party at work, or a colleague is having a birthday at work, all of a sudden, it's your responsibility to get the cake in the card, or somebody is leaving or something is happening. And you're supposed to plan that social event that happens oftentimes to two women at work. And the same thing at home because of these gender stereotypes and expectations.

All right, just to kind of elaborate a little bit more on this, I'm going to talk about the double standard again. And I'm going to talk about how it relates to objectification because again, another obvious one, but women often face double standards when it comes to their appearance, their behavior, their sexuality. We all know this, right? They're going to be judged more harshly for their choices of what they're wearing and what their hair looks like, as opposed to men, it will happen in social media, it will happen in the media, and it will happen to you at work.

So what does this do? This reduces the worth of a woman to their appearance, as opposed to everything they can contribute to society. Women will face criticism for their appearance. And their value will be tied to their beauty, which is such BS like, How many times did we hear about the effing pantsuit that Hillary Clinton wore? Let me tell you, I was a huge Hillary Clinton fan. And yes, she had pantsuits, and if we really need to talk about them on the news all the time. And I loved that her fans kind of took it back. And they wore their pantsuit, and they were just so proud of them.

They're like, Yeah, well, women, and we were pantsuits get over it. But the fact that we were having that conversation about what she was wearing, and her hair over and over and over again, it was just exhausting. And it really does what it does. The whole purpose is that the conversation is then moved away from the ideas that she has, and her credibility and her background and her experience and moves everything towards her appearance, which is kind of BS when you think about it. The same thing is true in so many other areas of our life. Think about work and think about dress codes or dress codes is one that I just get so frustrated when I hear about these dress codes. Because what are the dress codes do the dress codes police what women wear.

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The whole men shouldn't have to be uncomfortable with that. Men shouldn't be uncomfortable with you know, like cleavage. Oh cover your cleavage. Or you know, or your tank top is too thin. You guys have to wear thicker straps. If you're going to wear a tank top your tank tops should be thicker. Or oh no, we need to work polo shirts, polo shirts. What the heck

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I am a Latina who was raised in East LA, I've never owned a polo shirt with that, like a polo shirt. Come on. So the point is this, point is that the double standards, especially when it comes to objectification, it take away from a woman's worth, and what a woman can contribute in terms of her ideas and her background and her experience and her credibility. And it undermines all of that, and distracts from their expertise and their contributions. By focusing everything on their physical appearance, and essentially reducing their value to what they look like.

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Clearly, I get heated about this one really makes me mad. I saw my daughter's dress code for you know, she's going to a public school here in Atlanta, and I saw their dress code, and I was like, Oh, come on, don't get me started, because I will show up to these PTA meetings and let them know about dress codes. Luckily, we got an email later saying, we'd had a conversation. And this is what the dress code is going to be which no longer is really policing woman's appearance or body shaming anybody.

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The same thing when we talk about double standards, appearance is a big one. But the other one that's a really big one is parenting at work, which we kind of talked a little bit about when I talked about the gender stereotypes. But just to touch on this one more time, what I will say is, you've probably experienced this if you're a woman, and you also have a job, where you're caught in this double bind between work and family responsibilities, where it's tough for you to prioritize your career because you are seen as being selfish, or neglecting your family, which is such bullshit. And it's especially true if you are currently living in a part of the world where those, you know, traditional gender roles are still the norm. If that's you, I just want to hold space for you. I know this is a lot of my students who experienced this, because my students are smart, and they're ambitious. And they're going after their dreams. And they're often caught in this double bind where someone is telling them Oh, don't do that right now focus on your family are focused on this. And then they feel guilty, or they feel selfish, if they're not only thinking about their family, or if they're not, quote-unquote, prioritizing their family like it has to be either or.

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But if thing is that if then if they then prioritize their family, what happens there look at at work as not being committed enough.

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It's a no-win. It's like a no-win, lose-lose situation for women, when we think about it this way.

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I can go on and on about these examples of double standards and objectification. But I think you guys all get the point. The point is, and I want you guys to just be mindful of this when you see this. When you see, for example, I'm thinking about Rihanna when she did the Super Bowl. And she just went out there and she sang and her voice was beautiful. And she didn't wear something that you know what's like these tiny little tiny outfits, and she was wearing like a red sweat suit or something like that? I can't really remember.

