



## She's Fighting Inherited Gender Roles

Monica was raised as an independent woman by her very independent Mexican mother. But she's realizing both of them easily fall back on outmoded gender roles. And, a family therapist returns to the show to give all of us tools to self correct.

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Juleyka Lantigua-Williams:

Hi, everybody. Juleyka here. Before we get started, I want to invite you to come on the show. If you're an adult child of immigrant parents from anywhere in the world, I'd love to talk to you about the conversations that are necessary but challenging right now. What are you getting into with your loved ones? Holidays? Politics? Money? You know we get into it all. So, send us an email or a detailed voice memo to [hello@talktomamipapi.com](mailto:hello@talktomamipapi.com). We can't wait to have you on.

Hey, everybody. Today, my guest is Monica. Monica always saw her Mexican mom as a very independent woman who also raised her daughters and her son to be very independent people. But Monica chafes at how her mom sometimes still interacts with her and her siblings based on really outmoded gender norms. Worst of all, she catches herself enacting them, too. Let's get into it.

Monica Prado Garcia:

My name is Monica Prado Garcia. I'm from San Diego. I currently live in Los Angeles, but I'm originally from San Diego, California, and I grew up calling my mom mamá and my dad papí. So, my household included myself and two other siblings. One older sister and one older brother. I'm the youngest of three children and my parents were both Mexican. My mother was born... Well, on this side of the border in the U.S., and my father was born in Mexico. Unfortunately, my father passed away when I was very young, when I was 10, but the time that he was with us was great, and then thereafter, my mom... Well, she was a very strong woman, so she pushed the family along as a single mom of three.

My sister had kind of like a co-parenting role, so even though she was a sibling, she inherited that sense of parenting us, so really my brother and I were like the two siblings and we were both I guess coddled in a certain way, because we lived in very close knit community, but my brother was very much taken care of. I was expected to still learn how to cook, to clean, to help my sister manage household chores, whereas my brother didn't have those expectations. But it's just interesting, that irony between my mother being this... in a certain way very

feminist, very powerful, forward-thinking woman that very much believes in her independence, but still manages to incorporate some of that patriarchic values and patriarchy overall in the way that she treats her daughters versus her only son.

So, if we're eating lunch or dinner, the expectation is that my sister or I will serve my brother first. Or the expectation is, "Is Pedro hungry?" It's not so much are we all hungry, is Pedro hungry? Has he eaten today? And my sister and I always comment, "Well, we're hungry. Have you asked us if we've eaten today?" So, and she does, of course. She's very attentive. I don't want to discredit my mother, but we do feel the difference even as adults.

This was a couple years back. So, I was at my mother's home. I was making myself some quesadillas and my brother also comes to my mother's home and she says, "Oh, perfect. Monica was making you some quesadillas." And then of course since I have been raised this certain way, I just turned to my brother and said, "Yeah, sure. Here, have some quesadillas." I didn't even say like, "No, these are mine. Make your own." I just immediately succumbed and gave him the quesadillas. And she doesn't do it out of malice or anything. She's just... He is the boy of the family and he is so... He's held on a pedestal, so it's very interesting. And so, now his reaction is just like, "Mom, I can do it." Or, "No, ma, it's fine. Have you asked Mari and Moni how they feel?" And certain things like that.

Like we say, he's very competent. He can make his own quesadillas. He lives by himself. He probably washes his own dishes, mother. And all these certain comments, right? And she's like, "Oh no, he needs a girlfriend. He needs a wife. He needs his mother." So, she knows that he's competent to do all of these mundane tasks, but it's just the fact that someone needs to be serving him at all times.

I'm smiling right now because I'm thinking of my behavior and my mother's expectations of these certain gender roles, and outside of the nuclear family, so as it extends to extended family or even to my in-laws, and ironically I'm very complicit in this behavior. Because I do consider myself a very strong woman that's very independent. I do have a partner. I'm married. But when we're at Christmas and it's the entire extended family, I will serve my husband before I serve myself. And if my brother's there, I will serve my brother. And if my father-in-law's there, I will serve him, as well. So, I will definitely serve all of them men and the children before I even offer to serve my... Well, no. My mother I'll serve, too. But before I offer to serve myself, or other cousins, or siblings.

I'm afraid that I will be seen in a negative view amongst my extended family. Like I'm afraid... I'm honestly, now that I think about it, like for instance, why do I serve my husband in front of my mother-in-law? Well, I don't want my mother-in-law, she's also Mexican, also from Mexico, born and raised, I don't want her to think that I'm a bad wife, or that I don't care for my husband. So, I work, as well. So, I work full-time, I'm a full-time doctoral student, and I'm also... I consider myself like

a full-time housewife, just because I'm working from home right now, and even prior to working from home I was always... I'm always the lead on household chores. Even though my partner does share some of the actual labor of the household chores, I am the lead on it.

