

118. PART 2: Unraveling the Patriarchy, Past, Present, and Persistence

Vanessa 00:00

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.

Hello, sweet friends. Welcome back to the podcast. So we are continuing our conversation today on the patriarchy game. If you haven't yet heard part one, I recommend you go back and listen to part one where we talk about the origins of the patriarchy how certain patriarchal norms still exist today, and sort of the resultant causes of the patriarchy and what we still experience. And today we are talking about intersectionality. And the sort of experience of a woman that's more than just a woman who has other identities.

Now, I want to, before I go on, just mention to everyone, that this entire series of the patriarchy started because I actually sat down to draft a podcast on impostor syndrome, because I find myself coaching my students over and over again on impostor syndrome. I sat down to record a podcast to give women tools to overcome impostor syndrome. And I realized that I couldn't just create a podcast to overcome impostor syndrome without first really talking about where it came from. And really highlighting how impostor syndrome is not your fault. If you are a woman, impostor syndrome is not your fault. It's not because you're not good enough, or smart enough. It's not because you don't belong in that space. There are so many other factors at play, that are making you experience that sense of insecurity. That's where this came from. And here's the other truth to this is that the patriarchy exists, as do other systems of oppression, including racism, ableism, you know, fatphobia, all of those isms, they all exist. And we do not have to be victims of those systems of oppression. And the way we extricate ourselves from that is by first becoming aware that they exist, and being open to the possibility that, wow, they could be in my subconscious, that I could be someone that has been affected by the patriarchy, I could be someone that has been affected by racism.

I've done so much work on my own gender biases, and I'm still coming up with so many more ways that I didn't even realize I was perpetuating that patriarchy. So if you're listening to this, and you don't think you've been affected by it, what I want to offer is, I just want to invite you to be open to the possibility that this could have affected you too, because I have yet to meet a woman. And honestly, I've yet to meet a man who hasn't been socialized or affected by the patriarchy. The same is true with, you know, colonization and racism. I have an entire podcast episode series, actually, I think there are three parts. They're called decolonizing, your brain where we talk about colonization, and the oppressive ways that it has sort of made its way into our own brains. And how we essentially have internalized that racism. I think it's in the 80s. So if you're interested, go back to those podcast episodes and listen. It's called

decolonizing your brain. So we're doing a series today, three parts again, The first part talks about the origin of the patriarchy and how it still exists today.

Today, we're going to talk about intersectionality. And next week, we are talking about how we can all do our part to dismantle the patriarchy. Alright, so let's get started. So I mentioned the word intersectionality. And I was a little surprised when I was coaching one of my students and I said the inner I said the word I said intersection, like intersectionality, and they didn't know what I meant. So I'm just gonna get really basic for a second and just make sure that we all have an understanding. So the term intersectionality was coined in about Gosh, more than two decades ago in the 80s or so, by Professor Kimberly Crenshaw, who is this brilliant, brilliant woman, and co-founder of the African American policy firm. She was a professor who coined the term intersectionality and she wanted to make sure that when we were talking about these issues affecting race And these issues affecting gender, we didn't miss that intersection between race and gender.

Because there are things that, for example, brown people experience. And there are things that brown women experience. And the same thing, if you're a black man versus a black woman, there are things that a black woman will experience that men won't just experience, but as a black person that a black man won't understand. And that is why it's so important to think about intersectionality. In fact, I was really active in the diversity initiatives in an organization where I worked. And we often talked about, you know, the women's interest group. And then we often talked about the interest groups for people of color, the black interest group, the brown interest group, the Latino interest group, and I was like, hold on a second. I think it's great that we're talking about this. But please, let's not forget that brown people are also women. And women can also be black. And we don't want to miss that intersection. Because there's so much that a woman who's also a woman of color will experience that's different. So that is where the term intersectionality comes from.