But point is, what did people talk about her red sweat suit, and a bunch of other stuff. But what if a man did that nobody talks about what a man's wearing nobody cares what a man's wearing or what a man looks like, or what his hair looks like. Not at all, the same thing is true for the pressure of body image. Body image is a big deal. And it's a huge area of self worth for women, what your body looks like is a huge point of your self worth. Because again, women have been taught and socialized by the patriarchy, that their worth is reduced to what they look like, which is total bananas. And the last one I will mention here, when I talk about how the patriarchy still persists. Today, I'm going to talk about reproductive rights.

Now, I'm not going to go into a whole rant about abortion, it will save that for another podcast. But what I will say is that in many regions of the world, a woman's reproductive rights are restricted. Or they're denied. And I'm not even talking about abortion, I'm talking about just like access to family planning, access to contraception, access to condoms, for goodness sake, a woman's reproductive rights are restricted or denied, which reinforces the patriarchal notion that a woman's body and her choices can and should be controlled by other people, usually men, usually white men.

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Again, I'm not even talking about abortion here. Like, let's take that off the table. Because that just, you know, just introduces so much complexity. I'm just talking about access to contraception, or family planning or the education that you need to make sure like when to use a condom, that you can get pregnant the very first time you have sex like that conversation doesn't even have been, because we there's this assumption based on the patriarchy and the religious undertones that women shouldn't be pure. It's like this, this concept in the Latino culture of the two Maria's the, you know, very old school kind of Catholic Latinos will name their daughter Maria something. My mom's name, for example, is Medea Olivia.

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Maria after the Virgin Mary. And there's this concept of the other Maria, Maria Magdalena, you know, Mary Magdalene. So here's the two Maria has the concept of the tumors, the Virgin Mary, and Mary Magdalene. And there's this beautiful book, I can't remember who wrote it, but it's called the to Maria's, if you want to look it up, it's about the Latin sort of interpretation of the patriarchy and the view of the two Maria's but suffice it to say that, you know, we have this concept that women are supposed to be pure, until they get married, and that they will never have sex, and they're supposed to be this or that, or even just like the term virgin like even just that term, which makes gives me another sort of reaction that I won't go into right now. But we limit reproductive rights on women, because we have this assumption that a woman's body, and that a woman's choice to what she wants to do with her body.

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And when she should, when she chooses to give birth, all of that we think should be controlled by somebody else, by a man.

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All right, rant over. The point is, you all understand now, after listening to today, how sort of the patriarchy came to be? How we see examples of it in so many ancient cultures, and how it's still very present and very prevalent today.

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Alright, sweet friends, I will see you on next week where we will talk about the intersection between the patriarchy and woman's other identities. And part three of this podcast is we discuss how to essentially break down the patriarchy how we can all do our part to dismantle the oppression. That is right now because of the patriarchy. Alright, friends, I will talk to you again soon. Or one last thing before I sign off. Recall that I started this podcast episode by saying that, you know, really, the inspiration behind this podcast episode was imposter syndrome was me coaching so many of my students on impostor syndrome, and then not understanding how the chips you know, are the cards are essentially stacked against them as a woman and as a woman of color, all the time. And we have to sort of understand that to begin with.

So we don't internalize the oppression of the patriarchy. Because once we internalize, once we start to believe that we are in fact, not smart enough, not good enough, not as good as not as good as math or we're not as good politicians, or we shouldn't be leading religions because men are more pure or more divine than women. Once we start believing that and internalizing that belief, we are now doing the work of the oppressor. We are now doing the work of the patriarchy. Patriarchy doesn't even have to exist. We already believe it ourselves.

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Okay, sweet friends. I will talk to you next week. Have a powerful powerful week.

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Hey, sweet friends, if you love what you're learning, then you've got to join us in the journey. It's my all inclusive program and the best community out there giving you the education you never knew you needed to help you create a life you love. Join us at VanessaCalderonmd.com/join. I'll see you there.