Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Dr. Jessica Hernandez

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Dr. Jessica Hernandez, where I ask her: how amazing is Indigenous science? Welcome to Getting Curious, this is Jonathan Van Ness, I am so excited for this episode for a myriad of reasons, but very first, before I even get into it, I'm going to introduce our guest. She is Dr. Jessica Hernandez, who is an Indigenous scholar, scientist, and community advocate based in the Pacific Northwest, and her new book, which just came out yesterday, called Fresh Banana Leaves, she breaks down why Western conservation isn't working and introduces a different model for healing landscapes through Indigenous science. Welcome, Dr. Jessica Hernandez, how are you?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:00:50] Good. Thank you for having me.

JVN [00:00:52] Oh my gosh, pleasure's ours. So in some of our episodes around, like, dam displacement and a few other ones, we started to hear more of our experts and some of our guests tell us about Indigenous sciences and different ways in which Indigenous communities see or utilize science and medicine and land and all sorts of cool stuff. And I was like, "I'm new to this party. I need to understand more about this. This is so genius and interesting, and I would just love to learn more," which then introduces you because you're a literal Indigenous scholar scientist checking all the boxes. Forgive me for not knowing this prior, but is Fresh Banana Leaves your first book?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:01:39] Yes it is. Yeah, it is my first book. So yeah, I'm excited.

JVN [00:01:42] Congratulations! I mean, I'm sure being, like, a doctor, you've written, like, a lot of, like, long stuff, but how was it kind of bringing your passions together in this book? Because in Fresh Banana Leaves you center your story as an Indigenous scientist. So can you share some of that journey with us?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:01:59] Yeah. So I think it was a healing journey to write the book because, you know, as you mentioned, when we write scientific reports or peer review articles, it's kind of dull and boring where we have to, you know, write the abstract, introduction. But in this case, in a book, we can actually integrate our testimonies, our stories. And I think that one of the reasons why I decided to write a book is because I wanted to integrate my father's story, who, you know, as a child was a child soldier during the Central American Civil War that impacted his country of El Salvador, and, you know, targeted Indigenous children to fight either in the army or, you know, in the guerrilla, which is opposing, kind of, you know, situation against the government. So I think that being able

to write his story and seeing how even growing up, he always tried to not tell me his story, because you know as parents, they always want to, you know, kind of secure us, kind of protect us and protect us from harm. But, you know, obviously that's not the reality that the world kind of has. So he always wanted to protect me from, you know, this violence that he had to endure as an Indigenous child. So my father was in the war since he was 11, and eventually until he turned 14. So it's a part of his childhood and it's a part of that generation before me, so it's kind of hard to ignore, especially as a scientist, right, when I talk about our environments and nature.

JVN [00:03:18] So what, like, what was that like? You're just, like, minding your own business. You're, like, a baby Jessica Hernandez and then you were just, like, "I am really interested in science." And, like, when did that kind of spark happen for you?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:03:30] Yeah, so I was born in Los Angeles, California, so in South Central, that's where I grew up. And basically, given that my parents, you know, we're the only ones displaced from our relatives, you know, going back home and going back to my, you know, ancestral lands, my Indigenous land. So I think that, you know, I had that duality of living in the city, but also going back home to the, you know, rural areas where, you know, I was immersed in the environment. So I think that when I became more interested in our environment was because, you know, I loved listening to my grandmother tell her stories and how you know, she will, you know, sing to plants, sing to, you know, animals, kind of, you know, build that relationship. And my father, even though, you know, at a young age since he lost his father at a young age, he had to, you know, as the eldest, he had to take care of his family, so he became a fisherman. So I loved listening to the stories as a child, you know how he will create fishing nets out of, like, you know, the materials that were located in that nearby environment. And I think that that just grew my fascination. And eventually, as I grew up, I actually found out that, you know, there is an environmental science. It's actually a field that you can study as a student even beyond, you know, your high school years.

JVN [00:04:40] And then once you kind of realized that, were you, like, "That's for me," and you just, like, were kind of on track to study that and go that way? Or did you, or were you ever, like, "No, I want to be an astronaut?" Or was it pretty much like this the whole time?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:04:54] Yes, I think growing up I always wanted to be a teacher, so I was able to be a teacher because I think oftentimes we think that, you know, only teachers have to study education. But I wanted to be a teacher because I loved working with kids, especially children. So I wanted to be, like, a K-12 teacher. And then studying environmental sciences, I majored in marine sciences, so it was, like, more oceanography. I

was passionate about it, but it wasn't necessarily very, you know, like, pink and diamonds, right? It was, like, you know, a field that is, like, dominated by cisgender men. So obviously they oppress queer folks and they oppress women, right? So I think that oftentimes I saw that, right, where the men were elevated in the field while, you know, women and LGBT and, like, you know, any other gender that's, like, non-male was kind of oppressed or silenced in that way. So I think that while I loved the field, it wasn't a field that was, like, friendly or open to embracing me as an Indigenous woman.

