Transcript of today's podcast

Your ancestors' trauma doesn't have to be yours; how to heal and grow (#93)

Interview with Jasmin Joseph

Jean Latting 0:11

Hello, everybody. I'm excited to introduce Jasmin Joseph to you. Jasmin is a writer and researcher from Yonkers, New York. I ran across an article she wrote on intergenerational trauma and was immediately taken by what she had to say.

As you know, intergenerational trauma is what happens when trauma that's experienced by people in one generation gets passed down to their children and their children's children.

In this article, she talked about how she suddenly realized that she, too, was a product of intergenerational trauma, and decided to seek therapy because of it. I know so many people who could benefit from therapy or coaching, and yet won't seek it out.

What was it about Jasmin that got her past feeling stuck? I wanted to know more and invited her to the podcast. She accepted, and here is Jasmin.

Jean Latting 1:23

Hello, everybody. I am totally thrilled to bring to you Jasmin Joseph. Now I want you all to check her out. She has two descriptors of who she is. Her fancy one on LinkedIn, her professional one I should say, on LinkedIn, is that she's a writer and researcher. She's written in *Teen Vogue, Republic Journal,* and *YES! Magazine*, which is how I found her.

She describes herself as a Black American woman of African, Native American, and European descent; not many Black people will list all three of these ancestral lines as part of who they are. She also describes herself on her personal page as a 20-something mover, writer, tinkerer, explorer, and lover.

I brought her here because I was fascinated by this article she wrote in *YES! Magazine*. And I will say more about that after the interview gets started. But first, welcome Jasmin.

Jasmin Joseph 2:38

Thank you so much, Dr. Jean, for having me.

Jean Latting 2:43

Just totally delighted to do that. So, tell me…two things attracted me. First is mover shaker, 20-something, tinkerer, explorer, lover. Just give us an overview of how you came to be all of that and what that means in your everyday life.

Jasmin Joseph 3:06

I usually don't even really remember when I wrote that; I think because I needed a bio for the website. And everyone was like write a bio, write a bio, write a bio. But I just didn't like the bio just being a list of my accomplishments only. like, "Oh, I went to this school. I published in this place."

I wanted to describe me, as a person, who I am more than what I've done, so I came up with those words. Literally just thinking about what are the things I like to do? I like to tinker with ideas, explore places, love people, and I feel like that's the origin of all of my work anyway.

I think that's why I love that bio for myself. And I also don't want to say how old I am, or I didn't want to say how old I was at the time, even though I was 23 when I wrote it.

Jean Latting 3:59

Okay, cool. And you dance, you write, you paint, you draw?

Jasmin Joseph 4:07

I don't paint that often, sometimes. But I'm mostly a writer, I danced in college. I was a researcher. That's probably my main skill that I've used to get jobs.

But I've worked in different industries, political polling, banking. And all of my work I feel like is just trying to better connect with and understand people. So now I work in entertainment and then I moonlight as a writer/producer.

Jean Latting 4:38

How did you get interested in intergenerational trauma?

Jasmin Joseph 4:46

I have it, first of all, so that was probably my original interest. Part of actually the way that I am: a little anxious or the way that anxiety manifests in my life is a desire to get information, which is again also why I'm a researcher. Because whenever I think of something or something gets in my mind to anesthetize my fear, I try to learn as much about it as possible.

When I was advised, I wrote an article to go seek out a psychiatrist. It made me obsessively want to understand what he was accusing me of being wrong with me.

So, I started looking into anxiety, like physical manifestations of anxiety, what causes anxiety, and that came to be the arrow that everything was pointing to when I was like, why do I have this? What is wrong with me, etc. It was more like this directional pointing to there are other reasons why mental illness manifests in ways that it does.

Jean Latting 6:00

Wow. Okay, well, there's a lot to unpack here. So first, I just want to comment, a friend of mine told me once that whenever I want to get control of anxiety, I go about understanding it.

And I always say, I have the best profession in the world because I was an academic and a social worker. Any problem I want to learn about, I could do it in the name of social work, and I could go to the library, I could look it up, and then I could write about it. It's always fun to meet a kindred soul in that.

Jasmin Joseph 6:40

Of course.

Jean Latting 6:41

What you alluded to, something is wrong with me, something is wrong with me. I found you through this article you wrote in YES! Magazine on healing generational trauma, and you wrote this very provocative sentence, "My own mental health journey began with destigmatizing mental illness and eventually transformed into an acceptance of mental health care as an inextricable part of holistic wellness."

