



Episode 19: Breaking Patterns: Spontaneity in Anti-Oppression with Dr. Leticia Nieto

Transcript *(lightly edited for readability)*

[00:00:00] Roxy Manning:

Welcome to Fierce Compassion, the podcast that explores the power of compassion in creating an antiracist society. I'm Roxy Manning.

[00:00:23] Sarah Peyton:

And I'm Sarah Peyton. We're the hosts of the Fierce Compassion podcast. In this episode of Fierce Compassion, we are honored to welcome Dr. Leticia Nieto, a psychotherapist, educator, and author of the book, [Beyond Inclusion, Beyond Empowerment: A Developmental Strategy to Liberate Everyone](#). Dr. Nieto's work has been instrumental in empowering individuals and communities who seek to understand and dismantle oppression with tools for deep, meaningful engagement.

[00:00:59] Roxy Manning:

In today's session, we'll learn how alive and inclusive Leticia's sense of self-compassion is, and we'll discover how psychodrama has the capacity to contribute to a systemic remedy for racism. And in this age of AI, we'll begin to talk about how fully human spontaneity is and its importance.

[00:01:20] Sarah Peyton:

We learn about privilege and oppression through the eyes of child, adult, and elder; a view that allows us to take a fresher look at the oppression of racism.

[00:01:31] Roxy Manning:

And we'll learn why Leticia believes spontaneity is one of the truly liberatory skills of awareness and how anger, when it's not fully liberated, can fry our bodies.

[00:01:43] Sarah Peyton:

Join us as we explore Leticia's vision of wholeness and new ways to invite communities and individuals to find their own paths to full participation in anti-oppression.

[00:02:06] Roxy Manning:

Welcome, Leticia. We are so delighted to have you here!

[00:02:10] Leticia Nieto:

Thank you for having me!

[00:02:12] Roxy Manning:

It's truly, as I mentioned, an honor for me because I've so admired your work for a long time. The podcast is called Fierce Compassion, and so there's a question that we ask every single guest, which is, how do you define self-compassion?

[00:02:25] Leticia Nieto:

Yeah, I heard you in my head asking me that question, and I think the way it lives for me is in how we think about what "I" or "me" or "self" is. If self is a very, you know, insular shape, then self-compassion has one kind of echo. But the way that I think I've tended to construct it culturally as well as in the end academically and in my work, clinically even, is that it really is a "we" question. It's a "we" sphere of self-compassion, in that anything I want to offer, I have to have it in order to offer it, anything that I do that impacts another will ultimately impact me, and that we're profoundly interdependent and interpenetrative. So self-compassion is basically just attunement and care and kindness moving in and out of the interactions and kind of starting from a baseline with oneself and with others of being to whatever extent okay with what is and not necessarily in a, in a striving mode; "I wish, you know, I were different" or "I wish you were different," but sort of an inquiry into, you know, what is the invitation of this moment? Whatever's going on with me... I had a teacher once say, "You know, consciousness wants to taste that through you." So whatever the experience is that I'm having, I can maybe find some degree of generosity to allow that experience and presence it. I don't always have to like it. I don't think I have to like myself in order to be self-compassionate. I think I can be, you know, I could be irritated with myself or disgruntled or, you know, impatient or whatever, but there is this frame inside of which that's happening. And that is a fundamental "yes," a fundamental, "I am with you, I am with me, I am with us." That's what I want. It doesn't mean I can always do it, but that's what I want.

[00:04:37] Roxy Manning:

I'm hearing that for you, self-compassion is this combination of, like you said, attunement and warmth and curiosity.

[00:04:44] Leticia Nieto:

Yeah.

[00:04:47] Roxy Manning:

And so, when you think about self-compassion, like, how has it shown up in your work and in your life?

[00:04:54] Leticia Nieto:

Yeah. So, I've been a clinician since 1981, I was a professor in a Master's in Counseling program for over 30 years, 33 years. And so, a lot of my work had that kind of reflective practice component of the person of the therapist. You know, who is this person that, offers to be with, to companion, to witness, and what do they have to be able to do in their own life, in their own field? So cultivating the space of deep acceptance and personal, cultural, humility. I don't know everything. I especially don't know how someone else is experiencing what they're experiencing. So, if I'm going to offer kind of a high-grade quality of empathy, then again there's a belly to that, there's a density to

credibility with what I am extending when I say, "You are welcome here." And so in the clinical space with individuals, with families, with couples, and then in the training space around teaching content to do with social justice and equity and belonging, all of that I think has a very similar shape that it's a deep, deep welcome and an invitation, right? So I work a lot with how the tension of invitation as contrasted with anything that's like coercion. You know, even if it's for your own good - I don't really think we want to be coercive. And so that's, I think, another side or facet of compassion and self-compassion is to surrender, to lay down the sharp objects, the sharp tools for self-improvement or world improvement, and to pick up instead the materials and the practices that are softening so that, especially with regulated bodies, we are more receptive to the invitation to grow, as [Adrienne Maree Brown](#) says. So invitational, self-compassion is invitational.