JVN [00:05:53] Oh, I wish that that was the first time I heard that theme when it came to scientists and females' and non-males', like, existence in the scientific field, so I hate that story. So how do you approach the practice of Indigenous science? Because first of all, and I'm definitely guilty of this, I think that so many Americans only think of, like, Native Americans, and there's, like, so many other Indigenous communities that exist all over the world, so diverse, so thriving, contemporarily thriving as well, like, it's not this idea of the past. Which is part of why we're here, or why I'm here today, and why I'm so glad that you've given us your time. So can you tell us about the practice of Indigenous science and how you, as an Indigenous scientist, approach that practice?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:06:42] So I think Indigenous science and I think it's important to situate what Western science is, right? So Western science is, you know, we often coined the founders as these, like, you know, European men who came from, you know, Europe to the Americas and kind of brought their theories and ideas. But with Indigenous science, we're in tune with nature. We have those close relationships. We have lived there in a certain environment for generations, even, you know, previous generations, dating back to pre-colonization. So I think that with Indigenous science, the only difference is that it's more holistic. Western science tends to be binary, right? And, like, very straightforward, where, you know, you have the scientific method, you have to follow these six steps versus Indigenous science is more holistic, right, we don't separate ourselves, our spirituality, our medicine, our identities from the science itself. And I think that with Indigenous science being more holistic, we can be ourselves while practicing that science itself. So I think Indigenous science is more knowledge that has been passed to us through the generations that, you know, date back to since time immemorial, which is pre-colonization.

JVN [00:07:48] Ah! Fierce, I love that, like, saying, that's, like, a cool saying. So it's a more holistic approach. So does that mean that there's, like, like, a more, like, locally or, like place-based approach to how Indigenous science is approached?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:08:06] Yes, that's perfect, actually, because, yeah, Indigenous science is place-based, right? So for me, like my Indigenous science kind of is stronger in my communities, in my ancestral lands. So when my dad was teaching me about our

environments, he was teaching me about the water currents, the fish, the animal behavior in his lands. And obviously, you know, you can apply that because I think with Indigenous science, we can also adapt it to our current environments, especially for those of us who are displaced, whether it be external through borders or internal, right, from reservations into major cities, urban areas.

JVN [00:08:39] Oh OK. Yes, OK, wait, so, like, this statistic from Fresh Banana Leaves is really major. In, in the book, which again, if you have not got it through your gorgeous noggins listening to this already, it's called Fresh Banana Leaves, again, available for purchase today. In the book, you note that 80 percent of the world's biodiversity, 80 percent of the world's biodiversity is sustained by Indigenous peoples who make up less than five percent of the human population. That's major. So what are some examples of Indigenous land stewardship?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:09:13] I want to connect it back to what you stated, right? That when we talk about Indigeneity, especially in the United States, we tend to focus on the United States and Canada, right? So we focus on Native Americans and First Nations. But you know, one of the reasons why I wanted to write this book is because I wanted to discuss Indigeneity south of the border, which is Latin America. And given that statistic, 50 percent of the world's biodiversity is located in Latin America. Now you tie that back to violence. It's, you know, Latin America has become the deadliest place for Indigenous leaders because, you know, they're either disappeared, they're murdered. You know, they face that violence that's not really being stopped by the government. So that, given that 50 percent of the world's biodiversity is located in Latin America, it tends to impact Indigenous women the most because, you know, we have the missing and murdered Indigenous women pandemic that kind of crosses borders.

And yes, so 80 percent of the world's biodiversity is stewarded and caretaken by Indigenous peoples. So I think one of the examples is, you know, and it's, it's kind of, like, a sad example is not as romantic as we will have think. It's, like, you know, that ongoing movements to protect our Mother Earth, right? We see that in the Amazon rainforest. How Indigenous groups are fighting against giant oil companies or also, you know, these large agricultural companies that are trying to get rid of their forests in order for them to, you know, raise cattle. And I think that with that stewardship going back to Indigenous science, knowing that our plants and animals are our relatives rather than, you know, we seeing ourselves as, like, the hierarchy where we're on top of the food pyramid, we see ourselves more as, like, interconnected, related, right? Because I think that when we tie it to Indigenous communities and our creation stories, how we were created as people, all of our creation stories talk about our deities and gods creating us from the elements, from the animals that were near our environments or that local place on our ancestral lands.

JVN [00:11:11] That's beautiful, and yes. You mentioned earlier that a lot of this Indigenous science comes from the fact that a lot of these different Indigenous communities all over the world have lived there, like, prior to colonization, which spoiler alert, if you guys didn't know listening to this, this is the same stuff that we've talked about in past episodes of Getting Curious. Colonization, which a lot of well, all of these Indigenous communities predate, is, is what brought the idea of what, like, you know, air quotes "civilization" was supposed to look like and this idea of, you know, "civilizing people." And that's, and that's where so many of these, like, highly offensive, derogatory ideas that we have commonly that touch the gender binary, touches how we consume food, touches how we interact with the environment, among so many other things, really came from.