If you're interested in reading more or doing more of your own work on this, I'd recommend one of my favorite feminist books, It's called, Ain't I a Woman, by Bell Hooks. The title of that book, Ain't I a Woman comes from a speech that was given by an abolitionist and civil rights activist in 1850, Sojourner Truth, Her speech is just, every time I read it, especially the last paragraph, you can Google it if you want, it brings me to tears because the fact is that we put people in boxes because it's easier for the human brain, and we miss the delicate intricacies of the intersection that our identities play. Okay, so what I want to do right now is I'm going to talk about how intersectionality plays a role when we talk about the patriarchy. And we're going to talk about both global impacts and the impact here in the United States because I know many of you listening are here in the United States. Alright, so I'm going just to give you all examples of intersectionality. And how again, it can play a role. So again, the intersection is intersectionality recognizes that individuals hold many identities, such as ethnicity, or race, If you believe in race, gender, socioeconomic class, your sexuality, how have you identify whether or not you are identified as an able-bodied person, neurotypical neurodiverse, and we can go on and on and on.

So when you think about those identities, notice how they intersect, and they interact with each other. And that intersection shapes the experience and the experiences of those individuals living with those different identities. It essentially shapes both their privilege and their oppression. That's why it's so

important to notice that. This means that the impact of the patriarchy is not uniform. It's not the same for all women. It varies depending on the intersecting identities. And it's definitely compounded, as you can imagine, from marginalized communities, or communities of color. So let me give you some examples. I'm going to start with black women. So black women experienced the intersection again, of race and sex, as do Latina women, right racism and sexism. For black women, they may experience stereotypes that portray them as overly aggressive, or overly sexualized. And there's the struggle for racial and gender equality that's intertwined. And those challenges are not the same for a white woman. But they're also not fully understood by a black man. And they're not fully understood by a brown Latino man either.

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You know, speaking about Latinas, I'll just speak here a little bit more about the Latinos who are also immigrants, but you don't have to be a Latina to be an immigrant. If you're an immigrant period. What do you experience you experience not just the, you know, limited access to education or health care, but now you might have a language barrier that makes it difficult for you to get a job? OB, and you have the stereotypes that objectify you as hyper-sexualized. So we are now talking about the intersection of not just race and gender, but immigration status. If you are an indigenous person if you identify as indigenous indigenous women often face not just gender-based discrimination, but also this erasure of their cultural identity. So they may experience higher rates of violence and limited access to health care and education, while at the same time, losing their ancient wisdom, their traditional knowledge, and their ways of life.

If you are a woman who practices a religion, like a Muslim, Muslim woman, who wears a hijab, you might experience gender-based discrimination, but also religious discrimination. And the backlash is from both sort of sides, this misconception about faith, but an objectification based on your appearance, if you are someone who identifies as an LGBTQ plus woman, you know, lesbian women have, especially lesbian women of color, they might encounter discrimination based on their sexual orientation, their race, and now also their gender. They might experience discrimination with both the LGBTQ plus community and society at large, because of the complexity of the intersection of their intersectionality.

So again, by understanding this concept of intersectionality, we can recognize that the effects of the patriarchy they're not uniform across all women. Instead, they're going to vary, and they're going to intersect with different forms of oppression, and also different forms of privilege that are created based on how you identify. So if you are one, a white woman, you might experience gender discrimination, but you also have the privilege of being light-skinned. If I am, for example, identify as a light-skinned heterosexual Latina. So though I have, you know, dealt with the oppression of the patriarchy, and racism for being brown, and white, I am sorry, brown and woman, I have the privilege of being light-skinned, and I have the privilege of being heterosexual. So I don't experience those kinds of discriminations that other people might experience.

Alright, so here's the thing. The thing is that this affects us in the United States, but it has an incredible global impact. And there are still many countries where it's illegal, where there are laws and social customs that limit a woman's ability to work outside of their home without male permission or

supervision, that limit access to education, that prioritize or there are cultures where you're expected to have an early marriage at a young age, with no access to family planning. So if you're in one of these communities, if you're one of these cultures, and you have no access to family planning, but you have to get married at a young age, it's going to be really hard for you to continue to pursue education or a career if you're also trying to be a mother at a very young age.

