

A More Just Future with Dolly Chugh

Dolly Chugh: [00:00:00] I wanted to write a book that was about how, what is our relationship with the past?

How do we engage with that emotionally, and how is it holding us back from moving forward as a country? that was Dolly CHG on psychologists off the clock. we are three clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorenson, practicing in Mile High Denver, Colorado. Co-author of Act, Daily Journal, and an upcoming book on act for burnout.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm Dr. Yel Shreen, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the book Work Parent Thrive.

Jill Stoddard: And from coastal New England, I. Dr. Jill Sto, author of Be Mighty, the big book of Act metaphors and the Upcoming Imposter. No more.

Debbie Sorensen: We hope [00:01:00] you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Jill Stoddard: Thank you for listening to psychologists Off the clock.

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Yael Schonbrun: Hi everyone, This is Al here with Jill. To introduce an episode, I got to interview Dolly Chugg about her new book, A More Just Future, . I, I kind of fell in love with Dolly and I knew that I would, cuz I had watched her Ted Talk and [00:02:00] she's just, Warm and smart and human and lovely.

So it was such a fun conversation and about such an important topic about how do we reckon with a really painful history and move towards a better future. We're at a cultural moment in time where we're talking a lot about social justice, and I think bringing in the science is just a really helpful.

Set of tools to manage , both what comes up for all of us emotionally as we're sort of reckoning with, the painful experiences that people have had in the past and that people are continuing to have. And then also this important question of what now? What do we do?

So I thought it was an incredibly enriching conversation. And Jill, what did you think of it?

Jill Stoddard: I could not agree more. I absolutely loved Dolly. I just kept thinking like, Oh, I wish I could hang out with her . She was so. Like smart and relatable at the same time, which is something I aspire to be. You know, it's like how can you be smart and [00:03:00] relatable at the same time? But what I really loved was, um, How act consistent this episode was?

I think like sort of unintentionally, and I think you told me she's a social psychologist, right? Not a clinical psychologist. And you know, you talk a little bit about critical race theory, for example, and you connected it to. Values. I noticed how, um, she was really talking about process over content. So, you know, she was saying it's important for us to be able to give people the tools to learn about our history and these things rather than should we teach this thing or should we not teach this thing?

Um, And at one point you talked to her about acceptance and commitment therapy and she had been taking notes and she was like all excited and wanted to, wanted to learn more. And that's happened a number of times in our episodes and I just, I know it's so nerdy, but I get so excited every time it happens when like we're introducing act somewhere [00:04:00] outside of our.

Tiny little microcosm of, of psychology or like you say, outside of our little silos.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, it, I, I couldn't agree more in terms of how exciting it is to share these principles from evidence based psychology with people who are sort of in like just adjacent fields.

And really, it was so exciting as I was reading the book, cuz I was thinking to myself, she probably isn't familiar with acceptance and commitment therapy and here's this really cool opportunity that I have to share a bit of the science that I'm familiar with, with somebody who has this amazing specialization that I think the tools of acceptance and commitment therapy can really help her to disseminate that knowledge even more effectively.

And I think I'm, I don't wanna toot my own horn here, but I think she felt the same way.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. That it's, it's, it can help her with her mission and, and what a cool kind of parallel process that she was talking about. The need. Of people tools and then you ended up giving her some tools for her mission. I just thought it was so great. And I [00:05:00] also noticed, and this is just another nerdy thing that I love about the podcast, is how often topics from other episodes other than act come up.

So she was talking about research around sports, basically. It was a sports metaphor, but she cites a study that was in Dominic Packer's book and he was one of our guests and you guys talk about how her stuff, her book is related to growth mindset and we've had half of our guests, I think, have brought up growth mindset in our different episodes.

I just love the way that these concepts become interconnected and that, um, you know, it's, it's like our mission to be able to share, share those things with the world.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, and one of the most important take-homes for me from the conversation really is act consistent. And that is that doing social justice work of any kind, whether it's in our homes with their families, or sort of out in the world really. Is gonna have us encounter some uncomfortable feelings, shame, guilt, [00:06:00] confusion, overwhelm. isn't a problem to have those emotions. It's more this question of what should we do with them? How should we use that as information? And then how should we allow our values to guide us forward given the emotions that we're experiencing? And again, that is really.

What her book is about. I don't think she, you know, she obviously hadn't tied it specifically to acceptance and commitment therapy, but to me that parallel is so powerful.

So I'm really excited to see her book hit this, hit the bookshelves, and I hope lots of people pick it up and, um, get a lot out of the amazing work that she brings to bear.

Jill Stoddard: 100%. And if everybody listens to the end, you share a quote from her book that I just thought was so wonderful and really kind of summed up the conversation in a really perfect way.

Yael Schonbrun: Dr. Dolly Chugg is an award-winning social psychologist at NYU Stern School of Business, where she studies bounded [00:07:00] ethicality, or what she calls the psychology of good people. In 2018, she delivered a popular TED Talk, how to let go of being a good person and become a better person. She is the author of the person You mean to Be. Which offered the argument that the more we believe we are already good people, the harder it is to become better people. And her new book, which we are here to discuss, is a more just future psychological tools for reckoning with our past and driving social change.