So that is something that I think that, you know, as white people, as Americans, as non-Native people, as non-Indigenous communities, we really need to understand more of the impacts that, like, how we have been frankly, like, propaganda-fied or whatever, like, we've really been taught to separate ourselves from, like, from so many things. So I just think there's such a rich history in Indigenous science because these communities have been living in places for way longer than what we've been over here, you know, doing, you know, you know, bull in a goddamn china shop around here, for, I mean, focus Jonathan! So can you tell us about that, how that, like, cross-generational experience really strengthens the knowledge of Indigenous science?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:12:53] Yeah, so I think that, you know, you're mentioning all of these things, right? So I think through generations, we're taught to think a different way, right? At least for my community, like, you mentioned the gender binary, we have a third gender that are called Muxes, Muxes, as other people mention it, which is, you know, you know, a male given birth, you know, at birth, but has a Two-Spirit. So I think that, you know, when we saw how colonization impacted us, you know, we saw the introduction of religion. We saw how our third gender was kind of being attacked or harmed because the religion tells us that, you know, it's either the binary man and female versus, you know, in our matriarchal society, we still have our Muxes who are basically considered a gift from God, right? Because every mom wishes that she had a Muxe who inherited that Two-Spirit of a female and a male. And I think that with Indigenous science, we're always fighting to make sure that our traditions are kept even with these, this way of right, like, you were mentioning the spider web that has all these, like, frameworks that opposed the ways that we see the world. So basically, Indigenous science is, like, a holistic way of looking at the world. That kind of puts a spirituality at the core. And given that, you know, as individuals, our spirituality is also our medicine. So as you were mentioning, you know, with the food systems, obviously what we eat is our medicine. And as a result, and we always see

Indigenous science, we see the animals as our relatives, we see them as sacrificing their lives to nourish our bodies. And the same way of our plants.

JVN [00:14:27] So in your Native lands, what do we know about, like, the amount of time that, like, you're, like, the generations of your community were located in El Salvador before they were displaced through, like, all the various ways that displacement happened? What's your gorgeous nation called again?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:14:42] The Zapotec community. So that's in Oaxaca and then the Maya Ch'ortí is in El Salvador. So we are separated by a border, so we're in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. And we called the Americas Abya Yala.

JVN [00:14:53] Yes, fierce! Has there been any, like, fierce, like, archeological moments that have, like, like, been, like, "It's at least this old."

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:15:02] Yeah. So I don't really know how old we are, but I know that, you know, one of the things that we see archeologists be obsessed with is our pyramids. So if you look at the Mayan pyramids, you know, even scientists, who, they are still trying to understand the dynamics, especially the physics behind the pyramids, and they still haven't been able to solve that. So I think that, you know, when we look at Indigenous history, it holds on to those, to that engineering, to that physics through, to the sciences that were allowed our ancestors to build those pyramids. So even in one of the pyramids, if you were to clap in front of the pyramid, you will hear our bird, bird sounds from the quetzal, which is, you know, basically a sacred bird from that pyramid. So I think that, you know, that kind of also ties to, and I like, and I love your question, like, "how old we are," and that ties to the Indigenous science because when we look at our ancestors, they were able to build these majestic pyramids that archeology still tries to understand, to research. But I don't know exactly the timeframe of, like, how old we are, but I'm pretty sure that we're beyond, you know, 14,000 years.

JVN [00:16:08] That was the Maya Ch'ortí, you that did the gorgeous, all those gorgeous pyramids? I feel when you connected that I think my brain almost blew up right on this very Zoom.

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:16:16] Yeah, because I think we're a part of the Mayan civilization, and I know that there's over thirty one communities of different Maya pueblos. But yeah, in our Mayan civilization, like, we can connect it back to our pyramids, and we're lucky to, like, obviously, you know, some of them were destroyed during colonization but some of the pyramids are still kept because of tourism, right? We go back to that economy. The government wants to make money, but at least we have that item, that sacred item,

where we can hold to our history and say, "Oh, our ancestors were able to do that. Obviously, we can't anymore because of colonization." They kind of made us go back in time because, you know, our ancestors were that advanced. And, you know, I can just only imagine what we will be doing today if we still, you know, build on to that knowledge.

JVN [00:17:04] How is information passed down over the, like, how is this work, like, carried out across generations? Is it, like, word of mouth or something?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:17:14] Yes, it's oral storytelling, right? So it's, like, either stories where you sit in the fire or you sit close to your grandma and she will, like, tell you a story for, like, five hours, right? So you will listen as a child for five hours. It will also be through prayers, depending on the ceremonies that we hold, as you know, in our communities, it's also through songs. So we do a lot of singing right, and oftentimes those songs carry that knowledge. I think it's, all methods are oral stories, storytelling, whether it be, like, songs, prayers, music, stories themselves and things like that. So yes, all of the above.

