

Alicia Menendez Likability Trap

[00:00:00] **Alicia Menendez:** The cultural expectation is that women will be communal and warm and think about what is in everyone's best interest.

And our expectation of a leader is that they will be assertive driving and able to advocate for themselves. Those two things are on a collision course where, what we expect of women and what we expect of leaders are diametrically opposed. So that if a woman acts the way we expect a woman to act, people might like her, but they won't see her as the leader.

And if women act the way we expect leaders to act, then people may see her as a leader, but they won't like her.

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Jill Stoddard:

hey everyone. I am here to introduce this episode today with Yael and I had the honor of interviewing Alicia Menendez, who is just incredible. she does so much, she's an anchor for MSNBC. She hosts a podcast called Latina to Latina. the Washington post called her miss millennial.

She's been called [00:03:00] journalism's new gladiator by Elle and a content queen by Marie Claire. And she's had interviews and reporting, appearing all over the place like ABC news and bustle, fusion TV, PBS vice news. I know she's been a guest on the view as we talk about in the episode. And today we're going to talk primarily about her incredible book, the likability trap.

and I was so excited to have Alicia on, not only because I just, I loved this book and I think part of the reason I loved it so much is it just spoke to me in terms of its relate-ability as a professional woman, and how often we find ourselves in these traps, these like damned if you do damned, if you don't kind of traps,

where in order to be successful, women need to be likable. All the research says women are expected to be likable in a way that is not expected of men. And if we're not likable, there really is a penalty for this. [00:04:00]

And, and it's sort of exhausting having to always try to find this space where, you know, we're being assertive enough that we're making sure we have a voice and a seat at the table, but not too assertive that people are gonna think we're being aggressive or bitchy, and then we've become unlikable.

And then that impacts our ability to succeed. And she just talks about this, all of these issues in this book in a really, just well thought out well-reasoned. Compelling sort of way. So I'm curious what your thoughts were Yael.

Yael Schonbrun: I love this interview and. A huge reason why I loved it. It's something that you guys actually talked a lot about, which is that it was so authentic.

Both of you shared your personal experiences in some of the specific dilemmas that you've been in both personally and professionally, when it comes to how you manage this, push and pull between being likable and. You know, being ambitious, being likable and being assertive.

and. I know that for you, Jill, like authenticity is really [00:05:00] top value and it is for me too. and the reason is that that's how I connect to people. right. When I really feel like

people are being genuine and sharing their hearts with me and open to me, that's how I feel connected.

That's how I feel seen. that's how I sort of feel known and, that I can know. And it is really complicated for women, especially in the professional space. But as you guys talked about, you know, Also in the family space, it can be really complicated to be authentic, develop those deep relationships.

When there is this double edged sword of feeling like the more that you show different parts of yourself, that maybe judge, because you're a woman that you may be off putting. And so it really is a complicated place to be. It really does limit how you can show up in an authentic way.

And it was, you know, it's just interesting to be thinking about this because I'm reading a memoir called know my name by Chanel Miller that I know you read, and she [00:06:00] talks a lot about that as a young woman . Growing into her sexual self and going out to parties that there's this real double bind of being authentic and of showing up in a playful way, but also needing to have a witness and be really careful and , not wear your hair in a ponytail or say anything that's too sexually provocative.

, and then similarly, I was reading this article that I was sharing with you today, Jill, about , black women's suffrage and how Ida B Wells who's I think better known for her journalistic, , professional activity, but also did a lot of work in helping black women get the vote even after women technically.

Legally had the vote and her granddaughter just recently released a book where she talks about how Ida Wells was really in a bind between being likable and really helping to propel black women's suffrage forward. And so this is clearly a long standing issue for women of many racial and ethnic backgrounds, and I just think it's such an important conversation and you and Alicia [00:07:00] Menendez really just made it.

Come to life in such an important way.

Jill Stoddard: I'm so glad. And what that makes me think about too is when I think of other women who have been vilified for being assertive, I think of Anita Hill, I think of Christine Blasey Ford, where they were really kind of fighting a battle on their own. And there was clearly a lot of pushback, , for them, but when you look at the me too movement and the time's up movement, , I think where we have a lot of power is in groups and in numbers.

And I even know for myself , in my own personal experience, that where I get the courage to be authentic, to share my successes, even though I feel really anxious that I'm not being humble and people won't like me, if they see me bragging, you know, the courage to do that comes from. Having cheerleaders like you and Diana and Debbie [00:08:00] and the women's groups that I belong to.

The writing group that I belong to, that I find the more I surround myself with other women who also are ambitious and want to be genuine, who care about these issues. It really helps.

I think all of us too, move forward in these ways, even though there is that fear and reality of the potential penalty for doing so.

So, and we Alicia talks about that in her book. And we didn't get to talk about it much in the episode, but I do think it's one of the really critical pieces of, how we can move the needle forward.

Yael Schonbrun: that reminds me of the book that you've been encouraging me to read Abby Wambach's book, Wolfpack, which I know talks a lot about how women can really come together to support each other and raise each other up. And, and that really is an experience that we have in this podcast. And it's not easy or seamless, but, but I think, you know, the more that we try to.

[00:09:00] Be talking about these kinds of issues and really, you know, not, not allowing the status quo to just remain what it's been for so long, that we can make forward progress. And that's why, again, I think the conversation and, and Alicia Menendez, his book is so important and the timing is just so right to be pushing this conversation forward.

Jill Stoddard: Absolutely. So guys check out Alicia's book and enjoy this episode.

hey everyone. It's Jill here and I am super excited. I have Alicia Menendez with me today and when I started on the podcast back in January. She was the very first person that I really wanted to interview and we've gone back and forth for a couple months and finally made it happen.