Welcome, Dolly.

Dolly Chugh: Thank you so much for having me.

Yael Schonbrun: . so a little bit of background for our audiences that when I reached out to you, I saw that you had this link in your signature line that navigates the user to a site where you can click and hear your voice, teaching folks how to pronounce your name.

So I wonder if we can start by having you briefly explain why you have that.

Dolly Chugh: Oh sure. The name of the site is name Drop All One word.io, and it's a free site. I um, well, I, in my first book wrote about, Uh, two collaborators, [00:08:00] um, Sarah Weeks and Keith, the ver the RAs, who had been working together a really long time and then realized, um, sort of, sort of deep in their collaboration that Sarah didn't know how to say Keith's last name.

And, um, they both openly shared the sort of journey that took them on that when they. Confessed that Sarah didn't know how to say it, and that it bothered Keta that it was never said that. And then Sarah invested time in learning it, that

it really deepened not just their knowledge around pronunciation, but their relationship and their knowledge of each other's cultures and their, their ability to work well together.

And it got me thinking about how often I avoid saying someone's name because I don't know how. Um, and, and. Really, if I'm more honest about it, I don't just avoid saying their name, I avoid them because it seems inevitable that I'll have to [00:09:00] say their name if I'm with them. And, and, and just reflecting upon that choice and the impact it has on other people and on me, the losses I have in terms of the people I get to have relationships with.

Um, Made me think hard about how can we do better. Um, so part of that is I'm just trying harder to learn people's names and there's lots of tools out there. Um, and there's a lot of, it's just a mindset, like if you can say for the Mary Poppins fans in in the room. Supercalifragilistic Xbi or for the Game of Thrones fans?

I don't watch the show, but I understand there's long, unusual names. Um, if we can learn how to say those names, we can certainly learn how to say the names of our neighbors and coworkers. Um, and similarly, uh, my name is, uh, often mispronounced and I know people get worried about how to say it, and so I figured I would use some of the tools available to offer them.

Um, [00:10:00] the ease of how to learn to say it. So it's in my signature line. Um, it's in my LinkedIn profile and I believe LinkedIn actually has a feature built in, uh, around pronunciation of the name. Uh, sure cuz I was giving a talk at Microsoft, a virtual talk for Microsoft and I mentioned name drop, uh, or they asked me about it and then the chat box kind of blew up. Microsoft owns LinkedIn and they were all like, Actually we didn't. So yeah. So That's a long answer to your question, but I think it's something I've improved a lot at and I've tried to make part of my, you know, soap box with others as.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. I mean it's such an important psychological tool to creating a better future where we can feel more connected. But it, you're pointing to something so important that happens for so many of us, which is that we avoid that, which. Feels uncomfortable to us and so much about more just future is about that.

And I will say from personal experience, having a name like [00:11:00] mine, Yel for anyone curious about how to pronounce it, this is something that I reckon with all my life. I remember in elementary school substitute teachers not calling on me because they weren't sure how to pronounce my name, and it really had an impact.

And so when I saw that, I immediately added it to my own signature line, and now I've had a few people comment that they really appreciate that they don't have to have that anxiety about pronouncing my name. They can check it out for themselves. So I, I think offering these tools and recognizing for ourselves how that discomfort can really cause us to avoid when what we'd really like to do is connect.

Dolly Chugh: Exactly. Exactly. And you know, I feel for you that, like you, that that stuff sticks with you. That, that, that childhood experience and then the adulthood version of it. You know, in the olden days I remember calling people's uh, uh, voicemails at night, like their office voicemail to hear how they would say their name.

But then people started like forwarding their office phones. So there this be four cell phones. They [00:12:00] would like forward their office phone to their home phone, he'd be calling at midnight and like some groggy spouse would pick up the phone. He'd be like, Oh, oh, I'm so sorry. You know, So this is much better.

Yael Schonbrun: This is much better. That's so funny. Um, alright, so let's talk a bit about, let's talk a lot about a more just future. So you start the book talking about the Laura Ingels Wilder series, which I admit I loved as a kid and as an adult. But you point out an important paradox in the narrative of this pioneering family that really captures an integral part of what we now are reckoning with as a country.

And can you help us understand what this paradox is?

Dolly Chugh: Yes. I mean, I love this family too. I, I always have, and I still do. Um, The Lower Eng, the, the books by Laura Engel's Wilder are chronicle her life growing up in very difficult times. And the hard work her family put in the strong values they showed the, the heart they showed. And that's [00:13:00] the kind of thing that my husband and I are trying to, um, create in the fabric of our family as well.

So when my kids were, um, This would be about 10 years. So they were around six and seven years old. I have two children. Uh, I read to them every night from the book series. So the books, there's eight books. It took all year, literally every night. And we, we basically lived with the Engles family. Like every night we went to bed, we talked about them.

Um, and it got to be that they were so much part of our family that my husband and I decided to take. We live, um, on the East Coast and we decided to go to South Dakota and Minnesota. For family vacation and take our kids to the real places where the Engles family live to like walk on that land and breathe that air.

And it's not super touristy, but they do have, um, small sort of commemorations in those places, like small little museums. It's just sort of perfect bite sized. [00:14:00] And, um, it was an incredible week and I remember during that week, Especially as we were there and we were given ourselves a lot of parenting credit for this educational trip that our children were loving.