JVN [00:17:49] So, like, can you share with us because this also, is mentioned in Fresh Banana Leaves? How can nature serve as a sanctuary even amidst the natural disasters and, like, other things that can be quite scary?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:18:06] Yes, I think I would tie back to my father's story, because I think that he taught me that nature protects you as long as we protect nature. So my dad always sought nature as a sanctuary, right? Because as a child going through this violence and these, like, this harsh reality, he always went under a banana tree. Even though banana trees are invasive species, which means that they're not native to the Americas, but they were introduced. They kind of became our relatives right. They are our displaced relatives. So I think that he will always go under a tree, sing to the tree, kind of play with the tree, climb up the tree. Still, kind of, the tree kind of gave him that sanctuary or that childhood that he was missing because, you know, he had to face this hard reality. And I think that nature can help us balance, you know, be a sanctuary for us because it kind of allows us to remove ourselves from the reality that these systems have created for us, right? So urbanization. We can leave the city to kind of find a sanctuary in nature. We can, you know, all that violence that's happening even today, we can, you know, go to a hike and try to escape their reality. So I think that being given that nature kind of embraces us and kind of, you know, especially if we have a close relationship with nature, whether we sing to it, whether we dance around it, it kind of embraces us and kind of allows us to escape that harsh reality that we have to live every day.

JVN [00:19:30] Mmm. OK, great. I could just listen to you talk all day long, I'm just saying. So how would you distinguish, how would you distinguish Indigenous science from Western science in terms of, like, the value of scientists' personal experiences and perspectives?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:19:50] So I think with Western science, or even Western education in general, right, we're taught that nature is separate from us, right? Like, we're not in, a part of nature. And I think that with Indigenous science, like, I mentioned, our creation stories, right, we were created from nature. We were created from the elements, from the animals, from everything that's around us. So there's no way that we can separate ourselves from nature because we are nature. And I think that Western education, we, you, you know, go through high school, middle school, when you take environmental sciences, when you learn about, you know, sustainability, it always separates humans from nature or even humans from the rest of the animal kingdom, right, even though we're still animals in that sense of species. And I think that with Indigenous science, it teaches us that everything is interconnected, so we have to protect everything as the species that has, you know, formed civilizations in that sense, right? Because we can, you know, we form. I mean, not that all frameworks are positive, but you know, we have an economy. We have a government. While, you know, tigers don't and things like that. So I think that as humans, we are taught that, you know, we had to protect nature so nature can protect us.

And in Western science, nature is a commodity, right? So if you have a tree, you can cut it down and sell the timber. If you have, you know, your gardens, you know, I mean, obviously in your, you, you have a small garden, you're feeding yourself. But you know, these large agricultural corporations decided to plant all these crops to sell them to people and then exploit people for their labor while they're picking them and obviously sell them in masses. So I think that, you know, Indigenous science teaches us that we only take what we need from nature and not be greedy. And I think that Western frameworks like capitalism have taught us to be greedy, right? If you see five corn, you will take all of them as opposed to one. Because, you know, you're only one person, you might only be eating one corn, not five, right? But because of that, you know, capitalism that was introduced, it teaches us how to be greedy. So as a result, we continue to separate ourselves from nature as long as you know, we live in a capitalistic society.

JVN [00:21:56] Huh. Well, fuck me, honey, because I do love impulse buying stuff, but maybe we could do it more responsibly. But what about, like, because I feel like I'm, like, Because obviously, I'm not, like, like, I myself am an invasive species because, you know, I came from, like, you know, I'm pretty sure my folks were from, like, Holland or something, and who the fuck knows where they were before that? But the point is: Western doctors, right? Sometimes I'll say, like, "Oh, it's, like, a feeling that I have or, like, I've seen certain things, like, in nature or just, like, a feeling that I have about something," and, like, that's

always written off like, our intuitiveness or anything that, like, they can't verify mathematically. It's just, like, “That's not true.” It's like it's always discounted. And again, I'm not a Ph.D., nor am I, like, I'm not an Indigenous scientist or Indigenous person. You are a scientist, you're a Ph.D. So that exists, right? Don't you feel there's, like, a displaced emphasis on, like, Western medicine in the U.S. and Europe and like the western world?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:23:02] Yes, for sure.

JVN [00:23:04] How are the ways that you see that affecting people's well-being and the well-being of, just of the world?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:23:11] So I think you mentioned a term that I want to like, you know, kind of connect back to Indigenous science: invasive species, right? And that's something that Western sciences teaches us that if you're not Native to the lands, you're invasive. But I think that with Indigenous science, what it teaches us is that invasive species are displaced relatives. So I will say, you know, you're a displaced relative rather than an invasive species. And I think that with Western medicine, we're taught to kind of, like, fix the problem, but not the root drivers that are causing that, you know, that ailment or that situation. And I think that, you know, as you were mentioning with Western medicine, it has to be, like, proved, right? So we have to do experiments. We often experiment on animals, which also kind of disconnects it from Indigenous science because, you know, our animals are also our relatives.