So I'm super excited to have her today.

thank you so much and welcome to psychologists off the clock,

Alicia Menendez: Jill. I'm so glad we finally made this happen. And I'm covering my face, cause it should not have taken six months, but here

Jill Stoddard: we are. [00:10:00] Well, I want to talk primarily about your book, the likability trap.

, I don't remember where I found it, how I stumbled upon it, but it just, I don't know, it hit me like a ton of bricks. I just love this book. , and I hope everyone after this interview runs right out and, and reads it as well. So tell me a little bit. About your story? Like, how did you come to write this book?

Were there personal experiences? I mean, you went to Harvard undergrad. So I imagine there were some things that occurred there. Like what were some of the things that influenced your desire to write about gender and success?

Alicia Menendez: I originally wanted to write a book that. Was going to be like an eat, pray love for likability, where I, as a person who cares a lot about how others perceive me, how I

make others feel would recognize the downsides of that and, you know, go to a yoga retreat, eat gelatto, and try to free myself [00:11:00] of what I perceive as something that really at this point holds me back.

, and what I found as I started talking to other women, particularly other professional women, Particularly women in male dominated fields is that there were women like me who cared a lot and they paid an internal price for caring, but there were also women who did not care at all, or at least weren't governed by what other people think of them and those women.

who felt that they were paying a price for being so brazenly themselves and having disregard for the expectation that women should care about what others think of them. And that became much more interesting to me than my original question. Right, but it wasn't as though this was just an internal process.

This was an external expectation that really had to be reckoned with. And so that became the core question to your point about the sort of launch incident in my own life, [00:12:00] I found it really challenging to pick just one in part, because. This desire is so deeply ingrained in me and gets culturally ingrained in me the way it is in a lot of women in a lot of sensitive people, , in a lot of high achievers.

, but where it started, the friction started to come up for me that I have this career in broadcast journalism. I am a public person. And so I would do things like go on the view. Just like a lifelong dream to be on the view. I think it's like a very common dream for a lot of people. And the advice that everyone would give me was like, well, just be yourself.

Just be yourself. And because I am someone who shapes and shifts to very often accommodate whoever I'm with, I was like, well, I don't know that I know who that is. I don't know that I have such a fixed sense of self that I know how to show up as one person, rather than being a person or being who I am in relation to others.

And so that experience of [00:13:00] being on that show and the lights being on and everyone being like, do you, and be like, Almost 30 at that point. I have no idea who that is. That to me is the closest I can come to, to identifying, , a catapult moment.

Jill Stoddard: That's so interesting because you know, now that I'm thinking about this, as you're talking, I think something similar is what really drew me to the book, which is for me, one of my most important personal values is authenticity.

And in my clients as a clinical psychologist in my clients, I find that this is a common. Personal value as well. Yeah. And that it's something that my self and my female clients tend to struggle with most. And it's not just about who am I, what does it mean to be authentic? Like you're saying, but it's, I feel like when I'm authentic, there are some costs to that, right?

Like there's this part of me that does all this people pleasing and accommodating and. That gets reinforced. [00:14:00] And then when I try to be more authentic, which might mean being assertive or saying something someone doesn't want to hear, or maybe like not being

humble, you know, like maybe I'm going to tell the world about some of my successes, that there are negative consequences to that.

And not that that means it's not worth doing, but it's this double bind, which of course is, you know, what, what the book is about.

Alicia Menendez: And that we're just not honest about that. We either a lot of Instagram memes that I saved to my phone that I hope will just by osmosis change me. Right? Yeah. Like, do you, and don't care what anybody else thinks or, you know, any quote about authenticity because it rarely captures the other side, which is

we live in a society and a culture, and we have relationships where there will be penalties. Right where it's like, if you speak up in your office or in your workplace about a problem, very often for women and especially women of color, we become the problem. [00:15:00] Right. That people say like, Oh, like, is this really a problem?

Or is she being difficult? , and that, I think. Complicates the picture at the same time that we're shouting at people, be yourself, do yourself be authentic. It's okay. But then we have to be honest about the fact that you have to create environments and workplaces where people can do that, not be penalized for it, be rewarded for it.

And where, we are all agreeing that we are comfortable dealing with. Then the expansion, the cultural expansion that needs to happen to allow that to be possible.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And I think, you know, what's happening, right. Politics right now is bringing that a little bit more to the forefront. It's creating more of a conversation around the expectations for candidates to be likable.

You know what we've heard? Kamala Harris was being accused. Oh, she didn't apologize. After she had a debate, I believe was the criticism there. Someone [00:16:00] else was being criticized for being too ambitious. I mean, these ridiculous standards, that Kamala, they were both Kamala.

Yeah. I mean, things that you never hear being said about male candidates and the fact that it's happening, I think is causing people to talk about these things more. ,

Alicia Menendez: it's funny because I was on , , I was on MSNBC where I worked talking about, about this, about both of those attacks that have been launched against Kamala Harris.

And then of course, on Twitter, there's the secondary conversation where people are like, But if that's the same for men, right? Men have to be likable too, if they want to run for office. And it's not the same. I mean, there's all of this research that shows that yes, while voters in general prefer a likable candidate, they will vote for a man.

They don't like as long as they believe that he is competent in women has to clear both hurdles. A woman has to prove that she is competent. And then she also has to convince a voter that they like her. And look it's so, so [00:17:00] messy for women candidates for professional women. Is that right? proving our competence.

We inherently become less likeable and that can take a variety of forms. It can take the form of a straight A's. The STEM student, , having the perception that she is like not fun because she clearly is so committed to her work. , it can have the effect of a woman just being very assertive and very able to direct and lead a team and not conflicting with the expectation we have of women.