There are countries for example, in South Asia, where there's gender-based discrimination and early marriages, which hindered you know, women's access to education. In certain countries, there are concerns about safety, if a woman goes to school or for girl goes to school, families keep girls home to keep them safe. In Latin America, we have the machismo culture, which is just another term for the patriarchy in Latin America. And the machismo culture creates this, this x, it's almost like it's almost like we're saying it's okay to have this gender-based violence in Marchesa cultures. And more and more now, we are saying it's not okay. And we're actually standing up and, you know, women have the financial ability to leave those kinds of relationships where they're hostile. But I will tell you, that wasn't the case for a very long time. And for very many for a lot of people. It's still not the case. Because of this gender-based violence.

That's been okay with machetes in the machismo culture. I have generations of women in my lineage that have experienced physical abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse in their marriages, because they didn't you know, it was just okayed, it was said that that's just the way it was when you got married and they were blamed like it was their fault. You shouldn't have spoken up. You should have prepared the kind of meal he liked. Why did you keep nagging Jim, about those kinds of things that we experience? And I can go on and on here to give you more and more examples of how this is true globally. But I will say that this isn't just a thing that happens outside of the United States. As you guys all know, this is something that in the United States, we passed laws that essentially institutionalized the patriarchy, and institutionalized gender discrimination.

We have so many examples throughout history, like for example, the curvature doctrine, also known as curvature, where a woman's legal identity was essentially removed or merged with her husband's identity once she got married. So once a woman got married in the United States, she lost her rights to property to wages, she lost her name, because we all know well, that still happens now is more of a cultural as more of a cultural acceptance where a woman takes the man's name. But before the reason why that happened was because women were essentially losing their legal identity. They kept their first name, but they lost their last name. They lost any access to their property rights to their wages, and even custody of their children, which they essentially handed over to the man once they got married. That doctrine essentially reinforced the idea that women were dependent on men and lacked any autonomy, legal or financial autonomy.

There was a law which is wild called the marital rape exemption, which didn't actually become illegal until 1990 99 difference that's very recent. The law essentially allowed many US states to say that, you know if there if rape exists, but it happens in a marriage, then that is exempted from any kind of legal repercussion. Rape is legal in marriage, which, of course, upholds the notion. And the belief that within a marriage, a woman's consent to sexual activity was just assumed. She always consented just by saying yes, when she got married, so regardless of her feelings, or regardless of her wishes, if you are

somebody right now, in, a marriage, and you aren't you identify as a woman, and you feel guilty when you don't want to have sex, or you feel you're afraid to upset your husband, this friend, comes from decades and decades and centuries of a woman not being okay to say no to that in marriages. Property Ownership. Here's another one, We had laws around property ownership where, you know, they were often biased against women where married women couldn't own property, separately from their husbands, again, making them financially dependent on their spouse on their husband.

In fact, it wasn't until 1974, again, not that long ago, 1974, that we finally passed a federal law that prohibited credit discrimination, so women could finally go and open up their own bank account, without a man having to cosign, so it prohibited credit discrimination based on gender, marital status, race, and a few other factors. Again, 1974, and it's not like that law passed. And of course, the next day, no big deal. Every every woman is going out to open a bank not facing any discrimination. Of course not, when you've been practicing under an oppressive system, and you have these beliefs that a woman isn't supposed to, you know, have their own bank accounts. Think about sort of what happens subconsciously, you start believing you're not good at money, that you're irresponsible that the man handles the finances. So if you have any of those thoughts, this is where it comes from. And then, of course, voting restrictions.

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I'm gonna I can go on and on about voting rights and voting restrictions. But we know that women weren't given the right to vote until 1920. Women were denied the right to vote until 1920. And again, it's not like it just happened overnight, where women were given the right to vote, and every woman from her home runs to the voting booths. No, of course not. You were still discriminated against if you're if you lived in a house where they didn't believe that women should participate in politics, that they weren't smart enough that they should leave the politics to the men just because we passed this law in 1920 doesn't mean that all of a sudden, all the women went out and registered to vote. It took so much time and so much grassroots effort in organizing to get women to feel comfortable going out to participate in voting. We know that even today, racial discrimination and literacy tests still continue to hinder women of color. And voter ID laws that exist now disproportionately affect people of color and people of color. Lower socio-economic class.