I remember sort of like patting myself on the back, very smugly and waiting for my parenting trophy. Um, but also kind of having like a little, uh, like uncomfortable nibble in my head. As we would drive around. I'm like, this is clearly a land that Native Americans lived on. and still do, but it, that has been colonized, um, by the US government, by families like the Engles family.

And so I didn't really know what to do with that thought. Um, I, I didn't have a lot of knowledge about it. I didn't have a lot of practice with it, and so I just sort of went, Eh, we're gonna put that away. Um, [00:15:00] and let, let it be, There's a couple lines in the books that. that are blatantly pro problematic.

The only good Indian is a dead Indians. Lines like that. I'm sure when I was reading the book to my kids, I, you know, explicitly said, Well, that's not right, is it? Um, but then that was it. I didn't contextualize it as to what was going on more broadly. And years have passed since then, and it, it just has stuck with me like, why didn't I know what to do with those? Uncomfortable feelings. And as a result, what have I done to my children? I have fed them a narrative that excludes Native Americans, that presents, um, the settlers of that land as deserving of that land in a way that also suggests those who the land was taken from. Were not deserving of it, many lives were taken.

That what? How do we explain that? And. So as a psych, I'm not a historian. [00:16:00] If it's not obvious already from how I'm telling the story, I am not a historian. But, um, and I'm not even really a history buff, to be totally honest. Um, don't even, like, I don't even know if we get the history channel, but, but I am a psychologist and I feel like a psychologist, as you know, we, we have some tools to deal with uncomfortable feelings and unlocking.

Parts of ourselves using some, evidence based tools. And so I decided to, I couldn't find another book that sort of helped me think about this. So I guess I figured I would write the book that I needed to read.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, I love how much of you is in the book and I really hugely appreciate how open you are with your own challenges and confronting and reckoning with our historical past, but also with the habits that you've found yourself in, right? Sort of unwittingly. Um, you know, participating in this because I think we all do, and unless a leading voice [00:17:00] sort of admits like we're all in this together and we all jointly have a responsibility, I think it's hard to sort of, for many people to out themselves, right.

For me to out myself. But it makes it feel much safer because you are sort of sharing, you know, I do this for a living and I still found myself making a mistake in not contextualizing the Laura Engels Wilder story with my kids because, you know, we're all sort of in, in the soup together.

Dolly Chugh: Yes. I love that we're all in the soup together. Absolutely. I mean, you know, in this, this particular sort of, uh, uh, learning journey, I'm trying to decolonize my mind and I'm trying. Sort of unlearn something. And unlearning is, is usually the proc. Unlearning comes after learning. And I think we all learned, we all breathed in the same air, we all read the same textbooks.

Um, depending on our own lived experience and our family backgrounds and the cultures we inherited, we may have some unique perspectives into [00:18:00] understanding the American story. Um, and that's where like, you know, I come from a family of immigrants. I c I come in with that mindset. Um, a, a black family that has been in the United States for generations that may have, uh, come in, um, via the, you know, being enslaved would have a different sort of family narrative.

Um, uh, white family who had been here for generations might have a different family narrative. So we're all trying to unlearn this, and I think whatever it is we're trying to unlearn, um, It requires us to be so honest with ourselves because it's intellectually easy. Honestly, there's so much content out there.

That part is not hard. Emotionally it is really hard, and so I do feel I have a responsibility to start with myself before I, before I try to teach anyone else.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. So let's talk a little bit about this value of being a [00:19:00] lifelong unlearner. And I Love you refer to Adam Grant's book, um, in, in your book, um, in his book is called Think Again, and he talks a lot about

how scientists are really committed to unlearning. So I wonder if you can sort of talk a little bit about what we have to learn from scientists in this regard.

Dolly Chugh: Absolutely. Yeah. I love his metaphor where, um, he encourages us, and I might not be getting the exact terminology right that he uses, but essentially to not be. The attorney sort of trying to advocate for a particular, uh, viewpoint, but rather to be the, the scientist who's collecting data, testing hypotheses, and then revising the hypothesis, the.

Based on the data and, um, those of us who do science, meaning that we're in the field of research, this is a very familiar mindset for us. It's, it is so different than I think the way Hollywood presents science, which is very linear. Like you kind [00:20:00] of have this eureka moment. It's usually kind of a singular scientist that has a eureka moment when the truth is this is always a collective effort.

Um, And then it's sort of done. The discovery has been made and we are no longer needing to do anything with it. That's almost never how science works. I'm sure you know, of course there's, there's elevated moments of discovery, but there's, there's lots of incremental, um, um, learnings that some of which.

Confirm what we already thought and some of which make us go, Oh no, that paper I published two years ago may not be right. Um, and so the same thing that mindset's really useful when it comes to American history, uh, because we are. You know, the problem that we're dealing with is that, uh, history is, is, you know, as, as the saying goes, often told from the perspective of the victor.

And [00:21:00] because in the United States there has been legalized, um, racist policy for so many centuries. There's a lot that has been baked into our laws, our books, our narratives, and our culture. And, and there's lots of great books right now helping us see this, like stamped from the beginning by Eva Max Kendi.

Um, we don't even see that it's there. And so we have to, like a scientist kind of really push for what's the data, um, to disconfirm some of the, the narratives we have. So for example, Columbus Day or Thanksgiving are holidays where we have a very specific narrative of what we're celebrating. And there's very little data to support that narrative.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And so being like a scientist and sort of approaching it with curiosity and being willing to, to explore, you know, what other viewpoints might there be that could inform a more [00:22:00] nuanced view of this is so important. And before we started recording, I told Dolly that, that Jill and

Debbie and I, the co-host of this podcast, all practice acceptance and commitment therapy.

And one thing we talk a lot. We talk about a lot in the therapy room with patients is the importance of the narrative and recognizing that we all tell stories and that it's very easy to get hooked on them and feel like they are true and sort of true regardless of context, but almost never. Is that the case?

Right? Stories always occur in a context. There's always a narrator. There's always a plot line that you're choosing to highlight. There's always characters that you're choosing to put as the main characters and others that you're sidelining, other plots that you're putting to the side as well. And so really, Taking a step back from the central plot line, which is what you do in this book, and getting curious, like a scientist, you know, how much is this true?

What are other viewpoints to consider so that we can build out a more, um, textured narrative that, that has be supporting it. And so I wanted [00:23:00] to turn to, actually, it's one fascinating study that you describe in your book about home team bias in college. It may not, on the face of it, seem like it has much to do with social justice, but I think it uncovers how all of us have bias as a part of our wiring.

Not because we're bad, but because we're human. And so I wonder if you can talk a little bit about the findings from this study and how they reveal just how much our bias can so starkly color the realities that we take for grant.

Dolly Chugh: Absolutely. First, I wanna thank you for, um, that synopsis of your work about on acceptance and commitment therapy. Is that the correct term? I was really interesting and I've written it down to learn more and. It does help ex not just understand some of the concepts in my book, but help me, helps me understand some of those concepts better, um, as sort of the way like when you're in a clinical setting and helping an individual study their own [00:24:00] thoughts, uh, that that's the microcosm that kind of leads to these more collective narratives we have.

So it's really, really interesting,

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And like you're saying, we get so rigid about the storyline and it's that rigidity, like this has to be the story and that's what we're always working as therapists to help people grow some more flexibility. And you talk a lot about growing, more flexibility about the stories that we tell. And so, yeah, I, I, I'll be interested to.

Hear back from you after you've sort of looked into it. Because I, as I was reading your book, I really thought a lot about how many of the concepts that you're bringing up, line up with ideas from acceptance and commitment therapy.

Dolly Chugh: That's fascinating. That's fascinating. Um, so home team bias is, uh, is my little, uh, um, Nomenclature to describe a very classic study in the field of psychology by Hasor and Cantrill. Um, they, what they did was, uh, this was, uh, a, an intense [00:25:00] rivalry between Princeton and Dartmouth that culminated in a football game that got very, very heated and.

They were interested in, uh, looking at how the Princeton fans versus the Dartmouth fans, how these students perceived who was at fault in this very heated game. There were injuries and there were, you know, um, lots of calls. The refs were very busy, like it was, it was an intense game. And what they found that they, they, there was a, a video of the game and so then they brought in the week after the game, they brought in.

Students from both schools and ask them to watch the game. So they're watching the exact same tape. There's no like you're sitting in different fan sections or anything. You're, you're watching the exact same tape. And then they ask them, you know, to provide their interpretation of who started, you know, the, the, the sort of ruckus and whose fault was it that so and so got injured?

And, um, who engaged in fair play [00:26:00] and the results. And I, I think, Especially sports fans can sort of relate to this. Um, but the results were very stark. You know, the Princeton fans thought the Dartmouth fans started it, and that Dartmouth fans saw that Prince thought the Princeton's fans started it, and everybody was very committed to their narrative of what had happened.

Um, and so this home team bias, which is kind of funny, I guess, unless you're, you know, W involved in that particular game. It's kind of funny from the outside. Um, but it, it seems like a perfect example of how lots of human interactions are perceived, that we see it from the perspective of the group we identify with.

Um, there's lots of research on what we call social identity. The part of our identity that relates to, not me specifically, like, not me, Dolly Chugg, but the groups that I see myself a part of. So, you know, [00:27:00] could be moms or it could be, um, Indian Americans, or it could be professors. Those are groups I, I, I associate with.

And so that if there's a criticism of those groups, I feel it potentially cuz I'm invested in that identity and, and so home team bias. As an example of that social identity threat and the ways in which we protect it through literally seeing what we want to see. I mean, that's a cliché, but there's actually a reality to it in terms of what, what information our eyes and ears take in. Yeah, and I will, I'll add one more thing. I gave a talk at ESPN recently, um, not like on the channel, um, though that would be a dream come true, but this was actually internally to the employees of, of espn, all the people who bring that content to us. And, um, the, it was actually a fireside chat and the person interviewing me [00:28:00] pointed out, he said, Your book.

Filled with sports metaphors and I was like, you know, that was not on purpose. I did not think of it until you said it, but it is one after another. And part of it is I'm a big sports fan. I'm a, you know, a former athlete, I guess you would say. My family we're all sports fans, so probably that's part of it.