So what I find so interesting about women candidates is what happens to women in the workplace is often very subtle and it's. Often happens in things that are unsaid. And so with politicians, we are literally asked for our opinions of them. We're asked in public polling, we are asked in focus groups, pundits go on television and talk about it.

And so I watch it through the lens of these are the things they say about [00:18:00] all women when we're not in the

Jill Stoddard: room.

Yeah, absolutely. ,

I was reading an article recently that talks about.

These exact things that you and I are talking about, and there's a woman I'm forgetting her name, but she's at a law school in California. And she talks about it as gender judo. And this idea that as women, we can be more assertive as long as we're also warm, right? That like will allow you to, they have some of these characteristics that are seen as more male dominant that women shouldn't have.

As long as you layer on top of it, these more feminine. Characteristics, and then maybe you'll exist in this tiny little bubble where we'll accept you as being both likable and competent. It's exhausting.

Alicia Menendez: I think that advice comes from Joan Williams, who has done a lot of work in this space. And I, in the process of writing a likability trapped, really try to be.

Fair about the fact that, that [00:19:00] that is good advice for survival and, and necessary. And I also believe that each person, each woman needs to do what she needs to do in order to survive and thrive in her workplace. And that is so specific to who you are and your workplace, that there are very few blanket pieces of advice that are just going to work.

For everybody, because being a psychologist is very different than being a journalist and you were very different than me cause we're just different people. , and at the same time, it's sort of underlined for me. What I think has become. So limited about the work that has been done around women and work, which is the last wave of this has been here's what you can do.

You Jill, in order to maybe survive, maybe thrive. The problem with that is that it has shifted the focus of it away from institutions and systems that [00:20:00] really need to do the changing themselves in order to liberate someone like you to show up and be your most authentic self and lead in the way that is most authentic to you.

It has also created this center that a woman is both. Responsible for her problems in the workplace and responsible for fixing them that in the well-intended Canon of empowerment, that there has been this misunderstanding that now we have all the tools and we have all the answers and we can just fix things for ourselves.

And that if we don't. We are then the

Jill Stoddard: problem, right? I mean, it reminds me of some of the issues around rape culture. You know, women hold your keys between your fingers and never go walking by yourself and don't wear your hair in a ponytail, yada yada yada, take a self defense class. And it's the same.

Problem it's you need to protect yourself. And if you can't, it's your fault, then [00:21:00] if something happens to you and there isn't a lot of talk around like, Hey boys, and men learn how to respect women and learn and what consent is, and maybe don't rape women. , and this reminds me of that, I think for now it's both and right that like for now, We can and should try to be making individual changes.

And hopefully as we add those individual changes together, it will move the needle in some ways, but nothing is ever truly going to change, change at a systemic level, unless we see it at a systemic level and address it as a systemic issue. And I think that that's part of where this whole, whole conversation and movement gets stuck, because then it feels so big.

It's so overwhelming, right? That like, what am I doing Jill going to do to change the sexism. So forget it. Yeah,

Alicia Menendez: totally. Exactly. And I also, I mean, I would say there's nothing worse than being a person who cares about likability, who then writes a book about likeability, because what you will end up doing is staying up late at [00:22:00] night, reading the reviews of your book, starting with the one star reviews, right?

Like, of course you don't start with the people who actually loved it. You start the people don't like it. And, and there was a common frustration that I. Understood. Like, there's sort of like the bogus reviews that just like, I can ignore, but then there were, the reviews were just like, I just wanted more tips and tricks essentially.

I both fully understood it. And also it was a reminder of what we're up against that we have become so conditioned to believe that if I just had the right tips and tricks, then I could become the player myself. And it's like, That maybe she's not that simple. And to your point, if you start thinking about sexism, racism, and anything that is structural than it is just easier to walk away.

Well, they did end up coming to those. Like if you, if you harness that energy, she have, what could I do for myself and you, and you sort of turn it on its head and say, what can I do in the service of other women? And that is a better use of your energy, [00:23:00] right? So in as much as like language matters, right.

If I said to you, , you know, well, Jill she's, very indecisive that you could say, well, is she indecisive? Or she'd deliberate because. That's the same quality, but if I spin it as a positive and show you the positive element of it, then you're more likely to value Jill. Then if I tell you that she's indecisive, , same thing with passionate and emotional.

I want to work with people who are passionate, emotional, maybe not so much. And that we can say those things for ourselves, but really it's most important. You say it for somebody else when you hear somebody else described in those terms, and you take the moment to say, I think you mean she is this positive incarnation of the same trait that you just laid out.

Um, or there's this one piece of advice that I really liked, which is, you know, the vast majority of feedback women can get is critical, subjective feedback. So that if you are in an interview and someone says Alicia, you're just too aggressive. You say, compared to who. And would you say that about, about office and then the one that I think is even, yeah, [00:24:00] easier to execute as, okay.

Okay. Can you draw a line for me between my style and how it shows up in the results of my work? You have to be open to the possibility that the person can draw a line from your style to the results. And then that is something that you can begin to tackle and to work on, but very often just someone telling you what they think of you.

, and that doesn't actually have any bearing on your work and, and those tools are great for a person to use a self assessment. I also think they're even more powerful when you use them in service of someone else. Right. That if you hear that said about someone else that you inquire you, poke, you ask what the person really means when they say that.

If only to cause reflection, if only to give someone the time and the space to say, Hmm, you're right. Maybe, maybe when I say I don't like that person, what I really mean is we're very, very different. We work very differently and that is extraordinarily challenging for me.

Jill Stoddard: Right. And I remember you talking in the book too about qualities, like helpful.

That these [00:25:00] things that are disguised as positive words, like, Oh, in, in her review, I call her so helpful. , but often help and correct me if any part of this isn't quite right. But, you know, helpful often means. You know, you're doing the office housework of planning, the company party, or being the mentor to the other women, non promotable tasks, tasks that aren't the things that are getting you raises and moving you up in the company.