And in Indigenous science we have been holding observations for so many generations since time immemorial, like I mentioned, pre-colonization, that oftentimes because it's not written or it's not recorded, the data is not recorded in numerical, but rather qualitative data. Because it's oral. It's, like, verbal. Scientists tend to deny Indigenous science as a form of valid science, but I think that myself being trained in the Western sciences and seeing how my dad, my grandmother, my mother, all my relatives taught me about our environment. They just didn't have that Western terminology to call it what Western education teaches us doesn't invalidate their forms of knowing or their knowledge any lesser than Western science that has those tools to build that terminology, right? So, you know, like, Western medicine, we can talk about iron deficiencies versus, you know, in our communities we can talk about, “Oh, you might not be feeling good and you should eat these products,” and they will recommend products that are rich in iron.

But you know, they wouldn't call it anemia or any of those Western terminology. So I think that with Indigenous science and Western science, they can blend and complement each other because at the end of the day, sometimes they're kind of pointing at the same thing, it’s just that they don't have that consensus in the terminology because Indigenous

scientists or Indigenous peoples in general have been denied the access to education. And another thing that I wanted to connect is that through Indigenous science, all of us are scientists, right, whether you have a PhD or whether you don't. And I think that because we are a part of nature and we have been making observations as humans, we are scientists. It's just that that Western science teaches us that we have to acquire those PhDs or those degrees in order for us to be considered scientists. I think that, you know, you are a displaced relative and you're also a scientist.

JVN [00:25:50] I'm obsessed with "displaced relatives." I was just reading our notes, and I kept reading invasive species. And I was, like, it was, like, my white shame and guilt, like, lept out. I was like, "I'm an invasive species, I hate it! Ah!" But that's, I love that. It's like, displaced relatives is so much sweeter and nicer.

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:26:08] Yeah. And that just shows the connection that we have, as you know, as Indigenous peoples to other beings. It's not like, "Oh, you know, they're invasive." It's just, you know, you're displacing eventually because of colonization, the same way that, you know, invasive, what Western sciences calls "invasive plants" have been displaced because of colonization.

JVN [00:26:24] Kind of like when we call it, it's like, you know, relative, it's like a lot of us have relatives that fucking suck, but they're still our relatives and we still kind of love them, even though they're annoying and they're all, you know, like, being anti-vax or this or that. And, you know, so we still got the like, you know, like you've still gotta love your relatives. So that's nice. I, like, just, it's better because, you know, we're all still a community, even if we come from different communities. So it's so sweet, we, I'm obsessed with that. So speaking of anti-vaxxers, sometimes I feel like people who will, like, not believe Western science, like, on certain things, like, whether it's a vaccine or, like, you know, there was a lot of mistrust against, like, HIV medication back in the 80s and also because of, like, the inhumanities that have been perpetuated against marginalized communities at the hands of, like, this Western idea of science, whether that was, like, experimenting on Black and brown people like there's all sorts of fucked up stuff that happened at the hands of Western science and, like, well, it still goes on, you know, with, like, animals and it's all and there is still, like, such a health care disparity that's, like, very racially-driven. But a lot of times I feel like the people that are anti-science will use Indigenous science as a thing of, like, "Well I," like, basically, like, again, applying that binary thinking of it's either only Indigenous science or it's only, like, Western. But one thing I heard you say is is that actually there can be they can complement each other and there can be wisdom in both.

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:27:43] Mm hmm. Yes. And I think one of the examples that I can give is climate change, right? We still have scientists trying to find the solutions for

climate change. But given that Indigenous communities are already experiencing the impacts of climate change, some of us have those solutions. Some of us have already adapted to those climate change, you know, impacts that we're experiencing in our communities. But then in Western sciences, you know, we're kind of funding the research behind climate, climate science as opposed to mitigating and adapting to climate change. And I think that, you know, that would be another way that we can complement one another. And I think that, you know, one of the things that I'm honored that you have me here is that oftentimes in Western science, we still kind of view Indigenous communities as research subjects or areas of expertise, right? As opposed to seeing us as the experts or the researchers ourselves. So thank you for having me because I think that, you know, in a way, you're kind of decolonizing or deconstructing the notion that Indigenous peoples are just research subjects, or areas of expertise, where you're going to research about them but don't necessarily bring them to kind of give their own story and be their own experts.

JVN [00:28:50] Yeah, expert AF over here. Major. And obviously there are probably a lot of people listening and a lot of people in the public that, like, you know, maybe already had, like, a more evolved understanding of this. I still think that there's this, like, knee-jerk reaction to like, trying to, like, validate one or the other or, like, say that, like, one or the other is better. We've kind of talked about how capitalism has changed those things because it, like, you know, there's the five corn, take all the corn, that was a really good example. And I'm sure there's, like, endless other ones. But how does, like, settler colonialism skew the way in which Western science and Indigenous science is valued?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:29:29] Yes. Thank you. That's a great question. So I think with settler colonialism, we go back to the notion of who is the scientist, right? It's often people who have credentials, who went to school to study it. But we Indigenous science, we are all scientists, right? Because we are all interconnected, we are all living in Earth, we are all making observations of our environments, whether it be more, you know, in our backyards, whether it be in our local environments, whether we go hiking. We're like, "Oh, did you notice that plant or that flower blossom before, you know, last year?" because, you know, of climate change impacts. So where are we observing those notices or those observations or differences. And I think with settler colonialism, it has taught us that if it's not written, if it's not peer reviewed, if it's not, you know, it doesn't go through this rigorous research project in the lab, then it's not really science.

And I think that with Indigenous science, because we don't have those tools to make a rigorous, you know, lab project or a research area, we are oftentimes invalidated. Oftentimes we are the experts, we're seen as these pristine creatures, right? Because we have that stereotype of an ecological noble savage where, you know, settler colonialism introduced that. And I think that as an Indigenous scientist, I have to navigate that, right,

because I don't, you know, oftentimes when we have stereotypes that impact our identities, we have to kind of navigate that so that we don't perpetuate that stereotype even more. And I think that stereotype of the ecological noble savage where every Indigenous person is intuned and kind of interconnected with nature tends to happen a lot, right? Because it happened when settler colonialism came through the topological narratives that were written about us because, you know, we were so interconnected with nature, we never separated ourselves from nature. And I think that was settler colonialism, it taught us how to, you know, it amplified certain stereotypes that were created as a result. So we have to balance that.

So to tie it to displacement, because a lot of Indigenous peoples are displaced from their ancestral lands, some generations have that relationship with nature fractured with, you know, their relationship with their environments destroyed, or they're kind of reclaiming those relationships because they have been displaced from their lands. And I think that we tie it to how displacement impacts Indigenous peoples. In the United States, we're seeing a high influx of climate refugees. But when you see how, for instance, Haiti, how Haiti experienced a natural disaster, the earthquake and then obviously climate change impacts are, you know, drivers that impact, you know, political economy, everything, it's kind of displacing Haitians to the United States. But then we see how the United States criminalizes displacement in the form of immigration policies and then how they're mistreated, even as they're trying to seek asylum and refuge rather than, you know, immigrating as that narrative tries to criminalize them.

JVN [00:32:21] And, like, "Go get in a line," like, "You can do it, but go get in line," and then it's, like, "There is no fucking line!"

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:32:26] And yeah, and they're being deported. So, you know, through the policies, we have the MPP. And I think it's the Migrant Protection Plan (Protocols) where they're just being deported, so they're getting in line just to get deported. So, you know, going back to that, it's, like, Title 42. The United States used that policy to say, "Well, we are in a pandemic, so anybody who tries to come to our country is deported back to Mexico." So, you know, it's, like, seeing how certain things are used by settler colonial governments to kind of dismiss that asylum, you know, process or their refuge-seeking that many of these Indigenous peoples are being displaced as a form of climate change. And, you know, climate change obviously impacts the political spectrum in Haiti. The president was assassinated, so they had, you know, a lot of people had to flee. And I think that seeing how the United States treats climate refugees and knowing that the climate refugees crisis is going to increase because our governments are not doing anything to reduce or mitigate climate change, I think that, you know, it's going to be

something sad that we will have to face, especially our generation, as we see those numbers increase.

JVN [00:33:37] OK, So to recap, it's, like, settler colonialism has kind of really imposed these borders that didn't used to exist. They impose these, like, governments and ways of thinking in terms of, like, gender, agriculture, like, so many things. And that also that created so much displacement. And then another thing that we learned from Dr. Elizabeth Rule, who is an incredible Native American activist and scholar. She was telling us about how this government has gone back on so many of the treaties that it agreed to over the course of the, you know, a long time. So it's just interesting that, you know, when you bring up asylum, which is something that we agreed to this, you know, new, this government, the United States government we created this idea of asylum is like a constitutionally guaranteed right, I'm pretty sure. And the other thing I wanted to ask about, was just, like, the fucking patriarchy. Like, cause one thing I feel like I've heard is that, like, a lot of Indigenous communities just don't have that whole, like, "Man thing," like, and there are, there is, like, a gender spectrum and, like, a lot of them are, like, matriarchal, like, societies. So, like, any other thoughts on, like, how patriarchy or the idea patriarchy affects the validation and the value given to Indigenous science?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:35:57] Yeah. So I think in my Zapotec community, my maternal community from where my mom is from, she, like, you know, they're still matriarchal. So one of the things that my dad taught me, or always told me was that in order for him to marry my mom, he had to undo his patriarchal ways. So, for instance, in our communities, if we are in the gathering, the woman, our matriarchs, our elder women will speak first, then our Muxes, and then our women. And the Muxes is the third gender. So you know, they're assigned male at birth, but they have the duality of both the female and the male spirit. The patriarchy kind of has, like, also infiltrated many Indigenous communities, right? Because I think it's not that many Indigenous communities are still because, you know, there's a difference between, I think matrilineal where, you know, you kind of inherit your mom's line, and matriarchy, where the women are still the head of the table. And I think that for my Zapotec community, we still have a matriarchal society where the women are the head of the table. And I know that a lot of researchers and people have kind of written about our communities, about the matriarchy, because, you know, it's something that seems out of this world, especially since patriarchy is global.