But I think it, AI also says something about, , this very human set of behaviors that we're describing with, with home team bias, um, is captured in this activity that many people get very invested in. And I think that that's this, I'm not saying everyone is sports fans, but for the people who are sports fans, I think they're engaging in this incredibly human activity of holding onto a social identity, the team you care about.

And then like, Soaking up that perspective and that perception as, as deeply as you can. And in some ways that just captures the sort of broader, [00:29:00] broader, um, set of ideas that I'm talking about in this book.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, and it's, it's so. It, it feeds itself, right? Because if you have a narrative of your team being the better team, the more righteous team, the team that deserves to win, the team that had the calls being made, unjustifiably, then you sort of look for confirming evidence, but, and you discount anything that disagrees with it.

And then also drives behavior, what you pay attention to, and then how you actually act. And so it's this really. A powerful cycle that I think many of us don't realize. And, and that is why it's such a good example, because it's a little bit more emotionally neutral than racism or homophobia or sexism. I guess for some people

Dolly Chugh: I know for some people, maybe not my kids, but yes, for some people,

Yael Schonbrun: helps us to understand that we're all guilty of having that kind of bias because we all have stories and we all have identities, and so of course it drives what, how we see things and the, the stories that sort of build out from what [00:30:00] we.

Dolly Chugh: Yep, exactly. Well said.

Yael Schonbrun: So going a little bit further on the topic of bias, I just, there's this one piece of your book where you talk about critical race theory, which I think is so on people's minds. These days. Many people have strong feelings about critical race theory. So I wonder if you can shed some light on why this has become, why you see this as having become such a charged conversation.

Dolly Chugh: Hmm. Well, I, I mean, it's interesting cuz. , So critical race theory. I, I signed this book contract in 2019. That's relevant because if you look up, you know, you can look up the data on how many people have Googled a particular term, like that's publicly available data. It's anonymous and you don't know who Googled it, but you can see how many, if you look up 2019.

Very, very, very few people Googled critical race theory. It was, um, a, a very specific area of [00:31:00] study in legal scholarship that, um, was well respected but not widely studied. Like a lot of things we do as scholars, there's a deep, narrow group of people who studied the thing. And so when I, um, You know, worked out with my publisher in 2019 that I wanted to write a book that was about how, what is our relationship with the past?

How do we engage with that emotionally, and how is it holding us back from moving forward as a country? Um, there was no association with, if you look at my 60 page book proposal, the word critical race theory does not here. Then fast forward a year and the term that meant a very specific thing about how, um, how uh, racism can be baked into our laws and structures in ways that look race [00:32:00] neutral but aren't when you actually flesh out their impact.

That's my Unexpert definition of critical race theory. It's that term suddenly meant a much broader set of things. Um, and I, the, the metaphor I use in the book is like, it's as if a very specific food pomegranate was suddenly that word was being used to describe all food, everything. Pizza, lentils, you know, like everything we will now call pomegranate bananas and.

it made it difficult to distinguish what we are talking about. If you go to a restaurant, every food on the menu is called pomegranate. You really have no

idea what you're gonna get, what the waiter's gonna bring you. And so I am trying to um, I guess speak to the moment we're in, even though I didn't realize.

Book would end up crossing into critical race theory territory, [00:33:00] but also trying to, um, people have gotten very emotionally invested in the topic of what they call critical race theory, because I think they don't have the tools for how to think about these difficult areas of our history. And so the debate has become, should we cover those topic?

In textbooks or shouldn't we, should our children be learning about slavery or shouldn't they, instead of what tools can we give people to be able to teach and learn about these topics in an effective way? And so I think that's where, um, inadvertently I have sort of walked into this area. Saying, I think we do have some tools, evidence based tools that could help us.

Um, this isn't a matter of, like, we don't want people to feel shame or guilt. It's more like, I mean, quite frankly, you know, if you think about slavery, no matter sort of, you [00:34:00] know, whether you were alive then or not. I mean, I feel awful when I think about slavery and that doesn't seem like a terrible human reaction to me.

Yael Schonbrun: It's sort of the right

Dolly Chugh: Yeah, it's just like, that seems like something that makes us feel awful. The question is then what do I do with those feelings of feeling awful? And, and, um, I think, I think in the, all the heat of thee what's been lost is, are there tools that could help us? And, and there are,

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. Well, and it seems like such a good example of how that self threat, the threat to identity or the threat to what we know to be true, the threat to our narrative is a part of what drives the charge of this conversation around critical. Race theory and what you do in your writing and in your speaking is that you help people sort of zoom out and reconnect to sort of the values, right?

This is another court process and, and acceptance and commitment therapy of like, how is it that we wanna show up given that there is this painful history that we're all reckoning with and that we're all sort of confused about how do we go [00:35:00] forward in a way that feels. Fair, healing, appropriate for all parties involved.