And then the mirror, the flip side of that is unhelpful. And what does unhelpful mean? So if I'm doing work right. That is related to my goals. And me moving up in the company is that selfish, is that unhelpful. And are women being held to different standards? You don't often hear men being described as helpful or unhelpful.

Alicia Menendez: One thing that came up in a lot of the social science research is that tasks like. The printer and taking out the trash, little cleaning out the office refrigerator. That's very often still [00:26:00] fall to the people in the office that if a woman is asked to help with one of those things, and she says, no, there is a likability penalty where a man there is an expectation that he must just be working on.

They were important. So of course, I'll go ask somebody else. Um, And the helpful thing is, is a good yeah. Hard. Well, I will admit it is challenging to change your frame, which is, instead of saying she's helpful. Tell me what she did. She provided all of that numbers for the quarterly reports. She helped harness the teams so that everybody got their pieces into the binder on timely focus on the task.

And that listen, that that it's a muscle that you have to work right over and over again. But it's a muscle that can have a big impact in another person's life and career because it shapes the narrative around, around who they are. Are they helper or are they a visionary? And that it's a minor difference, but if you can get there, it can have a big [00:27:00] impact.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. I have quote from you that's, that's related to this. That was, , in an article and you say, quote, "the constant chatter about how women do their work and how women lead makes it nearly impossible for women to lead in a way that is authentic to them. Rather than re-imagining leadership, we're asking women to reimagine themselves."

So this, like what we're talking about here reminds me of that. And the other thing that it made me think of is, you know, are we asking women to be more like men, like re you know, going back to what you were talking about individual rather than. Systemic, you know, we're not asking people in power and systems to change.

, but also specifically, we're not asking them to recognize the unique qualities that women bring that are what promote better leadership. Right? So like the research shows that it's greater diversity that leads to better functioning in organizations, not just giving diverse people, a seat at the table, but only if they act like white Western [00:28:00] men.

Right. Like if you look at it, countries with female leaders that are doing things differently and doing it better, but I think in addition to expecting women to change themselves and do it individually in many ways, we're also asking them. To be more like men.

Alicia Menendez: Yeah. Yes. I think another way of thinking about it is we give men a very, very narrow lane in which to run, even with men, we're saying show up in these hyper masculine, as you said, Western culturally appropriate ways. And the idea is to be more expansive, to imagine, to see warmth as a form of strength. Yeah. To see the ability to apologize as a form of strength, to see the ability to ask questions to things you don't know as a form of inquiry and intellect and information gathering.

. And that expanse really happens at, um, it happens on an individual level and it happens at an [00:29:00] institutional level where there has to part of it is you, you know, I said this and heard other people say it so many times. but you can't be what you can't see.

It's true. It's like you, when you start seeing different forms of leadership, it empowers other people to say, Oh, okay. That person was able to show up as they are. And that way is different than I'm accustomed to seeing and they're succeeding. And so it's not that I have to model the way they are. It's that I am being given permission to be myself and to test out how that works in this time.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. Well said.

okay. So I wanna back up a little bit and ask you about the title of the book. So it's called the likeability trap, and I'm curious how you landed on that particular title.

And then I wanted to talk about some of the traps that you talk about in the book. So let's take the title part first, and then I can ask you some of those kinds,

Alicia Menendez: Jill, forgive me for not knowing this, but have you written a

Jill Stoddard: book. I've written two, [00:30:00] actually. So one is for therapists who do the kind of therapy I do.

And then the other one is for women with anxiety. The more recent one.

Alicia Menendez: Yeah. Oh, so both books I need

Jill Stoddard: to read

I'll send you a copy. Great.

Alicia Menendez: So first I was just going to make a throw away comment to you, which is finding a title is the worst because you have this thing that you love and you have poured yourself into and .

You know, 90% of people will make a snap judgment on it, predicated on that title and on even worse. That subtitle, which is like, I, if we could just get rid of subtitles, if we could just be like, read the back of the book, you need a whole paragraph write much better.

I mean, I think the way I originally understood the trap is what I, to your point outline as trap one, which is, , the Goldilocks conundrum too warm, too cold a woman, it seems is never quite right that women, the cultural expectation is that women will be communal and warm and think about what is in everyone's best interest.

And our expectation of a leader is that they will be assertive [00:31:00] driving and able to advocate for themselves. Those two things are on a collision course where, what we expect of women and what we expect of leaders are diametrically opposed. So that if a woman acts the way we expect a woman to act, people might like her, but they won't see her as the leader.

And if women act the way we expect leaders to act, then people may see her as a leader, but they won't like her. And that is particularly complicated because there are so many women like myself who were raised to be ambitious. To want to lead because we do care about the group and we want to help the group achieve a goal.

But we were also raised to care about what other people think of us to care about, how we make other people feel, which I think is a good thing. , And that manifests in wanting to be well liked and so to be raised, to believe that you could both be ambitious and be well-regarded and then to a bit later, find out that those two things may in this moment in our society be mutually [00:32:00] exclusive, really messes with your mind.

And that, to me was the trap. What I realized is that that is one of several traps. I mean, there's that, there's this call for authenticity. Which seems to really run against everything. I just said, you know, be yourself, do you but know that if you really show up in that way, you might be penalized for it, or we may decide that you're not a fit.

It's especially true for any person of color. It's true for queer people. It's true for anybody. Who's not in the majority identity in the place that they are working, living, , and then the success, likeability penalties. So I'm going to guess that a lot of people who listen to your podcast have either read, *Lean In* or seen Cheryl Sandberg's Ted talk, , and.