Who told you, you had a mental illness? And how did you go from mental illness to destigmatizing mental illness?

Jasmin Joseph 7:28

The first person that might have suggested it was, it was actually an ob-gyn. I had to go to him for a checkup treatment after I had gone on vacation, and I was so nervous about this appointment. I was just so nervous, I don't think I told my mom I was going, and I was just like, "Oh, my God, I'm freaking out." So, you know how they check your vitals when you go to the doctor, they do your blood pressure, whatever. And my heart rate was incredibly high, like, my heart was beating out of my chest.

And then obviously, the nurse wrote it down. The doctor looked at it, and asked, "Oh, do you have high blood pressure?" And I said, "Oh, no, I don't think so." And he said, "Oh, because your heart rate is so high."

And I was like, "No, sorry. I'm just nervous. This just happens to me." And he said, "You should see someone about that, if this happens to you a lot that's not good." And no one had ever brought it up, I guess, because I had never…I don't have general white coat anxiety, they call it when you're nervous to see the doctor.

Jean Latting 8:42

I was just thinking that.

Jasmin Joseph 8:43

Yeah, no. It had never come up before, but I was just so nervous about this particular appointment that it manifested in a way that I get when I get nervous. It was the first time anyone had basically seen it, because I always would be so composed. And he was quite alarmed.

I later looked it up, like, the level of my diastolic pressure, whatever it was. And it was: there's a spectrum and here's a heart attack. It was crazy high, that's why he was so nervous. And that's why actually he suggested I go straight to a psychiatrist and not a therapist first, but I thought no, and I didn't even tell anyone, anything like that.

But then there was another incident that I had where I was getting that same feeling. And I was like, "Okay, I think I need to do something about this, if having this kind of reaction is not good for me."

Jean Latting 9:46

Can I ask you some personal questions here?

Jasmin Joseph 9:48

Oh, for sure. Yeah.

Jean Latting 9:51

Did you think of yourself as a generally nervous person, composed on the outside, nervous on the inside?

Jasmin Joseph 10:00

I didn't think of myself as a nervous person, because I think even in my family, the language is always, I was nervous, I got nervous. You're not yourself, unless you're a person that's having nervous breakdowns, as we call them. I never thought of that as a quality. So, I was oh, no, I get nervous, but I'm not a nervous person, you know?

Jean Latting 10:26

Okay, so you weren't labeling, as, so you thought getting nervous, it was something that happens to you?

Jasmin Joseph 10:34

Right.

Jean Latting 10:35

Okay. Were you depressed? Unhappy?

Jasmin Joseph 10:40

During the appointment, or in general?

Jean Latting 10:43

General.

Jasmin Joseph 10:44

No, I feel like I just didn't recognize it. Unless it was something very serious, I didn't recognize mental illness to be a condition. I recognized it as a temporary state. You can be depressed, you can be nervous, but that doesn't mean you're depressed, you're nervous.

And I think that's a common misconception a lot of people have is that if you're depressed, you'll always be depressed. Like you're a depressed person, you stay depressed.

Jean Latting 11:20

I have a friend, a couple of friends actually, who are clinically depressed. Something is wired in their brain.

Jasmin Joseph 11:30

Right.

Jean Latting 11:31

So, they have to work to get out of that state. You're saying that's not what's true for you? In terms of your general emotional tone at that time, would you describe yourself as just basically satisfied, basically happy?

Jasmin Joseph 11:49

I was, again, I was 23, working a job I didn't really like, so I wasn't satisfied. But I definitely would not have thought back on it, or I didn't feel in the moment that I was very depressed.

But I would be very triggered by certain situations. And that's when it would be like, "Oh, I feel depressed. I feel nervous right now." And that could last a couple hours, it could last weeks. And that's what I would witness in my family as well, people would have a bad time. And then it's like a few weeks, they're feeling extra angsty, kind of way.

We never really, I think it was so pervasive that we never really were like, "We're all depressed." We all just get depressed sometimes, that's normal.

Jean Latting 12:38

I get that.

It's like a friend of mine who grew up poor said that her family talked about being broke sometimes. And till she was grown, did she realize hey, we were poor.

Jasmin Joseph 12:51

Right. Exactly. It's the exact same thing where there's a pervasive state, you only recognize deviations from whatever you've decided is your baseline.

Jean Latting 13:03

Right. So, you were generally okay, as you defined yourself, you just knew you had these periods where you might go off your game and sink into whatever.

Jasmin Joseph 13:18

Right.

Jean Latting 13:19

Then do you mind saying, what happened that you were so nervous about this particular appointment?

Jasmin Joseph 13:27

Oh, yeah, no problem. Another thing I want to try to destigmatize. I was getting STI tests, I was nervous about that. And I had never gotten one before so, I was just kind of nervous about what those results could hold, and again, I was going in secret. So, even though I was by myself, I felt like I was keeping a secret from everyone when I went.

Jean Latting 14:02

Yeah, okay, so the secrecy compounded the nervousness is hard enough going for that test, right?

Jasmin Joseph 14:09

Right.

Jean Latting 14:10

And then there's the embarrassment there.

Jasmin Joseph 14:14

Right.

Jean Latting 14:15

Right. And now I have to keep it a secret. I can't tell my mom, I can't tell anybody.

Jasmin Joseph 14:20

Right.

Jean Latting 14:21

So, by the time you show up, you're fit to be tied.

Jasmin Joseph 14:24

Exactly. I was wound up when I arrived, clearly.

Jean Latting 14:31

I can get that. Okay, so then he says, check it out. Maybe you should see a psychiatrist. And your reaction is what? Me?

Jasmin Joseph 14:43

Yeah, I was like, "Mm, okay. No. I don't know what he's talking about." But I think what was important was that he planted this seed. This reaction isn't normal. You could live without this kind of reaction to things that upset you or make you a little bit uncertain.

So, then that was one. The next time I had one of those episodes, I was like, "Yeah, okay, if I could do without this, I would like to."

Jean Latting 15:16

Wow, that's what I was looking for. You were at a fork; some people would say that crazy doctor doesn't know what he's talking about. You said, "If I can live without this and do something about it, I will." What made you turn that way and not just dismiss it?

Jasmin Joseph 15:42

I don't know. I think also because I sort of recognized that it was holding me back a little. I typically, from up until that point, I always worked through that nervousness but it was always there. I would get stomachaches; my heart would beat very fast.

Pretty much any time I had to do almost anything, and it would range from small to when I was at the doctor that time where it's like, my heart's beating, loudly pounding out of my chest, like after you run or something.

The fact that he said that, I had never considered that it was abnormal, I think. And when he brought it to my attention after I was like, "Okay, if I could change this, I want to." Or, "I don't want to have to experience everything like this anymore."

The next time I had that sort of reaction, probably, again, related to dating, frankly, I was, "Okay, I'm going to try to find a therapist." Because I didn't really want to go to a psychiatrist. I still didn't really know what those were, I didn't know what they did. But I was, "Okay, I'll look for a therapist."

Jean Latting 16:59

I just find that so fascinating. One of the things that continues to puzzle me is that moment where people decide to change rather than stay stuck.

So many people say, those folks don't know what they're talking about. Nothing can be done about it. I'm doomed. This is…I can't…nothing. What made you willing to change to investigate? Tell me about your family. Tell me about your family growing up.

Jasmin Joseph 17:35

I had a great family, had a great childhood, with some natural bumps in the road, as we all have, for the most part. But both my parents are African American, my dad is African American/Caribbean American. They were from the Island of St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands. And my grandma was from the South, and she met my grandpa after having moved north to New York.

So, I think my grandma had a very upwardly mobile kind of worldview in terms of, I'm going to go to school, I'm going to make my own money, that kind of thing. And I also find, that's probably why she linked up with my grandfather, because his family was a little bit more established, middle class, I don't think they had the experience of slavery in the US, they had it in the Caribbean.

So, they were like the middle class -- or that sort of Black emerging middle class -- for a long time before a lot of Black Americans were able to reach that level.

And my mom's family was not the same, they were umpteenth generation Americans in the South, out of slavery. She was the first generation that was out of the South, she was born in the north.

And I think the combination of that just obviously, you can imagine, can manifest itself in many different ways, in terms of finances, gender, power, even intercultural clashes between the Black Americans versus the Black non-Americans.

So, all those things, as I got older, I learned more about them. And I was always interested because what are we? Everyone else is telling these colorful stories about where they're from, who they are. And my parents would be, "You're just Black. You're just Black."

I did find it to be the worst, most insufficient answer. “There's no stories? There's no nothing, just this?” And also, “Just slavery? That sucks.”

The more I learned about what else that contained, I saw how the experience of my grandfather dropping out of school and not learning how to read and what kind of pressure that put on my mom and her younger siblings.

What kind of pressure it was to be upwardly mobile in a world where there is a glass ceiling that was saying, we don't want Black people in here, we don't care what your qualifications are. And how frustrating that could be, how difficult that could be. What vices you turn to when your life is frustrating and how those vices impact your children.

And I think that's what really clicked for me when I was, “Oh, this didn't start with me. This isn’t all my fault or all their fault.”

Jean Latting 21:00

Whoa. So, you put it together in a flash?

Jasmin Joseph 21:05

Yeah, like a galaxy brain moment. I think I was looking for someone to blame. And then, “Oh, no one's to blame.” And I think that's what I was afraid of, if I did this, everyone would start blaming one another.

Like, “We didn't do anything that you should feel like this. We did everything so you don't have to feel like this.” Or, “I felt like this and I made sure that you didn't feel like this. So, I did all this stuff. So how can you even say that you're feeling like something's lacking, like you have a reason to be depressed?”

I think when I took that perspective, it was, this is the perspective that I can get people on board with this. “It's not your fault” Is the bottom line.

Jean Latting 21:50

We didn't do it to ourselves.

Jasmin Joseph 21:53

Right. You didn't do it to yourself. You didn't do it to me. Someone didn't do it to you, someone didn't do it to them. Forwarding blame, in this case, is very useful.

Jean Latting 22:07

Whoa, this is the first time I've heard someone break it down that way. Usually people talk about generational trauma as something that they have to suffer through and their ancestors suffered through. And this is just sort of my fate, it's something that’s smeared over me and nothing can happen. And you took the opposite. You said, “Hey, we get a pass.”

Jasmin Joseph 22:34

Yeah.

Jean Latting 22:35

We get a free pass.

Jasmin Joseph 22:36

Right. And I think you get a pass and also I think just not taking that view that it's nihilistic almost, very nihilistic, like it's impossible. This is the hand of cards we were dealt so we just have to deal with it. And I think it helped me to take this power over the situation where this idea there's trauma, but there's also survival. All these people, all these people endured this and I'm still here, so that's there too, you know?

Jean Latting 23:16

So sometimes I think when I feel sorry for myself and think, "Oh, I have so many issues," I think, "Mm, I wasn't run out of town by the KKK, like one of my ancestors." I shut up and stop complaining and do what I have to do.

Jasmin Joseph 23:36

Exactly. Exactly.

Jean Latting 23:38

Okay. Let me recap what you've said. And you tell me what I'm missing.

Jasmin Joseph 23:43

Okay.

Jean Latting 23:45

You grew up with half Caribbean, half Black south.

Jasmin Joseph 23:50

Mm-hmm.

Jean Latting 23:52

And those are two different cultures for those who don't understand that because one, as you've said, is descended from the slaves, an artifact of the slave society. And the other, most Caribbeans were poor and certainly subject to colonialism but were free. So, were your Caribbean parents free, they were not enslaved?

Jasmin Joseph 24:20

My grandparents, I think, were enslaved in the Caribbean. They were never enslaved in the US, was a difference. I don't think they were enslaved in the US.

Jean Latting 24:30

Describe the difference between Caribbean slavery and South, like Southern slavery as you understand it.

Jasmin Joseph 24:40

I would say that there probably isn't that big a difference other than location wise, but I think the fact that they didn't have the experiences in the US and that they came being able to be separate from that

experience, or separate from having been in the US pre-slavery, post-slavery reconstruction, there's just sort of…how would I say it?

I think there's a difference in approach because they don't have, or occasionally they might not have that nihilistic worldview that might come as a result of having seen slavery, endured it, survived it. and emerged from it. Like a greater sense of possibility if you were able to be mobile to come to America, rather than be forced to America.

Jean Latting 25:33

So, you're saying the immigrant experience is what differentiates it.

Jasmin Joseph 25:38

Yeah.

Jean Latting 25:39

Both sets were enslaved but one had the opportunity to come into the land of the free even if it wasn't free?

Jasmin Joseph 25:50

Right.

Jean Latting 25:52

They still had the immigrant experience.

Jasmin Joseph 25:54

Right. Yeah. And they were more connected to that experience, I would say.

Jean Latting 26:00

Uh, huh. Because I know that there are a lot of stats that show that people who come from the Caribbean here, they do better economically, educationally. They thrive more than those who've been here forever.

Jasmin Joseph 26:15

Right.

Jean Latting 26:16

Who generation after generation start to lose hope. So that's what you're talking about. Is that right?

Jasmin Joseph 26:24

Correct. Yes, exactly.

Jean Latting 26:26

Okay, so you grew up with that, you grew up in an upwardly mobile family, even if they didn't have what they wanted their aspirations were upwardly mobile.

Jasmin Joseph 26:40

Correct.

Jean Latting 26:43

And so, you grew up believing I can do more. I can achieve more.

Jasmin Joseph 26:50

I would say that's accurate.

Jean Latting 26:53

Okay, so now here comes this doctor, telling you something's wrong with you.

Jasmin Joseph 27:00

Right.

Jean Latting 27:01

And you have all of that to fall back on. The history of a family that believes you can do something about your circumstances. And then you have this creative power to turn a lemon into lemonade.

Jasmin Joseph 27:19

Exactly.

Jean Latting 27:20

So that you go and investigate generational trauma and say, “Oh, this is bad. But this is also good.”

Jasmin Joseph 27:31

Right.

Jean Latting 27:34

I love it.

Jasmin Joseph 27:36

I solved my problem indirectly.

Jean Latting 27:39

I love it. Okay, we got there. So now here's the next step, realizing I need help, and getting off my you-know-what. To make that phone call, to do the investigation, to learn. Tell us about that journey. Because a lot of people say, "Oh, one day, I'm going to do such and such."

Jasmin Joseph 28:07

Right. So, I just went online, and I searched Black woman therapist, because I know I want to talk to a Black woman, period. I can't see myself talking to anyone else.

So, then I found Therapy for Black Girls, the founder of which Dr. Joy I was able to talk to for the article. And they have a network of therapists; you can put in your location and they can find them near you. They have a picture, a bio.

People do a lot of research, they meet with a lot of different ones. But when I was in New York, I went to basically the first one I thought I looked like I might be able to connect with and I was with her for a year and a half.

And then I moved to California and did the same thing. And I found another Black woman therapist on that website that I connected with out here and I've been with her ever since.

And yeah, I feel like that's really the main way to do it, just research. The one thing was that I didn't use insurance. I feel like I approach it where I'm not going to concern myself with that until I get to that point.

Because a lot of times I noticed a lot of them had sliding scales. Some people were open about accepting insurance, some people were not. I never liked the insurance part because it's just such a landmine to navigate. I decided that I would try to find the one that I liked best and then try to stick with them in whatever way possible.

Jean Latting 29:39

Okay, so you say you've been with her ever since. How long ago was this?

Jasmin Joseph 29:44

I moved here in 2019. So, it's been three years that I've been meeting with this same therapist.

Jean Latting 29:49

And you're still seeing her?

Jasmin Joseph 29:51

Yes, I am. I still see her.

Jean Latting 29:53

Okay. We're going to get to generational trauma because that's what attracted me. But, again, you're doing a service for all the folks who have thought about therapy and haven't done it. So why did you stay so long? Just go with that.

Jasmin Joseph 30:11

That's a good question. A lot of people ask that. I think it's because there's a lot of different things. And therapy, I think more than solving specific problems helps you develop the strategies to deal with life.

Also, I have gone through a lot of change, like in those three times, I moved here, had a new job, quit a job, started dating this person, stopped dating the person. I feel like I've had a lot of constant change in my life anyway. So, there was always material for us to discuss together.

I think, definitely, depending on what your situation is, there's always a point where you can taper off, do monthly check-ins, and sometimes you might be in a crisis and need to meet every week. It's just a matter of what you think you need. But to me, it's just nice to have the space that I'm dedicated to being honest with myself and another person is there to give me objective feedback.

Jean Latting 31:21

Yes. Okay. For listeners, I'm going to distinguish between therapy and coach because people know I do leadership coaching. I'm going to tell my difference and then you tell me if you agree with that, if you see it differently.

Jasmin Joseph 31:32

Okay.

Jean Latting 31:33

The way I explain it is therapy is going back into your past and uncovering the stuck part there so that you can move forward.

Jasmin Joseph 31:42

Right.

Jean Latting 31:44

Coaching keeps a lean on the going forward, and you dip into the past as necessary to bring it up to help explain where you are now and what you need to be different to move forward.

Jasmin Joseph 32:00

Yeah. I would agree.

Jean Latting 32:05

Okay. I feel compelled to say it again. Therapy is about looking back to go forward. Coaching is about looking forward, dipping back when you need to. So, you said there was a lot of fertile ground to go back to and to bring out. Was it in therapy that you discovered generational trauma, or was it in your reading or some combination?

Jasmin Joseph 32:36

It was a combination. It was both therapy, reading, and also, slowly as I got older, my parents started to open up more to me about their history and stories from their life and experiences. And I think when you're my age, you're like a younger person, you're talking to your parents, and they tell you stuff in the age we grew up in, they tell a passing story. And it's like, "Yeah, that's horrible. I'm incredibly sorry that happened to you. If no one has said that, that shouldn't have happened. That wasn't normal. It's okay to be upset by that."

Which is what a lot of people haven't heard, which is why there's this belief where, this just happens, that's a part of life. And okay, but it doesn't have to be, it actually shouldn't be, we should very much work so that it's not a part of anyone's life anymore.

I think the combination of those things, and when I tried to unpack with my therapist, certain things she would basically help me connect these dots. Like, "Oh, if you know they had that experience, when you do blah, blah, blah. That's why they react, blah, blah, blah kind of way."

Jean Latting 33:55

Can you think of any concrete example to illustrate that?

Jasmin Joseph 34:00

Let me see. I mean, I can do an abstract one without exposing too much. I think one might be, for example, if a lot of people have left someone's lives, and either because they were moving, an experience of incarceration, so they felt like people often abandon them.

So, you're just trying to do something for yourself, you want to go on vacation, you want to study in a different country, you want to move, they take it as something personal, like you're choosing to leave them. And then they might not be supportive, you think that your parent isn't supportive, and that's how those things continue. And they're just reacting to an experience they had.

And the knowledge of that can help you reassure them: this is temporary, I'm not leaving because I want to get away from everyone. Or everything moves in cycles, this isn't permanent. Small things like that can change the way someone reacts to a stimulus or something that you're telling them.

And the ways that those interactions affect relationships are the things that create these sorts of tensions in our relationships with one another, especially within families, but also in all relationships.

Jean Latting 35:44

Okay, so let me translate and tell me if I got it. Let's imagine that someone in your previous generation -- parents, aunts, grandparents -- someone experienced the trauma of being separated from someone they loved.

Jasmin Joseph 36:05

Correct.

Jean Latting 36:06

Fast forward a generation and now here you are, and you want to go off and live your life and explore new things.

Jasmin Joseph 36:15

Correct.

Jean Latting 36:16

They still have the ungrieved loss. And so now you're leaving, they experience it as something personal, a personal hurt, because it's been unprocessed.

Jasmin Joseph 36:32

Right. Exactly.

Jean Latting 36:33

Is that the essence of what you're saying?

Jasmin Joseph 36:35

Exactly. Yeah.

Jean Latting 36:36

Okay. How does that, their history and their ungrieved loss, affect you and what do you have to do to be whole and healed?

Jasmin Joseph 36:50

Woo, big question that I'm still learning to answer every day. I think you have to recognize where that comes from, the reactions that they have, and try to address them head on. But at the same time, not let that stop you from living your life.

Which is very hard, especially for oldest daughters, and I think the immigrant experience across ethnicities is very similar to the Black experience in that sense. Where, people are afraid of things that they don't even consciously realize that they're afraid of.

So, it's manifesting and can be argumentative or unsupportive behaviors or aggressive behaviors. I think we need to be a little more understanding of one another, but again, still do what you want to do.

Jean Latting 37:59

Okay. Let me translate, and I'm doing this partially on my own experience. So, there's guilt.

Jasmin Joseph 38:05

There is, there's a lot of guilt.

Jean Latting 38:09

There is responsibility, there is the legacy that the family has instilled in us. And so, we have to confront that and try to learn to distinguish, when is what I'm doing healthy and when is what I'm doing escapism?

Jasmin Joseph 38:38

Yeah, that's totally accurate. That's almost too accurate.

Jean Latting 38:44

It's not unusual. It's not unusual. I still remember a woman in my class whose family came here from Venezuela, and she had been raised to follow in her mother's footsteps of being at home and raising children and catering to the men in her life, her brother and father's whims.

And now she's in graduate school of social work. She's at a college, which was where I was, and she's in a graduate school of social work, getting her master's. And she learns about feminism, she learns about

empowerment, and then she goes home, and her brother expects her to wait on him, so she had to figure it out.

Jasmin Joseph 39:35

Yeah, that's another thing that is quite hard about this process is that there's a lot of jealousy too, when these curses are broken, because you think I suffered this way, you should suffer this way too.

Even myself, the generation beneath me, they have this type of freedom I didn't have when I was 14, they know about therapy when they're 10 or 12. So they can go into high school and have a much better experience than me.

And sometimes, I mean, obviously, I think everyone will feel that jealousy, but it's about you have to have, like you said, a forward-thinking view where this will be better for people after and I'm okay, if I have another life, I'll just make up for lost time in my next life.

Jean Latting 40:26

I want to show the chart that you developed that was in YES! Magazine.

Jasmin Joseph 40:33

I did not develop this. This was actually from a piece of research.

Jean Latting 40:36

Oh, okay. You did not develop it. Well, you can still talk us through it.

Jasmin Joseph 40:42

Correct.

Jean Latting 40:43

It's a great chart.

[insert chart]

Jasmin Joseph 40:44

Yes. So, this graph, I loved this chart, I loved this research. I'll start from the beginning. This chart was actually adapted from a psychology paper from 2014 by Kirmayer and others, and it's showing the transgenerational transmission of historical trauma.

In my essay, particularly, and also what we're talking about, is this idea of a historical trauma, meaning that something has happened on a population level to a group of people and that experience is what's being passed from generation to generation.

Historical trauma in this case was referring to Native Americans in the US. As a result of settler colonialism by Europeans, there was a loss of collective identity. There was a genocide, many people who spoke native languages were killed in this genocide, so some languages were totally lost because speakers were wiped out by sickness.

As a result, you can lose a whole generation of children either to mental illness, or mental illness that then escalates into suicide. And then the cultural implications -- of negative labeling and stereotyping their associations with these kinds of people -- limits your opportunities, limits economic opportunity.

And then how does that affect the family? There's grief, like you said, that goes unprocessed, there's anger at the world that is then shone onto the people that you have in your immediate area. So, men are angry, they cannot provide the way they think they're supposed to. Women are angry that they don't have the life they think they want for their children. And then as a result, it's family dysfunction, abuse, domestic violence.

And then how does this affect…these family dynamics affect the individual, individual people, individual children, all because of this one historical traumatic event? And then continuing to live through the impacts of this historical event, throughout those generations as well.

This also talks a little bit about epigenetic regulation, which -- not to get too into the science -- basically is about the expression of genes. Genes can be expressed in a different way and that way that they're expressed is passed on.

So that's what a lot of the newer research about the genetic implications of trauma have pointed to where it's not that the DNA itself has changed but something attaches itself to the DNA that changes the way that it's presented.

And in theory that can be reversed. But work has to be done on the part of the individual both spiritually or internally, often medically, with treatment.

Jean Latting 44:03

I want to tease out the epigenetic, because some people may not understand that. Let's take sickle cell. I know some teenagers whose mother homeschooled them, ground up the flour to make the bread. I mean, she just did. She was extremely holistic, they chose a community where sickle cell was not as problematic there.

And these kids have grown up getting ready to go to college with sickle cell anemia, the full-fledged disease, and they've never had a crisis. I think one had one crisis. But that's because the propensity to have it is there, the gene is there. But the expression of the gene, the epigenetic expression has not happened.

Jasmin Joseph 45:03

I actually don't think that applies to sickle cell.

Jean Latting 45:09

That's interesting.

Jasmin Joseph 45:10

Actually, I couldn't accurately say. I would have to look that up or ask a scientist, because I actually was thinking about including a bit on sickle cell, but that later was removed from the paper. But interesting that

you bring that up, because sickle cell basically is a genetic adaptation that is from Africa. So, it shapes your blood cells, so that you're less likely to contract malaria.

Obviously, when slaves were brought to the US, they had this trait and then they started eating a diet that didn't work well with that adaptation, for lack of a better word. So, you know, a diet that's heavy in fat is not good for people, or fat and butter is not good for people that have narrower blood vessels. And these narrow blood vessels are to help prevent diseases that one would get in Africa.

Now that people are moved here, and they have this adaptation that's misplaced now, it doesn't work anymore in the environment that they've been placed in. I think that's also why I was going to include that sickle cell was a unique case.

Similarly, with mental illness, it's like the paranoia of living under Reconstruction Era South, living with the KKK as an adult. And then moving to the north where that threat is no longer there, that paranoia, it probably just doesn't go away, because you moved to a better neighborhood, that kind of paranoia.

That is then translated into overprotectiveness, over-punishing your children, because you have this paranoia that used to exist of what would happen if you didn't discipline them, the world would discipline them, when that threat no longer exists.

I think that's a good way to look at how we can see these, how the impact of trauma even in a non-genetic way can continue.

Jean Latting 47:24

Let me distinguish what I meant by sickle cell, I meant having a physical crisis where you have to be hospitalized. As a genetic illness they still have the illness that didn't go away, but the expression of that illness through a sickle crisis that warrants hospitalization that's what was protected by nutrition, by health, by environment, by making sure that builds up the kids' immune system.