And my mother was in a very similar situation, so it's very interesting that I'm mirroring her exact behavior. My father, although he worked when he was with us, my mother always put her 50% of the income. I have such conflicting behaviors that this is really bringing a lot to light.

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Lantigua-Williams:

You know, sometimes a guest makes me think, "Are we the same person?" This was the case with Monica. Not just in terms of her relationship with her mom and the push and pull around gender roles, but in how she herself changes her behavior around certain family members. I hate to admit it, but if I let my guard down, that's exactly what I do. How is this still happening? And why does it make me doubt myself? I bet a bunch of you can relate, so to help, I mean, to help us, I called in an expert.

Claudia Cuevas:

My name is Claudia Cuevas. I am a licensed marriage and family therapist in the state of California, and I have a master's degree with a specialization in Latino family studies.

Lantigua-Williams:

Welcome back!

Cuevas: I'm so happy to be back.

Lantigua-Williams:

What did you hear in Monica's story?

Cuevas: Well, I hear this dilemma that women, Latinx women... We're having these, what I call like *sentimientos encontrados*, right? Like where we're like, "Wait, I'm supposed to do what?" When you start noticing how we're raised and how our siblings are raised, or our brothers are raised, and so... and then I loved when she said we're complicit in this patriarchy kind of way of raising men. So, you know, a lot of conflict. A lot of contradiction I heard.

Lantigua-Williams:

Do you hear this a lot?

Cuevas: I do. You know, being a therapist and having someone come into therapy, there's already this self-awareness that has to be in place in order to come and expose your problems to someone, right? I treat a lot of professional women and they have to reconcile how they were raised and what they want to do with their life. And how they find a balance. I try to get them to find a balance.

Lantigua-Williams:

Okay, so this is where I always have difficulty. Even though I'm a Libra, right? I can never find this balance. And I am constantly conflicted and self-correcting. So, where is this balance? How does one strike it?

Cuevas: I think it comes in that, in the self-correcting, right? You're trying to go against a generational way of thinking and raising. And let's just be honest. the machista man and the men that are in our lives, and that participate in this patriarchy, or this toxic masculinity, you know, all those trend words, we women raised them to be that way. Like we truly are complicit. And it's only when we push against that boundary and make the corrections is that we find this balance.

Lantigua-Williams:

So, here's the thing, though. Monica considers her mom and has always considered her mom a feminist.

Cuevas: Her mom is absolutely a feminist. Why? Because she works, she wanted her children to get educated, she supported her family, her husband passed away, and went on and did whatever she wanted. She values her independence is what Monica said. Oh, you know, that just like... It just struck such a cord of this loving that I wanted to give her as mom, because she is a feminist. She's not an Anglo definition of what a feminist is, but she is 100% a Latinx feminist.

It's just about that, right? Like we're equal. I want my daughters to have the same opportunity and education than my son or anybody else. Why? Because I know they're gonna have a better life. The more educated you are, the more independent you are about the money that you bring into the home, you don't depend and become subservient to someone. And I think we need to get back from like... Because I serve my husband some tamales doesn't mean that I'm this abnegada, subservient, and that he cracks a whip on me. That does not mean. I'm a Libra too, so I want to take care of him.

Lantigua-Williams:

I know! We love hosting!

Cuevas: Yes! And that fills my heart and I choose to do it. Nobody is obligating me to do it. That's a radical way of thinking.

Lantigua-Williams:

Yeah. Her mom... I think my... I grew up with a similar mom. My mom is definitely a feminist, but my mom is also the first one when we're at a family gathering to ask me why I didn't get the first plate for my husband.

Cuevas:

And that is generational, just, costumbres, right? As we are going forward with the next generations, I feel that there is much... There's much more awareness with the men that are being raised now, because they're being raised by these women that are getting PhDs, and are CEOs, and so that's going to... You know, with the next three generations, we're gonna see big change, and there's a lot of woke men, as well, which is great.

If you were to tell my husband if you think he's a machista, he'll be like, "Absolutely no. Women are equal. They can do whatever they want." And then it's like, "Did you fold my clothes right?"

Lantigua-Williams:

Okay, so here's the other crux for me, which is that yes, we get that these are cultural norms. We get that most of these happen within a familial setting where the norms are reinforced by multiple generations. But a lot of Latinas carry these norms and behaviors into the workplace, and I believe that is part of the reason why we make 54 cents on the dollar. Right? Because we don't ask for raises. We don't ask for promotions. We don't leave jobs that undermined us, underpay us, and underappreciate us, because a lot of it has to do with the way that we were socialized in the home.

So, how do these gender norms impact us, and I think really hurt us when we're out in a very Americanized workplace?

Cuevas:

The problem becomes that I don't think it's just with women. I think it also... It becomes just the whole Latino community. We're supposed to be these humble people, and we have this huge work ethic, and you just like... People will recognize you for your work. And that is not the country we live in, right? We see people get promotions who are talking a lot of talk, but they're not doing a lot of work.