She in the book talks about that in terms of, you know, the more successful a woman becomes the less likable she becomes. And while there's all this research to back it up and that is true, [00:33:00] I also think it's even more complicated, which is, it's not just a one time decision. Do I want to be. Successful or do I want to be likable?

It's not just once you reached a certain level of success that you become less likable. It's that every little thing a woman needs to do on the pathway to success makes her less likable. So it is all of these. Seemingly minor choices that a woman is making that determine whether or not she will be successful and whether or not she'll be likable.

So, , having a really stellar academic record can for a woman make a woman less likable or have the perception that she is not fun and not likable. , Advocating for a raise advocating for a better title, advocating to be put on the biggest project. Any of those little things makes a woman look like she is acting in the service of herself, and that then is seen as unladylike.

and then becomes less likable and that's to say nothing [00:34:00] of all those minor little things, things that happen in a workplace that. You swallow, you put away, you forget about, , because you know that if you, if you confronted every microaggression, you would seem like a person who was impossible to work with.

Jill Stoddard: Right. And, and I see it play out even outside of the workplace. It's so pervasive. , you know, I've had this personal experience. I actually wrote a blog about the book and about some of these experiences where, I have a book that came out in January and I was sharing my successes just with my family.

Initially, because I didn't want it out on social media because I was afraid that it would look like I was not being humble and that it would make me unlikeable that I'm bragging. But I figured of course it would be safe to share with my dad and my brother. And, , at one point my dad asked me very concerned.

, do you think sharing these successes might make your brother feel bad? And it was coming from this [00:35:00] very well intentioned place. Cause my brother had been having a hard time. , and likewise, my husband also sort of like he was mad at me for something unrelated and kind of lashed out but he made a comment about like, all I ever think about is my book and my podcast.

And I mean, it was this just Whoa, in your face. Personal example of like, even inside my own family, the sharing success is not a likable trait and Oh my God, it hurt so bad. And I don't

think they even realize it. You know, if I pointed this out to them as part of one of these kinds of likability traps, I think they would, be shocked.

Right. And, and it's, you know, I don't even know how to make that. Conscious for people. And you know, one of the things I was thinking about is like, is there maybe a bridge between this individual responsibility for changing things and this [00:36:00] systemic change, where if we think about the people who tend to have the power.

Who might be more likely to move the needle with systemic issues? It's whoever's in the majority group and in much the same way. I hope it seems like we're moving the needle with racial justice because white people are getting involved finally. Right? I think we need men and people in power to buy into this as an issue and to get.

Involved. , I even had the thought that maybe the borrowing from the racial justice movement, , that we may need to change the word feminism. Because it is so loaded. It is so loaded people hate that word. And you know, my dad said to me, jokingly. He said, don't call me a feminist. And I said, well, do you believe that men and women should have equality?

And he said, of course, I said, well, then you're a feminist. What do you think a feminist is? And that maybe we need to start calling it anti sexist, because I think most men I know, would say, of course I'm anti [00:37:00] sexist and then might be more willing to jump. Jump into the fight. And you know, I think one or two of the blogs I've written one specifically, I wrote to men, like to fathers of daughters in this desperate plea of like, Whoa, you know, no one can see me right now, but I'm doing fists.

Like I'm shaking someone, you know, like, how can I make you care about this? How can I make you see that this is an issue and we need your help. We need you to jump in here and be part of the solution. Well, maybe if I talk to you as a father of a daughter, then. Maybe you'll care,

Alicia Menendez: except it was your dad who told you that you were being immodest.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, I know. And that's, it's when I read the book, I'll admit I had this dual, like, I felt like sad and discouraged and like, Oh, how are we ever going to change it? But like also hopeful, , but I think this is where we get stuck for. I mean, exactly what you're saying is like, so, so what do we do if, if it's, if we're making a mistake by putting the onus some women individually, but it's, it feels so hard to change things [00:38:00] systemically.

Like what do we do? Where, where can we start? What is that bridge?

Alicia Menendez: And that's where I also think there is a. I mean, it's funny. The example you give, because the example you give is where the personal and the professional intersect, right? That it was your dad talking to you about your work product. I think what I think there are two different answers, which is, I think when you talk about work, so much of it is about finding a work place that really values you, , that allows you to show up as yourself where, where your successes are seen as successes for the group, and then are allotted.

I mean, you and I are in very individualistic things. I think that. Becomes complicated, even though you and I would see them as forms of service. So the group, but in your personal life, I it's where I have become more radicalized, which is that if you were going to spend 40 to 60 hours at work and work is always going to require some measure of performance, then in your personal life.

You really want to edit [00:39:00] down to the people with whom you feel you can be most yourself who understand, you understand your motivations and rooting you on it. I mean, that doesn't mean those people can't have real talk with you and that sometimes you, you might be annoying or dismissive or, you know, any of the things you already don't like about yourself, but you may be, and you want the people who can call you out on that stuff too.

But that in general, you want people with whom you feel you can show up as yourself. What I hear though, in this specific example that I'm now obsessed with of you and your dad, that there also is a, a misunderstanding of how self promotion. When you were doing something like writing a book or putting a product out into the world, isn't about being self-congratulatory, it's a part of the work it's part of what you have signed up for.

It is part of the commitment that you have made to your publisher. To your book, agent, to the [00:40:00] audience that you are trying to reach, like it is, it's great to, write a book really, you're, you're sharing a message and you are actively trying to get that message out to as many people as possible because you believe that it can change hearts, minds and lives.

And so I would have taken that so personally, like that is somewhere between the just like break down cry and like, you know, saying not nice words. But if I were in my most aligned rational space, I would hope that I could say I totally hear, , that, that you think it could affect my brother. I will be sure to check in with him more generally, but I would also hope that you can understand that this is a necessary component of my work, and this has, is more reflection on, on the work itself and what is necessary in order to get it done.