[00:07:02] Sarah Peyton:

And you're talking about your work as a clinician; how did you become a clinician? What took you along this path?

[00:07:09] Leticia Nieto:

I became interested in psychodrama, which is a form of really world change at the individual, family, group, and universal level when I was about 13, and I didn't really know about psychotherapy or social work or anything like that. I was growing up in Puebla, Mexico. And, um, I was hearing about this, this theory and this practice; [Jacob Moreno](#) and his vision for a world in which everyone had the conditions to be able to be at choice and to access spontaneity. Somehow one of his books ended up in my hand and I don't think I understood it very well, but I certainly got the bug. And then when I was in college in the United States, I was inquiring about that and nobody knew what I was talking about at first. So it took a while for me to find people who were connected to this practice. Yeah, so I declared major in psychology and theater because I - to my great surprise, they didn't have a psychodrama major. And then, you know, between singing and theater work and psychology classes and service, psychodrama began to be more of a practice. And it took me a really long time to get certified; I just kept going to workshops and eventually became certified, and then certified as a trainer. So I'm, I'm really grateful to have, if you will, kind of a professional home in a way, in the psychodrama community, and those of us that think that it's about the action part; it's about enactment and action and embodiment more than it is about just, you know, talking, especially talking "about," right? There's this being and acting from and bringing change by practicing that change.

[00:09:00] Roxy Manning:

We're going to come back to a lot of what you just shared about psychodrama, but I noticed like, I'm thinking about our listeners and some of our listeners are really interested in how do we get, how do we get people fired up, right? How do we help people find their passion so that they can have the impact that they want to have on the world? So I'm thinking of this 13-year-old who's encountering psychodrama and I'm wondering like, what about it really resonated with you at that age? Do you have a sense?

[00:09:27] Leticia Nieto:

Yeah! I think a lot of it was the ideas. I don't remember which ideas came first or landed with me

first, but this concept that to be fully human was to be in a state of spontaneity, right? As contrasted with being more like a robot; being programmed and socialized and in a way not really alive, operating just in a kind of mechanics of expectations and definitions provided by the environment. That was very compelling to me. And I remember reading the words spontaneity training and thinking, "That's a totally bizarre combination of words!" To train to be more spontaneous, isn't that, kind of an oxymoron, right? But it's not, actually, because this idea of getting people fired-up, how it is that we become fired-up, fierce, warmed... and so psychodrama has a concept called "warm-up," which of course is not hard to understand. You know, warming up to a person, an event, a space, an idea - that we start, you know, not connected; "That doesn't have anything to do with me," you know, "What does justice - how does that relate to my daily life? How does countering anti-Blackness - where does that live in my kitchen?" You know, how do these things, work? Decolonizing, what is that? You know? So we warm up by having experiences that allow us to begin to feel that resonance and to start to see, "Oh yeah, that is *not* not about me. Somewhere, I am located in relationship to all of these dehumanizing structures." And so it's a similar idea that we warm up, usually through lived experience and through personal relationship, sometimes, like happened for me, through ideas, through the life of the mind, you know. I remember reading [bell hooks](#) talking about finding liberation in books and having important relationships with theorists and authors. And I think I had some of that. And then finally finding people, actual people, who cared about freedom, liberation and fullness of life and vitality and, and deep interconnectivity. Not just *that* we are interconnected, but *performing* that interconnectivity through warmth and love and care and change, liberation. So, it all kind of came together.

[00:11:57] Sarah Peyton:

Sometimes people think about spontaneity as kind of thoughtless or impulsive action. Well, what do you mean by spontaneity? It sounds very rich when you speak about it.

[00:12:08] Leticia Nieto:

Yes, it's one of the key concepts, right, for the psychodrama work. And it has an official definition, so I'll share that. And it is; a good enough response to a new problem or situation, or a new response to an old problem or situation. So it's about being able to meet the moment. Right? To have availability and flexibility to catch the wave. It's a kind of state, if you will, of adaptive, resonant, wise action. It connects to things like wise mind and regulated body and balance, but it's more about, if I think about a surfer, which I've never surfed, I have no idea, but that image of someone really being able to be one with the ocean in such a way that they know just when to... you know, and then how to find their relationship to that motion. It's sort of dancey like that. Uh, you know, we, we can't contrive it. We can't predict it. We can't for sure cannot force it, but we can create conditions where it's more likely. And so I'm thinking about impossible things, like two people that shouldn't be able to have a conversation they're so polarized. And yet, if conditions permit it, if conditions support it, they might find a way to have an exchange, a transcendent moment. And maybe it won't last, right? The wave is short, but that's, I think, how we do it. It's just, one after another of those moments, sort of moving in the right direction, that's how we bring change.