So we know that even though in 1920, passed immediately after we still had racial discrimination, and now today, we still experience voter ID laws that disproportionately affect people of color and people of lower socioeconomic class. I can talk and talk about education access, but I won't spend too much time here. But essentially, we all know, women were often denied access to higher education. In fact, it wasn't until the late 19th century that the first woman was admitted into medical school. And the first woman was admitted into law school, in the late 19th century. And again, just because they're admitted doesn't mean like we solve the problem. Remember, sort of, you know, the backbone of this oppression is that their instructors are all men, their classmates are all men.

So if you experience impostor syndrome, now, imagine what it was like to be the only woman or the first woman, or one of few in these classrooms, where you're being constantly told that you're probably going to drop out to have kids, that you should prioritize having a family that You're so selfish, this is what we experienced. Now, in medicine, by the way, this isn't something that I'm sharing with you from

the 19th century. This is something that I hear my students say all the time, and I personally experienced it over and over again, and it comes from these underlying notions, and the socialization of the patriarchy. Let's talk about equal pay and employment discrimination. So in the last episode, I talked a lot about the gender pay gap. So go back and listen if you're interested. But I'll just say here that the Equal Pay Act wasn't even passed until 1963. And that was supposed to be our first step towards addressing the pay discrimination. And again, we still know today that the gender pay gap exists. And I can go on and on, but I'll just put a footnote here for contraception and reproductive rights. Again, not even talking about abortion at all. I'm not let's leave abortion off the table.

Simple access to contraception was illegal in many states and didn't even become legal, it was criminalized, it was criminalized, and didn't even become legal until the 20th century. So I talked more about that in the last episode. So go back and listen if you're interested. And the last thing I will mention here, before we wrap up is divorce and child custody. Because the divorce laws often favored men, what they would do if a woman was unhappy in her marriage, if she was being mentally abused, physically abused, or sexually abused in her marriage, she did not have a place to go, because divorce laws favored men, which meant that if a woman left, she would have no financial resources. And because of the way the patriarchy was structured, often women didn't even have their own bank accounts. They didn't, because it was illegal to have your own bank account. They didn't have jobs that they could go to if they left, they didn't have that sense of financial independence. Not only that, but the custody laws also favored men, which meant that if a woman left because of the Covert Care Act, they'd already signed over custody to their husband, which meant that they wouldn't have access to their kids. Can you imagine?

And so women were stuck in these marriages, where they were being abused physically, mentally, financially, where there was a lot of infidelity happening inside the marriage, and they had to stay, they were stuck, because they didn't have access to what they needed to leave financial freedom, a safe place to go access to their children. And it wasn't until 1969 that the very first law was passed, was passed to make it more equitable, to divorce and make it instead of favoring men to really favor both genders. That was in California 90s. In 1969, it was the no-fault divorce law that was passed. And it wasn't until 2010. So very recently, in 2010, New York passed, it's no-fault divorce law. So again, all of these things are very fresh. And yes, we've made a ton of strides towards gender equity. But notice how a lot of this stuff is very recent. And just because we pass a law doesn't mean we solve the problem, because subconsciously, we've already internalized a lot of these societal norms, a lot of these gender expectations we've already internalized them.

So again, today we talked about intersectionality, which was a term that was coined by Professor Kimberly Crenshaw to discuss and highlight the intersection of different identities. A woman sometimes is not just a woman, but she's a woman and she has a racial identity and sexual identity, socioeconomic class identity. And for us to understand how the different identities that a woman holds that intersection interacts and shapes both their experiences of oppression, but also their experiences of privilege. We talked about how this shows up in the United States with different identities, both the global impact, but also historically how it's happened in the United States and the different laws that have institutionalized the patriarchy and gender discrimination in the United States. Alright, sweet friends, I will see you all next week. Well, we do our last episode on the patriarch game, and talk about the different ways that

we can all get involved to dismantle this oppressive system. Alright, sweet friends have a very powerful week. I will see you next week.

Vanessa 26:07

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.