Jasmin Joseph 47:57

Right. Got it.

Jean Latting 48:00

Okay, I agree with you. What you said about the narrowing of the vessels was something I'd never heard about. And I'm very glad to hear that, that's very interesting to me. And what you're saying about the paranoia of growing up with the KKK, how that trauma can be passed down in terms of overprotectiveness.

Jasmin Joseph 48:25

Mm-hmm.

Jean Latting 48:26

Okay. Let's talk about that. The parent grows up under the KKK, as my parents did for an example. They end up being overprotective, or in my case, under-protective because my parents did not want me to grow up with fear so they flipped to this other end.

Now coming down to you, how does that overprotectiveness affect you, over or under, whichever way it went for you?

Jasmin Joseph 49:00

Right. I think for me, it would definitely be overprotectiveness, and how it looks is that let's say, I have an idea, like I said, I'm explorer type, tinkerer type, so I'm always trying to go places, do things.

And sometimes it feels, you know, I can feel unsupported. That's not because they don't support me or don't think that I can do whatever I want to do. It's just this sort of fear of what could happen if I'm going out and doing all these different things.

Jean Latting 49:40

Got it. That's cool. I'm glad you explained that.

Jasmin Joseph 49:45

Thank you for giving me the space to.

Jean Latting 49:49

Wrapping it up now. Thank you, this has been a great explanation. Is there one thing you want people of your generation to understand about generational trauma?

Jasmin Joseph 50:00

I would say that, even if you understand it, and recognize it, you don't have to be defined by it. And I don't think it should be a limiting thing or a way out of accountability for your actions, anything like that. And especially now that there's increasing cultural awareness of it, it's apparent in the media, it's a theme in the media.

So as a result, I think that working through it should be something that is, like you said, future oriented, like how can we make this world better for even the generations beyond the one that you might be closely connected to?

There was a Native American teaching of seventh generational thinking, or seven generations into the future. What would your life look like without this trauma? And I think that's what I thought of that one time, I was like, "What would my life look like without this? I want to look like that."

Jean Latting 51:05

Say that question again, I interrupted you and I want everybody to hear it. It's a great question. What would…?

Jasmin Joseph 51:10

What would my life look like without this trauma? And that's what I wanted to strive toward.

Jean Latting 51:21

Jasmin Joseph, thank you for a terrific interview.

Jasmin Joseph 51:26

Thank you so much for having me. I loved this conversation.

Jean Latting 51:30

I got the answer to my question. What was it about Jasmin that led her to seek therapeutic help, when she realized she could benefit from it, rather than deny it, or procrastinate, or just stay stuck?

Well, here's the answer. As she grew older, she heard stories from her family about what they went through, in the Caribbean Islands and the Black south. Even though her family experienced racial trauma, they didn't believe that was the way things should be. She explained that the stories she heard about what her family had to endure, which were horrible, yet they didn't think into learned helplessness, or think that nothing could ever change for them.

In her words, her family was upwardly mobile. They wanted better lives, and they wanted to be able to do something about it. In other words, she was the beneficiary of a family that didn't give up. I was so tickled to hear that the idea of racial trauma was actually a relief to her.

For her, it meant that her personal troubles were not her family's fault or her fault. No one in her family was to blame. Feeling off the hook and letting them off the hook was part of what she gained from therapy and her own research about it.

Instead of internalizing her upset-ness or what she called nervousness, she learned this was something put on her five generations past and she didn't have to get stuck in it, she could get out. This is what she did and continues to do in therapy.

She has the freedom to choose how she wants to be in the world. Helping people learn they have the freedom to choose how they want to be in the world is a passion of mine. Thanks to Jasmin for that insight and thanks to you for listening.

Jasmin Joseph is a writer, researcher, and aspiring producer based in Los Angeles originally from Yonkers, NY. Since entering the workforce at 14, she has served as a restaurant hostess, retail clerk, teacher's assistant, domestic cleaner, financial analyst, political pollster, hair & skin researcher, garnering skills in business strategy & operations, market research, communications, and people and product management.

She is a graduate of Georgetown University holding a double major in Marketing and Operations/Information Management. She is currently a staff member at the Producers Guild of America. Her work in Teen Vogue, The Republic Journal, ZORA, and other publications details the full breadth of her experience as a Black American woman of African, Native American, and European descent. She describes herself as a twenty-something, mover, writer, tinkerer, explorer, and lover. She can be reached at linkedin.com/in/jasmin-joseph-b4284683. Her personal website is jasminjoseph.com.