[00:13:52] Sarah Peyton:

So here we are talking about spontaneity. We've got a good definition of spontaneity. Now, here's the question. You've started to talk about this, but I'm so fascinated. What is the through line from spontaneity - the new response to something old, or the good enough response to something new - how does that help us break out of oppressive patterns? How does that contribute to social change? What's the line here?

[00:14:23] Leticia Nieto:

Yeah! No, that's great! I love the way you've put that! So, if we imagine that oppressive patterns are systemic structures that have been installed and that are in place and operate, not entirely autonomously, but appear to have a lot of potency and staying power - the tilts, you know, the unevennesses, the isms; ageism, ableism, all kinds of different dynamics that are working against people having their needs met in a very particular and repeated way, memetically replicating, so that they continue to work in an interpenetrating way, interwoven way. And while change happens, they also seem to adapt, like the isms seem to adapt and take new forms - as yet unimagined horrors, etc. So they have their patterns. And so whenever we are operating, either with consciousness of the pattern and ability to do something different, or we are doing something different, even if we don't know about the pattern, then I think what we're doing is we're softening and breaking apart what Moreno would have called conserved aspects of life. Conserved, like preserved, like in a jar. And so he had a model called the Canon of Creativity that said - basically it's a circle and you're going around and around warming up and building your spontaneity. And then at some point you have enough spontaneity that you shoot into the center of the circle and you have creativity. Right? So with enough spontaneity, something new is actually created. New, not ever existed before. And not long after that, that thing that's been created becomes conserved. It gets captured, you know. So an example is the Mona Lisa. Beautiful, gorgeous, not really still alive, but we don't want anything bad to happen to that painting, you know. It's a beautiful creation, but it isn't in the process of being created anymore. You know, the collapse of the wave function has happened. So there's this need for us to be co-creators of life, to be co-creators of society. And as long as we're just staying in those places, prefab lanes in those pre-programmed and socially defined roles, that are really narrow and flat, we're in the robotics of it. But when we're breaking out of that, then we can create new things. It's not so simple as just deciding, Oh, I think I'll be spontaneous and no longer allow sexism to affect me. It's not quite like that. It's more a journey of recognition. In my work, it's about sorting out the differential pathway towards spontaneity and creativity in areas where we carry social memberships of privilege and areas where we carry social memberships of disadvantage or marginalization. And so the work is different. It's not the same thing. It's not, we all just get free, you know? There is complexity to it and it requires careful and attuned co-creation of conditions for these more expanded skills and roles to emerge and then be practiced and then develop some solidity.

[00:17:45] Sarah Peyton:

Do you have any examples or stories that would help ground our listeners in the beautiful theoretics that we're swimming in?

[00:17:55] Leticia Nieto:

Yeah, so if we think about an area of privilege; so I could think of myself as an adult and as an adult, I can, especially because of the work I do, a lot of the work I do doesn't include children or adolescents. Yeah, every now and again, I have a family with kids, but teaching graduate school and doing a lot of training with organizations and such, for the most part, can fill my life if I choose with nothing but people like me in terms of age. And so, I can experience continuous days - hours, days, months - without any meaningful connection to children or adolescents. And so ageism is living in and through me without any effort at all. You know, I just - they don't even exist. And then there might be a reason why they begin to exist for me. Maybe, you know, someone in my life has a child and I am having more contact with them, or I get a family with kids and they're coming every week. Okay, now at least once a week I have that contact. And then what happens is that the uglier versions of how oppression is encoded in me will start to show up. Like I'm kind of irritated that I have that kid session today or, you know, I think of them as being really amazing. Uh, I call this distancing skills, right? They're either not in my field or I have some kind of devaluing of them or, you know, I love to help them, but I have a lot of distance between where I see myself, where I see them, or I have an appropriative, extractive orientation. And so that's different than they don't exist. It's better, but it's still incredibly robotic. And then I move into what I've called inclusion, in my work, which is I start to see them as actually a member of the human family. Of course, I'm the one determining that membership. *I've* decided, right? "Oh! Hey, congratulations! I now approve of you in such a way," and I can find common ground with you. All three of those skills, which I call indifference, distancing, and inclusion are oppressive skills, robotic skills, in-role skills. But then it shifts - it can, if conditions are good - into the skill of awareness, and that is the persistent realization that ageism is advantaging me every moment of the day and disadvantaging my kid client every moment of the day. Not through something I do or don't do; it is just a fact of the way things are set up. I have access where they don't. I get respect where they don't. I get to have way more self-determination. Things are set up and normed to my shape, not to theirs. And then when that becomes clear enough and sturdy enough, then I move into awareness plus action - which I termed "allyship," you know, 35 years ago or whatever. Now I maybe would call it something else, but I would call it action now, I think - and it's the idea of *awake* action. Oh! I can use my role as an adult to engage in effective action with people who are younger in the child and adolescent category, and I can also use it especially to work with other adults to support their evolution in the same way. So I just I used age, but you know, you could think about disability or national origin or sexual orientation or indigeneity or race. So in each area where there is advantage, we move through that process. But in areas where we have been assigned a membership that is devalued in the culture, we move through a very different dance. And so if I look at gender, I'll say that, you know, it starts out with the survival skill, which is; I will do anything just to kind of keep peace and have things be okay, which means that I'm going to try to pass, or masculinize in a certain way. I'm going to try to do things the way that environments tell me that I should be. So maybe I should be less emotional, whatever that means, and I need to speak in a way that cis men will experience as easy to understand. And I'm going to also be engaged in trying to soothe their nervous systems to create more safety. All of this is happening unconsciously. That includes dimensions of internalized sexism and horizontal sexism. Then I begin to maybe have disquiet if conditions are good - I might live my whole life doing nothing but being in service unconsciously to the

patriarchy. But if things shift for me, then I'll start to have a little, it's almost like that grain of sand that says, "Wait, wait, wait, is this, is this really okay? Is there something about this? Something's not quite right. I just got 'little lady'd' again. Is that - is there something I'm doing? Probably, right? There's probably something I'm doing. It must be my fault. You know, she asked for it." All the different ways that we construct sexism, misogyny as, you know, a problem of women, you know, rather than a problem of the patriarchy and the devaluing of the feminine and of women and non-binary people and trans people. So, that starts to kind of work with me, or work in me, and I will evolve the skill of confusion, which is the ability to be disoriented in the face of clear information but *on the way* to a kind of awakening. And so the third skill, empowerment, is the skill of the fog-lifting and rage-finding and voice-offering and saying "no more," and "this is not all right."

[00:23:26] Leticia Nieto:

And I can find others to join with who also resonate in that place. And this is a developmental emergence of voice and will and clarity about countering the dehumanizing shapes.

[00:23:41] Roxy Manning:

So before you talked about the three skills for the agent rank, that were the skills of the oppressed, and it sounds like you're also saying this kind of really active, you know, "I'm raging" skill for the target rank - is it also one of the skills still in that place of oppressed?

[00:23:57] Leticia Nieto:

It's the transitional skill. Like awareness is on the model for agent skills or skills for our privileged parts. So in the agent skills, we have indifference, distancing, and inclusion, which are conserved, robotic - things are not going to change, the status quo will be supported. And then the agent relative skills, or the truly liberatory skills, of awareness and allyship or action. And on the other side, for the target side, there are two skills in this case, rather than three, that are conserved, robotic skills, and that's survival, you know, "I will deny even that the oppression exists," etc.

[00:24:37] Leticia Nieto:

And confusion. So these are the two skills that we are permitted, if you will, as members of target groups. You get to be either in full adaptation and assimilation, or you can walk around confused and disoriented and figuring that it's you. Those are the two programmed skills. And then when we break through to the anti-oppressive skills, the first shape of that is this voiceful, fog-lifting clarity, which often is accompanied with anger at the realization of how pervasive, how dehumanizing, how violent - You know, we walk around collecting data and showing it to everybody; "Did you *know* the rate of *this* or *that*!?" because we're coming to consciousness about that and we *need* to have that be supported. And so that skill is not yet fully liberated. The anger holds us and rages through us, and so it kind of can fry our bodies. So in a way it's not yet, really - it's the beginning flavor of liberation, but the next flavor of liberation is a lot more yummy. And this is the one I was about to speak of; strategy skills, the ability to make choices, and not feel like I'm going to lose my clarity. This one I'm going to address. This one I'm not. This time I'm going to go to the wall. This time I'm going to write a letter. This one I'm simply going to journal about. This one I'm going to hand over to my friend, and say, "You deal with that one." Etc. So having the ability to stay connected to the reality of oppression and yet not define ourselves primarily as

having that as a problem that we need to fix, but rather begin to relativize it and see, okay, it's a problem in the culture, but I don't have time - and, you know, we hear this from different elders and leaders - we don't have time to wait till everybody wakes up to this reality. We're going to go ahead and build the world we want to build now. And so we begin to build liberatory spaces and liberatory relationships and ways of being, and anyone who wants to come with is welcome, but we are not focused primarily on daylighting or countering oppression, because it's become apparent to us and it's no longer useful just to name it. Now we want to build or find that alternate thing. So I think of it as a syntropic process. Contrasting it to entropy; entropy is the disorganizing tendency and syntropy is the rising relationship, right? So as the river of oppression is flowing, the reeds of liberation are ever stronger. And so it's not like a like-to-counter-like, but rather a realization that we are rising. We are always rising, and we are rising jointly, so we're shifting the culture from the bottom of the river. We're shifting the culture from the layers of the strata of interconnection. And so that's the strategy skill. And then finally the recentering skill is really characterized primarily by, *very* strong presence. So this is what you're doing, I think, in your podcast; you are bringing a quality of presence that is characterized by dignity, clarity, compassion, relationality, and actually a lot of peace. It's not very, "Arrrrgh!" Right? There's not necessarily a leading with complaint or rage, rather it's an invitation to come home to who we really are, which is vast and not flattened into a robot. And that's spontaneity too. That's to access multiple roles, to have our roles be vital and vibrant, and many! You know, to be able to be *anything* and *anyone* we want to be and that we need to be. Because in fact, and this is another important Moreno reframe, Moreno said, there's no self. The self comes out of the roles. And so if you're only permitted restricted roles, that is not allowing you to have selfhood.

[00:28:52] Roxy Manning:

One of the things that I find beautiful in this model that you're presenting is, at this liberatory stage, I am no longer centering this focus on oppression, right? It's almost like, yes, that exists, it's there, but I don't have to make that be the purpose of my life. And in building the structures that are actually working, like in Nonviolent Communication, the ones that are attending to true human needs, it's like, I'm attending to those oppressive structures without centering them. I'm actually centering what's real in the moment.

[00:29:22] Leticia Nieto:

Exactly. Yeah. I don't think of these as stages so much as I think of them as - I call them skill sets, and I call them holarchical instead of hierarchical skill sets. Sort of like a vocal range or a fountain, right? On any given day, of course you're going to catch me, right? If you spend the day with me, you're going to see evidence of the early skills. That will be there, but where we'll start to shift is an identification, as you were just saying, a centering of oppression as either the thing that I'm working to survive from, or the thing that I need to take on, and rather it becomes, okay, these are the conditions. It would be like if we were going to be against gravity! You know, good luck. We could stage all kinds of protests against gravity, but it's not going anywhere, at least in our understanding of our, of our lived experience. And I think similarly, supremacy, oppression isn't going anywhere, but we have a different relationship to it as we mature in these skill sets. We can relativize it significantly by engaging in ways that are more fresh, spontaneous. We don't have a

way to dismantle it fully, but we can create and pervade the field. More and more you see this, right? Environments that are centering kindness, care, relationality, depth of mutuality. So all of these things, the oppressive system doesn't want them, but also doesn't know what to do with them.

[00:31:03] Sarah Peyton:

It's so tantalizing. In terms of the work that you're doing, and yourself having some positions where you have privilege and some positions where you don't have privilege - you've been very clearly kind of giving us that picture - are there any other identities or places of privilege or no privilege that you'd like to name for yourself that have been important to you in the work that you do?

[00:31:31] Leticia Nieto:

Yes, I think that one of the elements, one of the shifts that has happened for me is thinking about coloniality, and having that morph for me over time. So I would say trauma and colonialism and thinking about post-traumatic stress and harm and generational impacts of colonial dehumanization and genocide. That concept, as I've also, you know, attempted to mature through these skills, has come into a new way when I think about indigeneity or being an immigrant or being queer... some of these elements have brought into focus something I've been terming "intactness." I don't know that's where I'm going to end, but intactness. And a friend of mine, [Scott Giacomucci](#), is now speaking a lot about "vicarious post-traumatic growth." Just let that sink in for a second. Vicarious post-traumatic growth. This is the kind of, you know, ingredient or spice that my nose goes, "Hmm? Where - what? What are we talking about? So, I mean, I understood trauma, right? I studied trauma, taught about trauma. I understand post-traumatic stress and post-traumatic harm. I understand post-traumatic growth. And that's where the intactness started to come through. And now, like, okay, and that's contagious too? Right? Wow. Right? So, I read [Resmaa Menakem](#)'s beautiful book, *My Grandmother's Hands*, where he really emerges, right, the impacts of historical and generational trauma and how racialized trauma shows up and lives in the body. But if you spend any time with him, what you get more is, well, then how come you are you? Because, you know, he's incredibly alive and sensitive and kind, passionate. And so, oh yeah, post-traumatic growth. And then all you have to do is hang out with any number of people we all, you know, adore here. It is quite contagious. I am stronger from sitting here with the two of you. So yeah, so intactness, reclamation. So one of the things I've heard myself say, and I don't know if I'm a little bit kind of trying to be clever or something, but I say, well, you know, the colonial project failed. It didn't achieve its ultimate end, if its ultimate end was the destruction and eradication. Of course, it *did* succeed at doing that in many places, in many ways, but *here we are*, though, right? Here we remain. And the ways that were prior to that harm in our personal lives, as well as our collective ancestral lives, those patterns, those memetics, also remain. I mean, I think queerness, if I take that one, is a liberatory invitation. It's a memetic that says that the gender binary and the sexual orientation binary are indeed quite false and that we are much more expansive in all of those ways, all of those core ways, and that pulse lives in me and it lives, I think, in everyone, but it is mine to transmit that pulse any way that it naturally happens. Similarly, I think, you know, in the United States, we see the highest values of the culture be expressed and lived out much more in

the margins than we do in the mainstream. And so if you really want to understand the lofty ideals of this country, go look at the immigrants and go look at the people who are experiencing disenfranchisement, because the survival strategies might be needed, but they are also intact. You know, there's much more collaboration and pooling of resources and adapting by seeing each other as family. So anyway, there's all of these ways that I think our target memberships of marginalization hold code for roles that are liberatory and ways of being that are liberatory. And yeah, I think, you know, sisterhood and especially sisterhood that is embracing of non-binary and trans folks and, you know, disability justice and the work that's being done around disability justice really unpacks, you know, something very rich and profound about what it is to be fully human and that it has nothing to do with being free of pain or disability. So it's this flipping, you know, of the script that, um, I own.

[00:36:35] Roxy Manning:

And even as I hear you describing - like disability justice has nothing to do with being free of disability, or queerness is really about expanding our understanding of what it means to be human - I see you doing what you talked about in terms of the centrality, right? So moving away from focusing on the definitions that the oppressive roles would try to have us center and instead thinking about what does it mean to be human? What does disability justice pull us towards? Like really this embracing all of the different ways we show up and can move through the world and interact with the world. And so I really get a sense of how your understanding of identity is liberatory, rather than a movement against, you know, "I'm being defined and I'm pushing away from that."

[00:37:20] Leticia Nieto:

Yeah, that's beautifully said. I don't think I've heard that quite like that. Thank you!

[00:37:24] Roxy Manning:

You're welcome! Ah, so I want to go back a little bit, then I want to keep talking about your model, right? You talked briefly about the agent rank and target rank, and I can imagine a lot of our listeners are going, "How do I know what rank I have? And, you know, how do I work with this?" And I'd love to hear you say a little bit about that.

[00:37:49] Leticia Nieto:

Yeah, so, so the model actually has three layers. At the core, if you think of maybe the seeds of the apple, is what I have called "power." And what I mean by that is more ultimate, but not power over, but source, truth, choice, will, interdependence, you know, the fact of our stardust nature. You know, those kind of things. That's what lives in the core. And so thinking about, in the center, that the seeds have the potency for orchard-ness, right? And then there's the meat of the apple, and I call that "rank," and those are the social assignments that carry differential valuing in the cultures. And so I have borrowed [Pamela Hays's](#) acronym of looking at ageism, ableism, religious oppression, racialization and racism, economic injustice, heterosexism and homophobia, anti-indigeneity and coloniality, anti-immigrant and nationalistic aspects, and then all forms of gender oppression. Not that that covers everything, but I just named off nine things, um, that I like to keep in my sphere. And I look at how these work together, you know. We used to think about

intersectionality as what are all the many ways that oppression can get you from all of these different angles and now we're thinking of it that way *and* we're thinking about this other thing which is; what are all the ways that *intactness* and *expansiveness* is coming through you. Yeah, so in terms of people working out a profile, thinking in those terms; my *assigned membership* that carries with it privilege, or my *assigned membership* that carries with it marginalization. It's a little different than thinking of it as an identity, because I think of identity as being our response to the assignment rather than the assignment itself. It's just splitting hairs, but I locate identity in the core where the seeds are and the assignments being, you know, something that we work with. It's kind of like some of the raw materials that we build our identity with or our roles. Um, and then the outer part of the, of the apple, the skin, the peel, um, I call that status play. And this is because I come out of theater and this is the observable... the observable play of being human or a fish or an amoeba or a whale, the moment-to-moment, up and down, yes and no, in or out-ness of moments. And so status play has a lot more flexibility. In other words, anyone can act terribly to another person, but as we deepen into the apple and the meat part of the apple - I like it for a couple of reasons, I'll tell you - in the rank layer, there are systemic structures; robotic, mechanical structures that don't have to do with just how people act, but they go to something more. So I'm just kind of trying to create a method to talk about three very different things. What happened? Who did what? Who said what? Who failed to do what? Now, how are the assignments that those people have assigned to them - how are those operating? That's where the skills process would come in. And then who is actually free from the robotics? Who in that story, in that scene, has access to skills beyond the double line in the model? So that would be awareness and allyship for privileged side and later parts of empowerment, uh, strategy and recentering for the target or marginalized part. Those folks, people who have access to that in that moment, they're accessing the core. Everyone else is working with whatever's been programmed and just supporting the status quo, sustaining and perpetuating the heavy, oppressive system. And then the outer layer is a little bit distracting because, if we get distracted by who's doing what, we could just end up trying to regulate behavior or legislate behavior; this word we use, this word we don't use; this action is good, this action is bad. But when we bring in the rank layer and we say, okay - you know, I give an example of someone pushes someone. Okay, we can all agree that pushing is not okay. Don't push people. Okay. But then if we look a little bit more and we examine that the one who is doing the pushing is carrying one or many marginalized assignments and their action is informed by both invisible and passive and active forms of dehumanization that finally reached a point where this person reacted. Now we have a little more to see. So in terms of that, the skill sets part you were asking about, I think I can simplify it. It has us, and I'm holding one hand with another hand, and we are just living out the programming of that, or we're in some kind of transition, or we're in relationship to that supremacy structure. So similarly, like when we're in it, we don't even know it's happening; we are completely unconscious. As we begin to differentiate from it - this is object relations, by the way - as we begin to differentiate from it, we're emerging from that context enough to know something isn't right, but we don't quite know what to do with it. And then when we finally achieve what is called an "object relationship" to the context of embeddedness we were in before, then we have choices that we can make, that we couldn't have made here or even here. And that, I mean, when we're in or when we're struggling to emerge. And this is really just the birth process, right? We're in the womb, we go through a vicissitude, challenging thing, and we

emerge, but we still, you know, have no sense of anything until we begin to have a relationship to that which brought us through. And then we go through that process over and over again through our lives. We are always going from one smaller container, the uterus, to then the mother, to then the family, to then the social culture, you know, et cetera. So the bowls change, but the practice of attachment and then differentiation and then integration or relationship, that dance repeats and repeats and repeats. I would just say, you know, in one moment sexism or classism or ageism or ableism might have me. Any given moment, I might be gripped by it. In another moment, you might see me struggling to get my bearings. And in another moment, you might see me elegant and liberatory. And *all* of that can happen within the space of, you know, an hour... or less!

[00:45:00] Sarah Peyton:

It's really inspiring to get to ride along in this because it's got so many elements that are similar to things that I work on and things that Roxy works on and, but it's looking through a slightly different lens! It's very... It's making my brain dance!

[00:45:18] Leticia Nieto:

Oh, good! Well, I was thinking about the hosting that you're doing. I think that liberatory contexts, liberatory environments, are ones that say you don't always have to be in your utmost cleanest, healthiest, most appropriate place of action and liberation. You can be all of the things, you know, but we are cultivating an invitation and providing an environment that will support you in going from being embedded to being free and being in relationship to. And that means that we're going to trade off who is in the grip. That's the phrase I use, you know, we'll be in a room together and you know, somebody does or says something that shocks us and instead of going, "*You just did an ism!*" we can go, "Oh wow, you're in the grip right now."

[00:46:16] Sarah Peyton:

Oh yeah, yeah, it's so compassionate. This brings us to this next question of empathy and personal growth, and how that helps people engage in antiracist work or anti-oppression work. Are you willing to say a little bit about this?

[00:46:32] Leticia Nieto:

Yeah, I kind of felt that's where we were going. The, the definition of what it is to be human, right, can be revised from something static to something dynamic. And to be human is, one way to think about it, to be human is to find contexts of embeddedness, like uteri of different kinds, to grow and then emerge from those contexts and then be able to work with those contexts. And so if we can accept that all three of those are part of the dance, right? Different cultures value different things, different parts of the world and different ages. You know, there's different valuing, but I feel like as an immigrant to the United States, one of the things that was interesting to me - a couple of things. One was achievement and maybe self-determination, goal-drivenness, and future orientation. That particular package was incredibly interesting. It was like, wow! You know, what are you doing this weekend? What are you doing in the summer? Where are you going? What are you going to do with your career? That was so different. I never before was asked those kinds of questions. And so it was a chance to notice, oh, that's the part of the cycle that carries a lot of charge and interest here, and so, when it's my turn to achieve, graduate, excel, that's gonna

confirm me. But, I come from - you know, Central Mexico is much more about, what are you in? And honoring the attachment part, right? So, maintaining relationships, spending time, and being present to what is happening right *now*, even if the bell has rung - I'm thinking about being in school, and the idea of the bell ringing, and people leaving the classroom. That was so shocking to me, because I grew up with the bell rang and it was a general suggestion that maybe we're about to wrap up, you know? But it wasn't until the teacher said, "And so, you know, we're done here and have a good day." and then people kind of casually and gently gathered their stuff and sauntered over to the next place. That difference in orientation to time also informed it. So the question that you have is about how self-compassion, kindness, and self-esteem can feed into social justice, I think. And I'm saying that maybe we can value, come to value, or start to value more points in the cycle.

[00:49:08] Sarah Peyton:

Mm, that's lovely. There are other places that really come to mind. I mean, this idea exactly of when somebody's saying something that's an *ism* and we're like, "Oh, you're caught." The ability to do that really comes from empathy and personal growth. So it's very exciting.

[00:49:27] Leticia Nieto:

Yeah. And also gratitude, like, "Oh, you're gripped." You know, you're in the grip, it's only a matter of seconds or minutes before *I'm* in the grip. And how do I want to have people be with me when I'm in the grip? Cause it turns out yelling at people when they're in the grip, doesn't get them out of the grip, right? Being harsh - when someone's in the grip that tells us their nervous system is dysregulated. They've lost access to their frontal lobe. They don't have social analysis available. That's why we're there in the grip! You know, they're in the grip, they don't have access! So if we increase challenge in that moment - this is just, you know, basic psychology and anatomy - um, when we increase challenge to someone who's in the grip of a dehumanizing force, we're actually aligning with the dehumanizing force. But if we can attune and attend and be good midwives, right? We can say, "Okay, you're in the grip and this pressure could actually be beneficial. Actually, something good could happen because we're here ready to catch you as you emerge and we're ready to support that emergence." It could be things are heating up and getting uglier *right before* something amazing is going to happen. So we might hear somebody say some of the worst things we've ever heard them say because they're about to be able to see what they just said and be in relationship to it. So if we could slow up a little bit to say, "Alright, I know you." Especially when we know someone and we're like, "I can't believe you of all people would say or do..." or not say or do... if we can go, "Okay, wait, I know you. So maybe you're in the grip and I've got a good diagnosis. Maybe I'm in the grip and I can't see the wisdom that you're offering," right? What if I'm the one who's in the grip, [unintelligible] I can't get what you're doing. Can I soften a little bit, so that whoever's in the grip can emerge? And maybe we're both in the grip.

[00:51:28] Roxy Manning:

Leticia, I'm fascinated and I want to stay here and I know that we're already past when we were supposed to end. And so the question I want to ask you, though, is about singing, because you already mentioned singing in the past, and I know that you make links between singing, self-regulation, and human development. And I'd love to have you maybe end by talking about that!

[00:51:51] Leticia Nieto:

Oh, beautiful! Yeah, so singing has been a practice for me. I was very anxious as a kid. I also had a lot of physical pain. Then I discovered when I was singing, both of those would change. So pain - it's not that pain went away, but the perception of pain, the experience of pain was really different when singing. And the same with anxiety. And I could extend it to other things, but singing on my own is very healing and singing with others is profoundly liberating. So singing in circles, both in person and online, has been a really powerful practice for knowing everything I've been saying is true. It's a very lived experience of resting in the collective while simultaneously experiencing the tensions, the dissonances... the upshot is; the song can hold the dissonance, the singing together can hold the dissonance, the rhythm... We can go away from it and come back to it. And so it reinforces my own bias, or maybe faith, that there's something ultimate and something less ultimate, that we are ultimately connected and separation is more of an illusion. It's real, but not ultimate. And interdependence, interconnectivity, universally, is more the truth of the story, but the differentiation dance is golden and crucial for us. So I'm not saying one is good one is bad; I'm just saying one is bigger than the other. So we differentiate in the context of an even larger embeddedness, or an even larger attachment, and singing within a couple of moments takes me right to that center of that recognition. I can sing away, I can sing in, you know, I can do a harmony, or I can stay in the melody. I can riff ahead or behind the beat, but I get to come home to the place where we're all in it together. So yeah, I highly, highly recommend Circle Singing, both the [Bobby McFerrin](#) form of improvisation that allows for something really totally fresh and new to happen - it kind of has the yumminess of risk and discovery - but I also really love songs that are led by - they call themselves song catchers - and they're brief and they're easy to learn. So I spend a lot of time in song circles.

[00:54:30] Sarah Peyton:

Well, here you've given us a little bit of advice for folks who are feeling perhaps overwhelmed and hopeless in the world with all the wars and genocides and the continued discrimination and harm. Are there any other ideas or possibilities that you'd like to name for folks who are trying to find some way through, some way to participate?

[00:54:54] Leticia Nieto:

I think it might be that grief is showing up as an important companion to liberation... That we bear up and witness fully and engage, of course, any way that we can to interrupt harm, but not expect that we will heal the grief or clear it. It's our birthright to attend the grief, to be with, and let loss and harm affect us and break us. It's our birthright to be present with that. And we can do it, if we are collective about it. I think it's really hard to expect individuals to hold the dimensions of terror and anguish. To sign up to be broken by grief individually, I think, is not possible. But we *can* do it collectively, and we must do it collectively, and we *need* it. It's part of the recipe or part of the fiber of liberation is this presence.

[00:56:12] Sarah Peyton:

Well, as we're coming to a close, are there any invitations or actions that you would like to invite our listeners to take? Buying your book or joining these kinds of theater action teams or... what

kinds of possibilities?

[00:56:29] Leticia Nieto:

I have a [newsletter](#) that goes out sort of infrequently or randomly, but it's a good way to know about what I'm doing. I work with Tele'Drama, and Tele'Drama offers lots of workshops and events online in a world-centric way. So pretty much every experience in Tele'Drama is an international experience. You can find it easily at teledrama.org. And then I also offer some other psychodrama and playback theater kinds of experiences that you can learn about through the newsletter.

[00:57:06] Sarah Peyton:

Thank you so much, Leticia, for being with us! It's been extraordinary!

[00:57:11] Leticia Nieto:

It's my pleasure! Thank you for listening so deep and inviting the new thing to come through.

[00:57:19] Sarah Peyton:

And so then turning to our listeners. Listeners, please support this work and this podcast in the world by going to antiracistconversations.com. There you'll learn how to purchase our books, *How to Have Antiracist Conversations* and *The Antiracist Heart*, and you'll learn about upcoming podcast guests and new classes, and you'll be able to re listen to Leticia and to also listen to past episodes as well.