And it is on me.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, that's great.

Alicia Menendez: So entangled,

Jill Stoddard: they do well. And I think because I did have a strong, emotional response, I [00:41:00] shut down and I didn't say anything. And instead I wrote an article about it. It's like, I'm going to do what I do when I'm having a lot of feelings, I'm going to write about it, to manage my feelings, but I didn't address the problem.

, you know, the source of the problem. And, and I really should have, because. You know, I know we're still just talking about one person and it happens to be my dad, but I've also seen evidence where having those conversations is effective. So for example, he said to me, yeah, one point my dad is, um, is a Republican and I am not.

And he said to me, at one point, I guess the Obama's purchased a home in Hawaii and he said, how can Obama, how can Barack Obama, was that what he meant? How can Obama afford a \$15 million home in Hawaii Maui, wherever it was. And I said, well, dad, his wife, Michelle. Wrote the biggest selling memoir of all time and got a \$15 million advance.

So perhaps that's how the Obama family can afford a \$15 million home. [00:42:00] And he sort of was like, Oh right. Like you could see that it just never occurred to him. And then he did the exact same thing, talking about a friend of mine. How can he afford this house on a Lake? What does he do that he can afford it?

And I said, okay, Well, dad, his wife insert name here. I won't out them on the podcast, but you know, she does this and that and sold this patent. And so perhaps it has to do with her that they can afford that home. And I said, you know, dad, that's the second time you've done that. And, you know, he stopped and thought and he said, Oh my gosh, you're right.

And I'm like, like, see how insidious these biases are, that you just automatically go to the assumption that a person can afford a home based on the male. And he really got it. You know, he really got it. And so I do think, you know, it's not our job as women to educate every other male and female, you know, all of the other people out there about.

These biases, but when we have the opportunity to call someone in and talk [00:43:00] about it, I do think it's important to do that,

even though it's not easy.

Alicia Menendez: Your dad would get a lot of airtime today. Hope he likes this podcast.

Jill Stoddard: I know he did. I don't, well, you know, my, my family doesn't tend to read what I write or listen to my podcasts,

Alicia Menendez: phenomenal.

Yes. I don't want to hyper focus, but it's also so funny. It's like, okay, so. I'm not going to share my accomplishment and that's gonna make everyone else feel better. How so now it's like, now we've just stymied everyone. Like now, like it's not like, there's like, someone's now winning.

Jill Stoddard: Right? Right. No, one's winning.

Yeah. I had this other, I don't, this is what just popped in my head. I don't know if it's related to what we were just saying, but, , I had this other sort of aha moment after I read the book and specifically the Goldilocks conundrum, , Where I grew up where my mom and I had this complicated relationship and she would be critical of my weight when my weight was too high.

Right. But then I would [00:44:00] lose weight and she would feel very threatened by that. Right. So I spent all this time trying to find that perfect box where I was neither too hot, nor

too cold, but I was just right. And I never got there, no amount of therapy or trying. I never got there. And my mom passed away a few years ago before I read the book, but I read this book.

And had this aha moment. And it actually allowed me to like really forgive her because what it made me realize, it's like, Oh my God, like this, wasn't just her being. She wasn't trying to be mean, or like being a bad mom. Like she was raised in a culture where this Goldilocks conundrum plays out for women all the time.

And I think this is a way that like she too internalized these biases and then put them on me and just having that realization, like really allowed me to let go of a big piece of that.

Alicia Menendez: Thank you. Thank you. I feel like [00:45:00] sometimes when you're writing a book, you feel like you're screaming into a void and you hope that somebody hears it on their side.

So I'm, I'm glad that it made that connection for you. And one of the things, there are few things that I regret just not interrogating more. One of them was weight, um, or just body image. Um, the other one was age, but I didn't really think enough about. Ageism. I think in part, because the older women I was talking to had, you know, were successful, that was why I was talking to them.

And so they were seeing age, the same lens as someone who might be in middle management or, you know, , might be contending with in different ways. To your point about weight? I remember I have oscillated in my weight, my entire life, and I was at my grandmother's funeral, sort of on the receiving line 10 years ago.

And it was a parade of people who. It felt like every other person is like, you've lost weight, you've gained weight, you've lost weight, you gained weight. And in some ways I [00:46:00] felt very empowered and, and had so much clarity on them. It was like, okay, this is also a subjective thing. Like how, how, how you are seeing or responding to my body has actually so much more to do with you.

Then it has to do with me because I'm standing here and I'm, I am the same way, moment to moment in which we were having this conversation. And yet I was told that I was both too, too thin and had like thickened up in the same . And that is where I think it is also the same, which is like, you're so often dealing with other people's perceptions and where it becomes a challenge is when it changes your perception of yourself.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, totally. And just, I mean, an added layer to that is like, why do people think that they can comment on women's bodies? And I guarantee whatever men were standing in that line, were probably not having comments made about their weight or shape or size or facial [00:47:00] expression, or, you know, one of the other things that as I was reading the book and going, Oh my gosh, like this and this and this, and all these things that have happened is, , I think my first really.

Obvious memory of this was in graduate school. When I got yelled at for laughing too loud. And then within a few days, the same person told me I needed to smile more. And it almost

feels like gaslighting. I mean, it is that Goldilocks like too hot, too cold. Like there's nowhere I can be. There's nothing I can, the way I look the way I speak, the way I emote.

Like there's no just right.

Alicia Menendez: And it has become even more complicated because. While you are a public person. I am a public person. Like if you have a Twitter account, you're a public person, though. If you have a public facing Instagram account, you are a public person now where there is just more feedback.

And so it's not like you just have this universe of your nuclear family, [00:48:00] maybe a few neighbors, maybe a few friends. And those are the people that you are wondering, you know, what did they think of this lipstick or whatever it's like now there is just this expansive universe of maybe Russian bots, maybe real people

Jill Stoddard: who.

Alicia Menendez: Who want to weigh in, and then it's like, then you are in a real fun house where you're dealing with the opinions of people you don't know may never meet and who, who will never meet you. Like I'm having the loveliest time. I'm Jill. We could meet in person and not, and this just could not be a thing. You know what I mean?

Like I, or I could, I could sit down. Yeah. Cause I'm now going to buy the book on it on women and anxiety. And I could read it. And like that's, if I had only known that piece of you. I would have an incomplete picture and it is so easy now to have an incomplete picture of someone based on limited interactions or limited exposure, and to have the misperception that you have the full picture.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. That's

Alicia Menendez: I follow her on Instagram. [00:49:00] I know her.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah.

Alicia Menendez: I didn't, I didn't post anything from my second pregnancy on Instagram because I was in the middle of trying to get a job. So I kept it all off of social media and then sort of had a picture of me and my baby in the hospital bed. And people were like, what?

Like,

Jill Stoddard: like

Alicia Menendez: not about like, they didn't care about me. It was like, how well, like how, how could I not know this? I

Jill Stoddard: probably would not told me, like, I feel entitled that you as a public person should have shared this with me. And how sad that you felt. You couldn't if you wanted to, because women are discriminated against for being mothers.

And

Alicia Menendez: at some point it became like, An element of performance art to move. Just like none of this is real. None of this is the complete picture. Like everybody is, is doing some form of editing. Like it doesn't have to be a literal filter or a literal edit. It's like you are picking and choosing which moments of your life you share that is editing.

and we're comparing [00:50:00] ourselves to others based on those ads. That's

Jill Stoddard: right. The highlight reel. truth. That's not really what people want to see. Like yes, of course there are those trolls out there that are just dying to throw insults your way. But for like the rest of the just good hearted people at their, you know, I recently posted on Instagram, some of my bad reviews for my book and which felt really vulnerable and like, Oh God, what am I doing?

, And of course there were lots of people who responded to that as like, Oh my God, thank you. You know, there's something about that. Like, Hey, look, here, I am a real flawed human being who has struggles and et cetera. And that means where the same, right. That common humanity, that like we are all human beings who are.

Struggling and trying to manage during these crazy times. And no one's highlight reel is genuinely the real picture and the thing that makes us feel connected to one another is that struggle that we all share those imperfections.

[00:51:00] **Alicia Menendez:** I got a, I was reading a bad review the other day.

That was just very fair, where it was basically like this, this book was fine. It just didn't do anything for me. And I was surprised to see all of the really good reviews and you almost going write back to like, I'm so sorry. It didn't land. Like I wish I could send you a refund. Cause it just seems like this just wasn't a fit and they feel bad about that.

But I went down a deep dark hole and so in order to pull myself out of it, I started reading bad reviews of books. I loved. To remind myself that it was subjective. And my favorite one that I found

Jill Stoddard: amazing book

Alicia Menendez: where the review was like, this book came to me three days late and the cover was dirty. And I was like, Oh, that's right.

This person's reviewing it as a product. Like they're not assessing it as Alicia, the person or Jill, the person feels that way. But it's like, she was actually more concerned with like the binding of the right. Right. Was with the agencies and that somehow that just like [00:52:00] lit me up.

Jill Stoddard: Liberates you. Yeah. Well speaking a little bit of motherhood and hard times.

I know we're about to run out of time here, but I did want to take a few minutes to talk about how. Some of these gender issues and biases are playing out either the same or differently in this, you know, crazy new context. We're all living in,

what are your thoughts?

Alicia Menendez: , I am going to give the necessary disclaimer, which is. There, there are a lot of families and a lot of mothers right now who are out of work. And so they are worrying about how to keep their family safe from a raging virus and how they're going to put food on the table. And that is a failure of leadership and government that has to be reckoned with.

And then there are the women like you and me who are lucky and have jobs that have continued to pay us. And we also have kids at home. So that is like to me, like a. A secondary [00:53:00] reality. Um, there's all of the obvious stuff too obvious to me around the fact that we've now had to be much more transparent about our time and putting boundaries and limits on our times in both directions.

So this is where the personal and the, and the professional. Crash once again, which as you both with your partner, if you have a partner with your children need to be like, these are the hours where mommy works and where there cannot be interruptions and. And you have to do it at work too, where you say I'm, I'm available during these windows by phone I'm available during these ones.

It goes by email. If you need me to finish that, it will be done tonight, but there are just some realities of confines on my time that I can no longer mask because I no longer have the type of childcare that would allow me to do that. But I think there is a more, amorphous thing that I would love to talk about with you because you seem so, um, uniquely qualified to talk about it, [00:54:00] which is, and the ambivalence around ambition and then a lack of clarity around how appropriate it is to be ambitious in this moment.

where it just becomes a tax on the self, right. On an old way of operating . Right. I'm a, I'm a mega ambitious person. I don't know how much sense it makes to. Be ambitious. And to set the bar there in this moment, it feels like a thing that is deeply unkind to myself to trying to do all the things I was doing before and clear all of those accomplishments on the flip.

It also feels like it would be unkind to myself. Not to be striving because otherwise, I mean, you know, I think we went into this thought, well, maybe if they do all the right things, that'll be a few weeks, then a few months. Now you have Google saying people aren't going to return to work until June, 2021.

So as we really settle into the reality of how long this is going to be, and it also doesn't seem feasible to put all of these [00:55:00] ambitions and dreams on the back burner. And so I feel like I personally have like, like a low grade malaise. And also, , a different anxiety than my day to day anxiety, which is just like, I can't quite land on the answer.

Jill Stoddard: I know exactly what you're talking about and what I find myself wondering is if part of this is that it's become more difficult to. Compartmentalize the part of us that is a parent and the part of us that is a professional. , and of course these things, aren't compartmentalized. We are both of these things at all times, but under normal circumstances, we are at work and we are doing work and we are working and then we stop working and we are.

Parents. And right now we're all the things all the time. And one of the things I've noticed just in my small circle of women, I know is many times ambitious go getting women are working less [00:56:00] cutting hours, taking a complete break from work and are very, um, you know, they're, they're ambivalent about it.

They're like, I just, what you're saying, like, I want to keep working and being ambitious and doing these things. And I need to be a good mom and I can't figure out how to do both of those things. So I can't not choose my kids. And what I think is the most glaring issue inside of that is like, if you're a single parent, this is a completely different conversation.

But assuming that this child has a, another parent in the mix, where is that person? You know, a colleague of mine recently chose to leave her job. And I know for a fact that if she worked in this job full time, she would make a very good amount of money. So which of the parents decides to stop working and stay with the kids, had nothing to do with finances.

And as far as I know, there was never any conversation that maybe. Dad would [00:57:00] be the one to stay home and be in charge while mom continued to ambitiously pursue her career. and I think that's that kind of cultural pieces, like, and we're all doing it. We're all colluding. There's just this sort of assumption that the onus is on the moms in these situations.

And partly as moms, because we want it to be in some ways, right? Like. It's re it's complicated. I don't know what the answer is, but I think that that's, that's part of what the challenge is.

Alicia Menendez: I'm shaking my head because it's just, it is wildly complicated and it, it is both. You run up against all of the cultural pieces you said, and then they're also individual choices. I think that there are, there are, there are a lot of women who want to do it. I also though have a friend who's very clear that she would prefer to work than to caretake for her children.

Just complete clarity around that. And her clarity actually held up to me a mirror where I had to contend with my own ambivalence, that I both really [00:58:00] love working. I love working. I also love being with my kids and that complicates the picture cause I do, I want to, I want to be in both places. I want to do both things.

but I want to do them well. And I had finally gotten to a place right here had, you know, like the tetris figured out so that the pieces. Fit as best as possible and still wacky in my house as, I mean, like I should pick up the zoom and show you the laundry bag that it's sitting on the floor. Like it's, it's messy, but it, it works.

And then it feels like this has all forced us to re establish it and not just the establish, the caretaking establish the routine, but establish those conversations around. Who's who works, whose time is valued. How is that time valued? Whose career is seen as the most important and it's and further complicated, cause it's not always tied to who makes the most income, right?

Not just that neat. That's what you're raising is that it's not someone said, okay, well, you know, you make \$20 and I make \$10. So clearly the person who makes \$20 should be the [00:59:00] one who goes and works. It's like, there is an ephemera around it that isn't sometimes not

Jill Stoddard: spoken about. Yeah. Yeah. And I, and I think the other kind of ambivalence piece of like, I love working and I love being with my kids is at least for me, it used to be the case that I would be working during the day.

And I would go pick my kids up at kid's care. And they had so much fun in their afterschool program that they would see me and be like, Aw, what are you doing here?

Best feeling in the world

Alicia Menendez: for me personally.

Jill Stoddard: Best feeling because it, it allays that mom guilt immediately, like, Oh, they're having way more fun here than they would at home.

So it's all good. Now there's none of that. They're on screens way more than they should be, because what other option is there? Especially if you have kids who are too young to be like out running around the neighborhood on their own, but now it's constantly coming in saying, mommy, will you play a game with me?

And having to say no, so incredibly painful and having to find a way, like, how can I do my job [01:00:00] and stuff? Yes. As much as possible. , and I think all of that, just the emotion yeah. Comes with that is as part of what has made it. you know, it's, it's not as easy, easy to accept and let go as it, as it was before I think before we were all home together all the time.

I will say one of the, um, it's been a few years, but I have worked very hard at, having an. Equal distribution of labor in my home. And that was absolutely not the case initially. And that has helped. So yeah, much to have a partner who does dishes and does laundry. And you know that if I'm here recording and he's out there, I know that the kids will go to him.

It makes, I mean, I was. Drowning at one point, you know, I'm somebody who can juggle a hell of a lot of balls. I even joke, like even if the balls are on fire, but I got to the point where they came crashing down. Um, and you know, I had to like, [01:01:00] Beg my partner to get on board with this. And it took a lot of really difficult and emotional conversations, but we did get there.

And, and I think, you know, I'm bringing this up now because I know there are a lot of other women who struggle with this. And I think the key is you can't give up. Like it's so tempting when things feel too big. Like we were talking about before to just stick your head back in the sand and just go about your regular life.

, But if you're willing to keep having these painful conversations, like I

Alicia Menendez: I can hear your kids, they gave you til 1:31.

I love it. Where you were going with that though, which is you do have, like, I had the same moment where it's like, step back, look at this, like do design thinking, like what, what is.

Understand the problem come up with every possible solution that it's like, I was getting so trapped in a binary of like my choices to work or to not to work or my choices to like wake up early and do my work or not. And it's like, no, like come up. But there are [01:02:00] there, it should not to be on women individually to have to figure out these solutions.

But since we are here and that is where we often find ourselves, it is. It is worth the time and effort to understand at least what, what can change.

Jill Stoddard: Right. I think it's not, it can't be the only solution, but it must be part of the solution, right? Yeah. Okay. Um, well, yeah,

Alicia Menendez: I know mom. I'm so good.

Jill Stoddard: It's the kids apparently have been watching the clock.

So we will go ahead and wrap up there. So, , thank you Alicia so much for spending the time. This was such a meaningful conversation for me, and I really appreciate it. I

Alicia Menendez: appreciate you. Thank you, Jill.

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