Sort of how can we, um, what tools can we use to make a better world, a more just future, which is such a great title because that, that really is the question, how do we build towards that? Not how do we avoid the discomfort

Dolly Chugh: exactly. Yes. I love that. I, and I love how you said that, you know, sort of zoom out to our values when we feel a threat to our narrative. That's exactly.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. So we leave that, the conversation around narrative systems around stories that we tell, cause I think this is so critical and, and, and I love how you talk about it in your book and I, but I wanna talk about some of the other tools that you offer in the book as well. But you talk about how there are three sort of.

More fundamental narratives that we often see people defaulting to so based on comparisons that you make between post apartheid South Africa and post Nazi [00:36:00] era Germany and the us, what do we know about the most productive ways to think about our problematic histories?

Dolly Chugh: Yeah. Yeah. I really like that framework. I, um, I learned it from a book called Knowledge in Our Blood by Jonathan Janssen, um, who is a, um, sort of senior level administrator in higher education in South Africa. A black man who, uh, found himself when apartheid fell. taking on that senior leadership role in a formerly white university, and he was fascinated to watch these young people who were within, you know, their lifetimes, watching their entire system and culture change in a dramatic way.

And he was really interested in how would they process the before. , what, what narrative would he attach to that? And the three narratives he came up with, where the [00:37:00] nothing happened, something happened, now get over it. And, um, uh, terrible things happened.

So, so that was, that was his framework and.

What I was really interested in is like thinking about how that might translate to our situation. Because when I was reading and, and I'm, I'm sorry, I'm being very US centric here cuz that's the country I've grown up in in the book. In the book I talk a lot about sort of American history in our own narrative around it.

But it could definitely be applied in other countries cuz I think many countries deal with very similar issues. So I was fascinated when I read his book that if you just sort of replace some of the terminology that's very South Africa

specific, I felt like I was reading about the United States. I was like, Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

And this. Their changes, their dramatic changes happened in my lifetime. Like I [00:38:00] remember when Mandela was president, Mandela was released from prison. Um, and so it's, it's that dramatic. A change was more recent than our changes, and yet I feel like we're still psychologically and culturally in a kind of similar place.

The, um, the narrative around. Um, nothing happened is clearly not useful and there are some trying to push that. Um, the narrative around something happened. It was a long time ago. Now get over it, I think is also not useful. And in, in my book I really try to offer a tool around connecting the dots so we can see how even things that appear to be a long time ago. we can connect the dots to how they're still having impact today. And then terrible things happen where we just acknowledge that terrible things happened. Um, and in some cases they didn't happen by accident. Um, we or, [00:39:00] or those who came before us did those things. And so, , I offer the thesis that the terrible things narrative is a useful one.

It's exactly the narrative we need to move forward. The other two narratives leave us, um, ignoring the plight of people to whom terrible things happened, and therefore, as long as if we ignore it, we can't fix where the impact is still happening.

Yael Schonbrun: Right. Yeah. So acknowledging not, not sort of hiding away or pretending it didn't happen. Requires us to confront some discomfort and experience some discomfort, but actually that's the most productive thing that we can do. So now we get to the, the tools that you offer. So facing painful histories or, and being pressed to do so can cause us to feel threatened, can cause us to feel uncomfortable.

And so what are some of your favorite tools? And there are a lot in the book of what we can do when we feel threaten. [00:40:00] That can help us to manage that self threat in, in what I think our, our value aligned ways, sort of like compassionate, caring, positive, forward moving ways.

Dolly Chugh: absolutely. One of my favorite tools is the paradox mindset. . So this comes from the research of Wendy Smith, Maryanne Lewis, and others. The paradox mindset is, uh, it's something we have to deliberately wear because our minds don't naturally like contradiction our minds, like things that sort of line up, you know, it's like a.

A picture that's a little crooked on the wall, you know, you kind of have that, that urge to just straighten it out. Um, our minds do that all the time. When there's inconsistency with information, they just, our mind just kind of fixes it for us so that things line up. Um, and

Yael Schonbrun: we want, our minds want a coherent narrative. They want everything to make sense. Yeah.

Dolly Chugh: Yeah. It's, it comes back to that.

It really, [00:41:00] it really, it really is what our mind, it's like a magnet that it wants that consistency and coherence as you just said. Um, so the paradox mindset is the idea that we tell our minds. We literally tell ourselves it's okay if not everything lines up. It's okay if there is a paradox or a contradiction, it's okay if there's two statements, both of which are true.

but that appear to, um, be the opposite of each other. So for example, the forefathers of our country did extraordinary things. They wrote extraordinary documents. They had extraordinary visions. Extraordinary. And the forefathers of our country, many of them while they were doing. Building this country, writing those documents, exalting the values of freedom and equality [00:42:00] and liberty we're enslaving other humans that were kidnapped from their homelands, a continent away, separating families from each other, taking children from mothers.

They were also doing that. Both things are true. Both things are true. Um, and you know, I feel, even when I say that, I'm like, Yeah, and I could see, you know, I, I know our, your listeners are listening, but you and I can see each other and I could see on your face how uncomfortable it was to

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Dolly Chugh: And so,

Yael Schonbrun: so uncomfortable, but it's, it's strange. It like gives me a chill. I'm like, Yes, because there is a bigger truth there. There's something that's uncomfortable and yet so right about being able to hold both of those things at the same time.

Dolly Chugh: Exactly, and in some ways what I have been finding is I practice the paradox mindset is that it's, it's [00:43:00] liberating, and let me explain what I mean by liberating. Suddenly, as you just said, things make sense. Like

when you look around and you start to notice like how we are living as a society, how we're engaging with each other, you know, Racial disparities in, fill in the blank, just about everything.

The how do you understand, I don't know how to understand that, but when you start allowing a paradox to be true and it allows you to put facts that maybe were, were not kind of part of the thought process before into our minds, suddenly things start to make sense and we can deal with them as they are.

And so that, that's what I mean by liberating is that it liberates us to kind of think in a forward moving way because we understand better how we got to this point. Um, so I love that tool and I, I've been, I've been using like a little with my kids when we traveled. This is when they were younger. [00:44:00] Um, you know, we would use, you know, if you're going on a road trip or whatever, , we would, we would keep track of adventure points.

That's when things don't go right, you know, you take a wrong turn or somebody throws up cuz they get motions, like, or whatever things that would sort of put everyone in a bad mood. We'd be like, Ah, Adventure point. How many adventure points are we trying to get today? 10. Okay, so that's two more. Um, And so I've been trying to, I know this sounds childish, but it works for me.

It's like, think about paradox points, like how many paradoxes can I sort of discover, um, and just allow to be true. Both things can be true. And when I do that, this need to kind of force fit everything into that, that consistent narrative I'm released.

Yael Schonbrun: Is is so cool. I love that.. A, a really messy adventure that you take with your family can be hard and so much fun and exciting. Um, and I think that practicing that, I love that. I [00:45:00] love that idea of actually proactively practicing it so that you can build some of that flexibility in, in lots of different pockets of your life.

, I also just wanted to give a mention. We'll be releasing an episode with an O Outfit survivor. Her name is Eddie Anger and she has these two beautiful books.

One is called The Choice and the other is called The Gift. And in it she really talks about, Unthinkable atrocities that were committed that, that she was at the receiving end of, and at the same time, all of these beautiful gifts. I mean, she says Auschwitz was like a learning opportunity for her, an opportunity for her to

grow her resilience and see beauty and some of the people who were cruel, even had pockets of kindness.

It, it's just amazing in. Sort of mind bending story. You can't believe it's real life where she could find beauty in, in such darkness. And it's, it's really an example of, of what you're talking about, this paradox mindset. So,

Dolly Chugh: Wow. Thank you.

Yael Schonbrun: yeah.[00:46:00] Related to that. So stories are often more nuanced than we believe, especially when it be, when it comes to fables , you talk about how there's often racial fables that we culturally just buy into in this very sort of not nuanced way.

And I wonder if you can, maybe using the example of Rosa Parks, explain why it's important to reject those kind of fables.

Dolly Chugh: Absolutely. Well, the, the fable around Rosa Parks, who's other than US President's, one of the most recognized names, um, most sort of, uh, famous people in the United States. Um, the fable is of course, that she was an elderly, tired seamstress on her way home from work on a bus. Uh, uh, as a black woman, she was expected to give up her seat to the white passenger who wanted it.

She did not want to because her feet were tired and that, um, sort of accidentally she became an activist and that unleashed the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Dr. Martin Luther King and was an impetus for many things in the civil rights movement. That's the [00:47:00] story we're often been told. Um, she tried repeatedly to tell her real story and.

As a country just didn't want to hear it. Or at least those who controlled narratives in textbooks and in newspapers and magazines didn't wanna hear it. And the true story that she wanted to tell. That's really well documented. And there's a wonderful book and actually, oh, a movie coming out in October, uh, depending on when folks are listening to this, it's coming out, um, I think on the peacock streaming platform based on the book called The Rebellious Life of Mrs.

Rosa Parks. Meticulously documents that she had been an activist for decades. She was also 42 when this happened with, with, she's described as elderly. She was 42. Um, and she had, she spent, um, many hours every week volunteering

for the naacp, training, student activists on [00:48:00] college campuses, um, fighting for.

Equality and civil rights. It was not an accident that she found herself in this role. And, um, the, the fable where it's this accidental person who sort of helps us notice something we hadn't really noticed was problematic. And then a lot of people are like, Oh, you're right. We should fix that. You know, let's fix that.

And everyone sort of clapped for Rosa Parks, um, that fable. What it makes it hard for us to see is that there were many attempts before this that failed. There was widespread opposition amongst white Americans of these kind of acts of civil disobedience. Uh, Martin Luther King when he led the Montgomery Bus boycott, [00:49:00] was viewed as divisive and radical and was believed to be moving too fast, um, according to Gallup polls at the time.

So what that fable obscures is how change actually happens, and it means, oh, and I should also lastly say it obscures the fact that many, many, many people, um, risked their lives, their livelihoods. In order, uh, in the civil rights movement, not just Rosa Parks and not just Martin Luther King. And so it obscures how change happens in a way that today we are looking for.

The sanitized Rosa and the sanitized Martin. And when we don't see them, we're demonizing what we do see, thinking that's not how change happens. That's divisive. Or what good is that protest doing? Um, or see nothing happen. They went and made a fuss and nothing happens. So that's why they shouldn't be doing that, [00:50:00] when in fact the data says that that's exactly how change happens.