I remember when I was first working, I would go into any nonprofit agency and just become every role, and do the work, and there was an Anglo supervisor who would sit down and watch me run around like crazy. And they would ask him, "Hey, can you help?" And he's like, "What for? You got your peon. She does everything." And that's when I was like, "Oh my goodness. They're not gonna promote me. They see me as the worker bee."

I had to reconcile and be like, "Oh, I need to delegate. I need to act as a leader, and I need to ask for what I want." And it's a scary concept because you're not supposed to. You're supposed to be humble. You're supposed to serve. You're

supposed to do. And then you'll get recognized. And so, we miss that little lesson in school or wherever, at home, because that's just not how we're raised.

Lantigua-Williams:

For someone like Monica, who's already a grown person, how does someone in that situation start to not just check themselves, but also check everybody else in this behavior, so that we raise our awareness to the behavior, and then we can proactively change the behavior?

Cuevas: So, it's really about analyzing what is it that you're feeling stressed about. What is it that you want to correct? What is it that is causing stress in the home? And then we kind of sit down and we analyze like, "Okay, how do we then find balance in that for you?"

Lantigua-Williams:

Interesting. Are you suggesting that these gender norms are also a way to keep harmony because it's predictable, what everybody's assigned to do, even if it's unbalanced based on gender? Because women always end up doing more work in the home?

Cuevas: It's gonna depend on that family, right? Some people don't want to just mess with the order of things, like they... You know, get out of the kitchen. This is my domain. Leave me alone kind of thing. And that's okay. I think that it's never gonna be 50/50 in the home. There's always gonna be these different seasons, times where someone gives 70, and then other things you give 80, and then in other things you give 100, and then... But at the end, if you're feeling like you're satisfied with how things are going, and that there is some harmony within your home, then that's great.

But if you're stressed out because you're just killing yourself, you hate doing this thing all the time, and you hate being told to do it, then that's where we have to have a conversation. There's nothing wrong with the gender roles. It's really about how that is affecting you, right? Like there's some serious machismo going out there and you know, you don't get access to money, and you're not allowed to look at the bank accounts, those are concerning. But if I say, "Listen, I am not good at money. I'm gonna let my husband take care of that." Which is not the case in mine, but I'm gonna hand it over to him. That's not a gender role. That's about what your strength is.

And so, if we look in the home and see what everybody's strengths are, they will end up doing a higher percentage of that task.

Lantigua-Williams:

All right, final question. What do you do with a tía who at the party is like, "Go get your husband something to drink." What do you do when external forces act upon the civility that you have cultivated in your relationships?

Cuevas: You know, it's gonna depend on the personality you have. You can literally say like, "No, he's fine. He makes his drink better than I do." Or you can say, "No. I don't want to." You're not gonna be able to convince your tía that you not taking care of your husband, he's not gonna leave you and go find himself another woman that will.

Lantigua-Williams:

Right.

Cuevas: That's their way of thinking.

Lantigua-Williams:

Okay. It's too late for the adults. I get it. I definitely get it.

Cuevas: But we're the example, right? We're the example of this could happen. Literally my husband, when we go to parties, serves me. And I have cousins, I have tías, that just turn around and look at me, and I smile and go, "That's right. Don't you wish you were me?" And they'll laugh, right? They're like, "Aye." And then just keep on walking.

Lantigua-Williams:

Claudia, always, always so good to have you on the show. Thank you for coming back.

Cuevas: Thank you. Anytime. I love it.

Lantigua-Williams:

All right. Let's recap what we learned from Claudia. Hold yourself accountable. Understand how you are also complicit and be aware that you're pushing back against generations of cultural norms. Find harmony in the give and take. For example, at home, decide what chores you will do and what chores will be assigned based on individual strengths, not on wanting to resist or follow gender norms. And remember, be the example. Be the change you want to see in the world. Instead of trying to convince your relatives of your more evolved ways, let your behavior at that next family gathering speak for itself.

Lantigua-Williams:

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you so much for listening. Your listening helped us achieve something so cool. Just this week, Spotify named our show, your show, among the top podcasts of 2020. It's so cool. I am so proud of my team. I'm so proud that we get to do this for you every week. And it's really sweet to get that kind of recognition, so thank you, thank you for listening. How to Talk to [Mamá and Papá] About Anything is an original production of Lantigua Williams & Co. Virginia Lora produced this episode. Michael Castañeda mixed it. Micaela Rodríguez is our founding producer and social media editor. Cedric

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**CITATION:**

Lantigua-Williams, Juleyka, host. "She's Fighting Inherited Gender Roles" *How to Talk to [Mami & Papi] About Anything*, Lantigua Williams & Co., December 6, 2020. TalkToMamiPapi.com.

Produced by:

