

74. Decolonize Your Brain Part 1: Colonization and the Colonizer Mentality

SPEAKERS

Vanessa

Vanessa 00:00

Welcome to coaching for Latina leaders, the only podcast dedicated to the advancement of Latinas at every level of life with your host, Dr. Vanessa Calderon, a Latina with over 20 years of leadership experience, Harvard grad physician and mother of two.

Vanessa 00:19

Hello, my friends, welcome back to the podcast, I'm excited to bring you a three-part series on healing internalized racism, and decolonizing your brain. Now, I know this is a sensitive topic. Anytime you say the word race or racism, it triggers some people. So if you right now are feeling that sort of tight tightness or restriction in your body, I want you to just notice that and I don't want you to turn away. In fact, I want to encourage you to continue to listen. Because my sense is that whether or not you consider yourself a person of color, or you're somebody in a white body, you're gonna get a lot out of this episode, and the next two episodes that follow.

Vanessa 01:01

Okay, so what we're doing here is I'm going to be teaching you how to actually start the work to do your own internal healing. And the reason why is because, you know, I know from doing my own work, my own internalized healing, that when you do this work, it's incredibly impactful. And it changes the way you show up, it improves your level of confidence, your level of self-compassion, and your level of compassion for other people. So what I'll be doing here is I'll be reviewing the history of colonization in part one to get us all speaking the same language and vocabulary. And in part two, we're going to dive into how to start to do the work of healing our own internalized racism. In part three, I'm going to be joined by Dr. Kim Marie Newsome, a DEI and racial consciousness consultant, who is going to give us a different perspective on how to start the healing process.

Vanessa 01:53

So before I begin, I also want to preface this by saying that I am not a Ph.D. in anti-racist studies. And by no means will, the next three episodes include everything that you need to know, to understand this incredibly complex issue. But it is a great starting point. And I hope to deliver this to you in a way that you can grasp some of these concepts that can feel complex can feel distant and can feel sort of sensitive or difficult to process. So we're gonna start by talking about colonization. And again, the reason why I'm talking about this today is because, you know, I talk a lot up on this podcast. And you know, the entire work that I do as a professional coach is teaching women and teaching other professionals, how to be the master of their minds, so that they can show up their most effective and

authentic selves, and not let things like thought errors, or limiting beliefs get in the way of them showing up their most powerful way.

Vanessa 02:56

So thought errors and limiting beliefs are things that we think unintentionally, that limit our potential thought errors develop for many different reasons they could have developed because of things that you saw growing up. For example, think back to your childhood, what gender roles did you see playing what, who went to work, whose job was it to stay home, you could have developed thought errors or limiting beliefs based on other influential people in your life, maybe you are someone that was really religious and went to church, that probably influenced your perspective. And your perspective is something that's created by the thoughts in your brain.

Vanessa 03:33

And those thoughts, again, are thoughts that were created by the things that you saw around you, again, examples of adult figures in your life of things that you heard, maybe things you saw on TV? So two of the things that really sort of influence a lot of our thoughts are two unfortunate systems of oppression, one being the patriarchal system that, you know, we're sort of born into, and the other being colonization, also known as white supremacy. So in this episode, and in the next two to follow, we're focusing on colonization and decolonizing. Our brain understanding how the systems of colonization and colonizer mentality has affected how we think and how we see the world and how to start doing the work to get that out of our brains.

Vanessa 04:23

Okay, so I mentioned that in this episode, we're talking about internalized racism. So internalized racism is the beliefs that we internalize that are based on racial, the racist sort of system around us. So you know, it's defined by two different things. So if you're in a white body, it's defined as you internalizing superiority. And if you are a person of color, it's defined as you internalizing inferiority. So if you're listening to this right now, and you identify as a person of color, and you're telling yourself but wait a second, I don't feel any sort of inferiority, or if you're one A person and you're like, Well, I don't feel superior to anybody else, we're all equals.

Vanessa 05:04

What I want to say is this, that understanding and identifying and doing the work of internalized racism is actually really difficult. And the reason why is, once you start questioning your beliefs, you're starting to question your own integrity and your identity. And when you're questioning your identity, again, you're putting your integrity up for question. And that sets you up for a bunch of vulnerabilities. Because all of a sudden, for example, if you're a person of color, now you have to admit that you've had feelings of inferiority, and that doesn't feel good. And if you're white, you now might have to admit that you've benefited and been privileged from a society that's oppressed others. And the reason why that is so hard and uncomfortable for our bodies to process is because shame gets involved. And you know, it's shameful to think that I've been experiencing inferiority or it's shameful to believe that you know, that I've been oppressing others if I am a white body. And I've benefited and privileged from a society that's oppressed others.

Vanessa 06:05

But this is the thing that as that shame gets healed, it's easier to talk about all of these things. And you start to realize that the shame you feel is not yours. It doesn't belong to you that what happened, and what is happening is shameful, but it's not your fault. And then it makes it easier to talk about these issues across racial groups. This is sort of where I am now in my journey. You know, I've been on my own journey, healing my own internalized racism and feelings of inferiority. And though my journey isn't complete, by any means, I am at a place now where I've healed a lot of the shame that I was once holding, that I once held for not feeling intelligent enough, not feeling smart enough or good enough, or beautiful enough, because of the color of my skin, or because my hair wasn't straight enough for yellow. And so, you know, I've been on this journey myself.

Vanessa 07:02

And so I know from personal experience that this work isn't easy. But again, I also know how impactful it can be, which is why I'm doing this series. Because when you do your own work and start to heal your own internalized racism, you're not just healing it for yourself, you're healing it for generations to come. Because without knowing when we have these beliefs, we pass it on to our children, to our children's children. And it just keeps going. And so by you doing the work right now, you are stopping that generational trauma. And you are sort of passing on a legacy of healing a legacy of, of power, a legacy of owning your authenticity, to your children and your children's children. So again, this, this work is impactful both for the work that the impact it will have on your own life, but on how you will now heal the generations that come after you.

Vanessa 07:58

Okay, so I talked about the limiting beliefs and internalized racism. And here's the thing, that internalized racism happens at a very, very early age. In fact, in the 1930s, they did an experiment on young kids called the Clark doll experiment. Now, this is a super famous experiment, many people have sort of heard of it, or seen it done on TV. And I'm just going to refresh all of your memories. So in the 1930s, two, psychologists took a group of young black and brown kids, and between the ages of three and seven years old, and they sat them in front of two dolls, a white doll and a black doll. And they asked them questions about these dolls. And then they had them point to the dolls to see what the kids were preferring. And the questions were number one, what doll would you like to play with?

Vanessa 08:51

Number two, Which doll is the nice doll number three, which doll looks like the bad doll number 4.2, the doll that has a nice color. And then they asked, Which doll looks like you? Now overwhelmingly, and kind of you know, I still feel a lot of sadness when I see these results. But overwhelmingly, the young black and brown kids prefer the white dolls, and design, the negative characteristics of being the doll that looked like the bad doll, or being the doll that didn't look nice, or being the doll that didn't have nice color. They assigned all of those characteristics to the black doll. And then when they asked that when they asked him Which doll looks like you, they all pointed to the black doll.

Vanessa 09:38

Now, you can imagine how traumatizing This must have been for some of the kids. In fact, you know, some of the kids stormed out because you can see how there was cognitive dissonance when you

know, this is like a four or five year old that maybe has never done anything wrong in their life, and is now seeing all of these things about this black doll and then saying that that doll looks like that. So what does that mean about them? So So again, this is a really profound study, it was replicated in the 1940s, in Italy, and we saw the same exact results. Italian, young Italian kids between the ages of three and seven asked the same questions and had the same exact thing. So what does this tell us?

Vanessa 10:15

This tells us that internalized racism is learned at a very young age. You know, Albert Einstein said a lot of things, but one of the things he said is, it's easier to break an atom than it is to break prejudice. Now, if you can imagine the, you know, that's that simple statement is so profound, because an atom is crazy. It's complex, it's strong, you need like, all of these things with physics and hydro physics to break an atom. But it's easier to break an atom than it is to break a prejudice or a belief that you have in your brain. Okay, so let's go on here, I want to talk a little bit about the history of colonization. Because to best understand how this racism developed, it's really important to understand where this concept of race came from. And for that, I'm going to talk about the history of colonization. And again, I'm going to give you a very brief history because I'm not a PhD in history. And everything I bring you in this episode today. And in the next two episodes, are things that I have learned from my own journey and from being a student of some of the best minds out there, like, for example, Dr. Abram Kennedy, and other incredible anti racist scholars. Okay, so

Vanessa 11:29

let's talk about the history of colonization. So the history of colonization dates back to the 15th century. So a lot of you, especially if you're of my generation, you might remember learning that in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. So in the 15th century, Europe was in the dark ages, and the way they emerge out of the dark ages, is by colonizing the West. So why did Christopher Columbus get funded to set out on that expedition? So you know, in the 15th century, what was happening was Europe was essentially like trying to emerge out of this huge dark age. And they were reliant upon this trade route to Asia to China, you know, what's known as the Silk Road.

Vanessa 12:15

And they were relying upon that trade route. And they were getting so many things from China, that was super important for them, for example, because what they got from China that allowed them to colonize, you know, and brutalize and murder, so many people take on guns and gunpowder. So there's a huge misconception that guns were invented out of Europe. But that's not the case at all. They came from China. And they were traded along the Silk Route to Europe. So in the 15th century, as they're trying to emerge, that trade route is something that's becoming more and more of a pain point for Europe, because there are so many middlemen now that there's so many taxes, that it's becoming really expensive to trade along that route.

Vanessa 13:00

So the Spaniards, who at this time had just bought back the Muslim empire decide that they're going to fund this Italian, Christopher Columbus, they're going to fund him to go on this expedition to find a faster, easier, cheaper trade route to Asia. That was the whole point. So Christopher Columbus heads out west, because remember, they thought that the world was flat and that he would eventually get to

Asia. He heads out west, and what does he land on? He lands on all of the, you know, what we call the Americas, but it was all of the Caribbean islands there. Which he then calls Hispaniola, again, where the term Hispanic comes from. He named the Bahamas, he landed in the Bahamas, he called it Hispaniola. And this sets up an incredible chain reaction that leads to one of the largest genocides of history. It at that time, you know, there was about 8 million inhabitants, indigenous Americans living on the islands, and 92% of them were murdered.

Vanessa 14:01

So when Christopher Columbus landed, he sort of named himself governor and he said, I'm going to take over and I'm going to be governor, and he reigned with terror, with brutality with violence, and that that initial 8 million inhabitants that were there were reduced to 20,000 people. Now, if you visit those lands, there's very few indigenous people left. Again, 92% of the indigenous Americans were murdered because what did Christopher Columbus bring with him? He brought the steel and the gunpowder. So he brought guns. But because Europeans at that time, you know, back in Europe, they were living in really close quarters with a bunch of livestock. They had also experienced a lot of diseases like smallpox, for example. So on the boats that Christopher Columbus brought over, there was a ton of diseases and a ton of guns. So with all of that they brutalized and they murdered, the large proportion and the majority of the indigenous Americans that were there.

Vanessa 15:04

So after killing off the natives, they use the lands in the Caribbean and the Americas to mine. And this is where the 300 years of the slave trade starts. So I want you to sort of picture this triangle with Western Europe being a point of that triangle. And then the, the western coast of Africa being another point of that triangle, and the Americas, or those like Virgin Islands being the third point on that triangle. So what happened was, the Europeans would come down from Europe down to the west coast of Africa, they would enslave and kidnap the Africans, and they would force them onto these slave ships, they vote and they would ship them to the Americas.

Vanessa 15:48

And then they would get there and they would force them into slave labor to harvest things like sugar and cotton. And then they would get these crops and they would, they would take them on that sort of triangle back over to Europe. So you know, there's a huge men's good misconception that you know, Europe was this powerhouse, they had this incredible industrial revolution. But guess what was needed to power the very first steam engine, sugar, sugar was used to power the very first steam engine, and there would be no sugar if there was no slave trade, because it came from the enslaved out in the Americas. Alright, so in summary, in the 15th century, Europe was in the dark ages, it was behind China and India. And the only way that it could survive was to find this find this other route to China.

Vanessa 16:41

But instead, what it did is Europe found the Americas and the only way it survived is by enslaving all of the Africans that are bred over slave labor and by taking over and reining in this terrible, brutal way, and causing significant disease and genocide. So you know, the actual emergence of Europe of the Dark Ages required the exploitation of black and brown people, it required that labor. And the West continues to develop due to this resource extraction, which is again, a whole nother conversation that I won't go

into today. Okay, so when I refer to colonization, I want to get us all on the same page. What I'm referring to here is the violent process of seizing political and cultural control over another country, occupying it with the intent to exploit the land, the people and the resources.

Vanessa 17:38

So I'm going to introduce you to a four-step framework that introduces this concept of the colonizer mentality. And this comes from this really brilliant psychologist who was French of African and Haitian descent. And he published a book in 1963, called *The Wretched of the Earth*. His name is Franz Fanon. So the first stage of the colonizer mentality is, you know, it begins with forced entry and occupation by the colonizer to exploit natural resources and inhabitants so you know, slavery or cheap labor.

Vanessa 18:10

The second stage is when the colonizer imposes its culture, it disintegrates indigenous culture, and it recreates their own definitions of the indigenous culture, you know, defining indigenous cultures like primitive, backward or savage compared to civilized colonizers. So I want you to think back to what you saw on TV when you were a young kid because I know what I saw on TV when I was a young kid, and the people that were portrayed as being savage with a Native Americans, and that just disheartened means to think that just me as a young kid, not many years ago, I was still being fed these lies of colonizer mentality on television, and it's still happening now.

Vanessa 18:50

So the third stage justifies military domination and tyrannical rule by framing it as the white man's burden to tame and control the colonized. So in many cases, the colonized the colonizer, presented themselves as these heroic saviors, saving indigenous people from themselves. So if you've ever heard of the term, the white savior complex, this is where it comes from. It comes from the idea that it's the white man's burden to save people of color. Again,

Vanessa 19:22

this is just so disheartening for me, you know, I grew up in a pretty religious house, and our church had a lot of missionaries. And I used to think that I wanted to be a missionary because I thought missionaries went around and you know, quote, unquote, help people. And then when I learned that what they were doing is presenting the Word of God as the one and only way to salvation. That was something I couldn't get behind. I was like, Wait a second, you're telling me that you are going to come into these communities where these people have been living for centuries without never knowing your sort of way of thinking. You're going to tell them that their way of thinking is wrong. That was something I just couldn't get behind.

Vanessa 20:02

The fourth stage is the establishment of a society where all the political, social and economic institutions, like government, schools and churches are designed to benefit and maintain the domination of the colonizer, while at the same time subjugating the colonized. So indigenous people are rewarded for assimilating into the colonizers ways and punished when they resist. It's through this phase of colonization, that the colonized people began to develop those psychological chains that keep us oppressed. So this is stained depression that's experienced by colonized people, leads to self doubt,

identity, confusion, and ultimately feelings of inferiority. You know, what ends up happening is the colonized, you know, eventually ends up believing that we are in fact inferior, that we must be inferior.

Vanessa 20:57

Because if I'm only getting rewarded, when I act like a white person, it must mean that my own race is inferior to the white race. So because of the inferiority attached to the indigenous identities, the colonized might develop a desire to rid themselves of their racial identities and to mimic the colonizer because they're seen as superior. Colonized people may even feel a sense of gratitude and indebtedness towards the colonizer for civilizing and enlightening them. You know, the self-perceived inferiority of the colonized usually begins at a very young age, which, you know, I sort of depicted in that doll test that I shared with you earlier. And eventually, the colonial mentality becomes natural, it becomes unconscious, and it becomes involuntary. So it is because it becomes just part of our subconscious brain, we don't even think about it. Alright, so we're going to wrap up here, and in part two, we are going to start to do the work of understanding whether or not we've done our own if we've internalized racism for ourselves.

Vanessa 22:02

So I'm gonna give you some props and help you think about whether or not you've internalized it. And then I'm gonna walk you through a process to help you start the healing process. And again, this work is so powerful and so important, because when we, when we people of color, start believing the lies of these oppressive systems, we are now doing the work of the oppressor. We are now doing the work of the oppressor. There's this anti-apartheid activist that is incredibly inspirational. His name is Bantu Stewart, Steven Bhiku. And this is what he says. He says that the most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.

Vanessa 22:45

Again, the most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. And I want to remind you one last time that when you do this work, you don't just liberate yourself from all this and heal, heal yourself. You are also healing the generations that follow you, your children and your children's children and you are creating a more liberated world. Okay, my friends, thank you so much. You sit here with gratitude, that you had the curiosity and you sat through this entire podcast episode. I'm looking forward to the next one. So I will see you guys next week.

Vanessa 23:25

Hey, if you love what you're learning, then you've got to check out my free Ultimate Guide to stop people pleasing, where I teach you a simple five step process to stop saying yes. When you really want to say No, you'll be so glad that you did. There's a link to the guide in the show notes. I'll see you next time.