Failed attempt after failed attempt, after failed attempt until suddenly something works. And it looks like just a couple of people did it, but in fact it was a huge collective. Um, and, and it, it leaves us, um, just like with our children, you know, when I, when my children with the little house in the Prairie example, I'm, I've sort of.

Un unintentionally given them something they have to unlearn. Now, as adults or as as older children, um, these racial fables do the same thing where we sort of leave ourselves and our children with so much to unlearn that we can't participate in making change happen because we're actually barriers to making change happen.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I think it's such an important point on so many levels, but I'll just sort of, you. It's a little bit like the founding father's fable, right?

When we sort of sanitize the story and leave out all nuance, then it leaves [00:51:00] us thinking that there's nothing to do. And you talk about growth mindset a bunch in your book, and I think this is so powerful.

It's like if we can see that there are mistakes that have been made, it doesn't mean that we're doomed. As long as we can have a growth mindset and see it as like a place to learn and grow and build to a better place. But if we can't acknowledge the errors, acknowledge the pain of the past, acknowledge the pain of the present, then how do we grow as a country?

How do we grow as as families? How do we grow as individuals?

Dolly Chugh: Yeah, exactly. So well said.

Yael Schonbrun: I wanted to end with, um, asking you what is the fable of your own life that you've had to introduce more nuance.

You talk a bit about this in the book, and for me it was very powerful as the child of immigrants myself.

Dolly Chugh: oh, is that right? Wow. Um, yeah. The fable of my life is that my parents immigrated from India when I was a baby, and I've, um, you know, grown up in a [00:52:00] family. Like me, my parents love this country. We, we've, we've always referred to it and still refer to it as the greatest country on earth. Um, very patriotic and.

I understood that what brought us here was that my dad was an engineer and that the United States wanted more doctors and engineers. There was a shortage. And so they reached out to countries like India, where my family comes from, and were like, Please, would you come here and help us? It would be wonderful to have you here.

And, um, adjusted the immigration laws to make that happen. And, and so that, what I've heard my whole life, and I've, and not just from my own family, I've, like, within our community and culture, I've heard that a million times. And actually it was a, a week before, um, co the, in March, 2020, when, [00:53:00] when we went into that shutdown phase in quarantine in mid-March, it was the week before that I had started to read.

that that actually isn't how it happened. That it was, um, a fight legislatively that came out of the Civil Rights movement, uh, where some activists were saying, you know, you're. This, the, the immigration laws also have a lot of inequality

in them in that they allow for many more European immigrants, white European immigrants to come in than immigrants from countries that are not mostly white.

And there should be something done about that. And there was this big fight over it. And, um, the sort of concession was, Okay, we're gonna sort of loosen it up for countries like. Um, but you know what, nobody's, they're not actually gonna come. Don't worry. We're gonna be able to stay a white country, a white Christian country, so, you [00:54:00] know, let's do it.

But, and there's, you know, there's all sorts of documentation of this, but don't worry about it. It's gonna be fine. And that's, That's what led to my parents being able to come and I didn't know that. And um, when I sort of started reading about this the week before, not realizing it was the week before we were gonna shut down, I remember thinking like, I need to sit down with my parents.

I don't know if they know this. We're gonna, next time I go over, I'm gonna sit down with them and we're gonna talk. I'm gonna share with them what I learned or whatever. And then everything shut down. I didn't see my parents for months. I was just like, Oh my God, I'm like sitting with this. Of course, when I finally did have a chance to talk to 'em about it, they did know more than I realized.

I think their understanding had grown in the decades that they'd been here from what it was at the start. Um, so they, they were as scientists updating their, their narrative. But, uh, that was just, that was a real shocker.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. I mean that's such a perfect example of how, you know, the beliefs [00:55:00] that we sort of believe are true, right? This is how it happened are, you know, there's so much more to it. There's so many more layers to, to most of our life stories and our, and our life histories and our, our cultural histories. And I think.

Your book is such a wonderful invitation to really open yourself up to it. So I just wanted to end with a quote from your book. Um, and it is, if you love this country deeply and believe it can do no wrong, I invite you to consider why. If you have fallen out of love with this country, believe it can do no right.

I invite you to consider what brings people here decade after decade, and if you like me, are somewhere in between. I invite you to consider how all of your feelings can coexist in the search for a more perfect union. And I just think that captures the message so well. There are so many more tools from psychology offered in your book.

I highly recommend it a more just future. I also recommend Dolly's previous book. It's wonderful. The person you mean to be as well as Hurt. Awesome Ted Talk. It's, It's so [00:56:00] good. So where else besides the books can folks find out more about you and your powerful.

Dolly Chugh: Oh, thank you and thank you for this and really, um, eye opening conversation for me. Um, I have a website, dolly chugg.com and, uh, one of the things that people find for free on the website is my newsletter, Dear Good People, which is once a. Um, kind of zeitgeisty tips on how to be the inclusive person, you mean to be So, um, you can subscribe or just without subscribing, read back issues right on my website.

Yael Schonbrun: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for, for joining me and, and good luck with the lunch of your

Dolly Chugh: Thank you so much. Same to you. I can't wait to read it.

Yael Schonbrun: Thank you.

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