And for that sense, I think that two ecological frameworks are trying to dismantle that patriarchy that's embedded in our environments is queer ecology. Queer ecology basically tries to prevail heterosexist discourses, and institution, articulations of sexuality and nature. So it talks about how, you know, even in biology, like, ecosystems, ecology. It's, like, this perceived notion that, you know, it's every animal is in a heterosexual relationship with,

like, male and female. But in reality, that's not the case, so queer ecology tries to dismantle that because, you know, that's the patriarchal notion that teaches us, "Oh, you know, it's always a male and a female, binary genders." And the other one is eco-feminism. That kind of brings forward queer folks and also women to the forefront of dismantling that patriarchy that's embedded in environmentalism. So the two terms are queer ecology and eco-feminism.

JVN [00:37:02] OK, so here's a random question that I didn't think I was going to ask in response to that amazing information. So at what point do fucking men have to fucking dismantle it themselves? Or is it one of those things that, like, no one ever wants to willingly give up power? So we have to do it, period. And then there will just be, like, some cool men with probably, like, you know, really loving souls and a very loving spirit that will dismantle it, my filter just worked, I was about to make a nasty sex joke, and then I realized that was probably some colonialism about, like, celebrating like bigger stuff versus smaller stuff. So I was like, "No, loving spirit." OK. Yeah. And, and yes. So yeah, do you think that men are ever going to fucking, like, cisgender men who are, like, have you ever seen, like, in your experience, like, some just, like, fucking dick, like, some dick, like, like, unlearned their dickish ways and then, like, become like nicer for the environment and, like, celebrate, like, Indigenous science more?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:38:12] So I see that a lot with my students, because I teach climate science, Introduction to Climate Science, you're welcome to come to class any day. But I also integrate Indigenous science and I think that in their recent lectures, I talked about queer ecology and eco-feminism. I kind of brought them the framework of patriarchy and how it's embedded in ecology. And a lot of my cisgender male students, you know, they were a little bit uncomfortable, right? Because they were looking down. They were not doing eye contact with me as I was lecturing. While, you know, my queer students and my female students were like, "Yeah, yeah," you know, like, listening, been very integrated. But when it came to having those discussions, my cisgender male students actually reflected and I was, like, "Yes, we need you at the table. We need you dismantling patriarchy," because they were talking about how, you know, in order for us to heal our lands, we also have to kind of dismantle the patriarchy because patriarchy teaches us that there's an ownership of female bodies, right?

And because nature is considered a female, right, we have Mother Earth, we have mother nature. Patriarchy teaches us that we own Mother Earth, right, we own the planets, we own the environments, the resources. So as a result of that, being able to tie that to that, to those two things, like, even what I just mentioned, students were reflecting and then they were, like, "Wait a minute, in order for us to actually heal our Mother Earth and mitigate those climate change impacts and think about not just ourselves, but the future

generations, I have to sit in this uncomfortable situation and actually do something about it." You know, I'm hopeful for them, but obviously we still have a lot of cisgender men in power. We still have them kind of dictating how we move around in settler colonialism in this current government. So I'm hopeful, but you know, it's still going to be a long ways.

JVN [00:40:00] So this is, like, another random question. I'm so sorry, are these young people, are we are we fucked? As an educator, that's the way I want to ask you, are we fucked or are you hopeful and we're fucked, because it's probably more of a spectrum, not a binary. Like how or, how fucked are we, in your opinion as an educator?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:40:23] So I think that, you know, it's interesting because I just had I forget who told me this conversation, right, that when we talk about climate change, the Earth will be fine. It's us who are fucked. Right? So if climate change were to destroy, you know, you know, continue to continue accelerating and become worse, we're going to be destroyed as species, right, because the Earth is still going to be a planet. It's just that we're not going to be living on this Earth. And I think that we do have a spectrum of students, especially from Gen Z. But I also see how they're, they have the willing, the willingness to fight against those, you know, those frameworks. We see how even in the United Nations, the COP26 conference, we saw youth come to the front lines and be, like, you know, "This is, like, a, like, a shit show," right?

Because they're bringing in all these fossil fuel industry giants to the conference to talk about climate change when they're the ones responsible. So we're seeing the younger generation kind of bring to light those issues. And I think that teaching it's it's also a lack of awareness or a lack of education that many people still have. And I mean, you're here, kind of what I would say, decolonizing that way of thinking, right? Because you're, like, "Oh, I want to learn about this, so let me go and decolonize this colonial mindset where you know, I'm taught to read a book," you're bringing in people who have lived experiences and sharing their expertise. So I think that, you know, they're, we're leading the decolonizing kind of movements to kind of undo those layers that colonialism has embedded in our society. So I'm hopeful, but it's, it's probably something that we're not going to see in our lifetime.

JVN [00:42:06] Yeah. OK, so, like, like, hope, but, like, we might be fucked, like, it remains to be seen, the jury's still out is what I hear you saying from that. OK, got it. Great. So I'm now going back onto my plan of questions: with eco-colonialism, because, like, like, well, what is eco-colonialism?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:42:28] Yeah, eco colonialism is just, like, how settler colonialism has impacted our environments, right? So in the case of eco-colonialism, it kind of ties back

to what you were mentioning, patriarchy, right, where cisgender men who have the authority to govern our natural resources without consulting Indigenous communities, it's this severe alteration of our environments due to climate change and other human-caused impacts, whether it be urbanization or deforestation, because, you know, they're trying to introduce large agricultural corporations or entities. And it's also the reality that, you know, when it comes to environmentalism, women and Two-Spirit folks are often ignored or not even elevated in those discourses, right? Because it's always the man who's given the microphone, the cisgender men who's given the mic and never passed down to Two-Spirit or women or female.

JVN [00:43:22] So what about the privatization of land, like, how is that altering Indigenous landscapes?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:43:31] So I think in my communities, one of the things that we still experience is land theft, right where the government steals our lands and as a result, they sell, you know, hundreds of acres of our lands in what they call "land grabs" to large corporations. So we are seeing how, for instance, the banana or mangos or avocados, they were all introduced to the Americas right through those land grabs where international corporations were like, "Oh, I'm going to buy all these, like, acres of lands and then kind of create these plantations so that we can, you know, export and import these commodities," right? Because they're no longer natural resources, right? The way that Indigenous peoples view it, it's more commodities, right, to fuel the agricultural economy. And I think that through that privatization of lands, we're seen how as a result, more land has been stolen or the land that was given to Indigenous peoples is being impacted the most by climate change we're seeing, you know, it kind of relates back to that displacement that many of us are, you know, and our relatives are given the only chance that in order for them to thrive, they have to leave their ancestral land. So I think that displacement, you know, fractures our Indigeneity, it fractures are Indigenous science and history because, you know, we have to adapt to a new environment. And if we make it right because, you know, displacement is not an easy journey as we have noticed and witnessed that, you know, the United States, how it kind of continues to use those violent techniques, you know, against climate refugees at the borders.

JVN [00:45:12] So what about tourism?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:46:18] Yeah, so with tourism, most of the touristic locations, like, even, like, going back to the pyramids, right, like, the pyramids are, like, something from our ancestors. But when it comes to tourism, the money that goes, that is kind of obtained from the tourism because people want to go visit the pyramids is not given to Indigenous peoples, right, it's given to fuel the economy, the government, and these larger

corporations that own those sites now, right. So I think that, you know, when we look at sacred sites and these majestic landscapes and how they're commodified for tourism, they don't really impact or, you know, have any effect on the Indigenous communities rather than negative impacts. And we look at Hawai'i, right, like, how there's a large tourism going to Hawai'i. But when it comes to the Native Hawaiians, the Kānaka Maoli, they're not given any, kind of, they don't benefit from tourism. They just see how their island continues to be desecrated. Because, you know, tourism, we have a lot of pollution, they have a lot of pollution, you know, sunscreen there. You know, the sunscreen, the toxins in the sunscreen can alter the coral reefs, kill a lot of the marine life. So we see how tourism only benefits the people who are already in power and not necessarily the Indigenous peoples of those lands or landscapes.

JVN [00:46:41] And then meanwhile, you're just, like, this dumb fucking tourist, like, my fucking ass who just wants to go to, like, a turquoise beach. And then there's, like, Indigenous people and communities, literally most everywhere, because, like, even, like, because I didn't go to Hawai'i for my honeymoon, I was, like, "I'm not going to be a goddamn fucking, I'm not going to go fuck them up anymore because they were having all this, like, COVID outbreaks and stuff." So then I was like, "Let me go to the Turks and Caicos." They were, like, having, like, less tourism and they were, like, you know, open and stuff. But then when I went there, coral reef all fucked up, like, it's you know, and then, like, the people that took us there because I wanted to go, like, see it, were, like, yeah, it's, like, even in their life, it's changed so much, like, it used to be way more vibrant and all of the, like, sunscreen and just, like, the heavy tourism. Touring, like, this, like, little island that I had went to, like, it's totally, like, done a thing to the reefs. And then I was like, "Fuck!" So is the only way for us to really like, be responsible, like, people is to just, like, do staycations because like it's probably not going to help the local community, no matter where you go?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:47:45] Yeah, I always have to ask that question or even ask myself, right? Because I also love traveling. I also like, you know, kind of learning from other cultures. And I think that it doesn't necessarily say that we shouldn't visit certain communities. It's just that we should do our homework and actually look at things that are actually, you know, owned by the local people as opposed to, like, an international corporation. Because I mean, the United States, you know, a lot of companies own a lot of touristic sites outside of the United States. And I think if we do our homework and we're like, "Oh, this is like, you know, kind of supporting your local business," and I think it applies to also outside of the United States, right? Because we tend to say, "Oh, look, you know, support your local small business." But when we go visit, you know, we just want, want the easiest access or we don't want to, like, do their homework and be, like, "Oh, these are local shops." And I think that, you know, elevating them and giving them a

platform so that you know, they can continue to sustain will hopefully allow them to regain that, that power to kind of, you know, throw away these larger corporations out of business so that they can leave their lands and, you know, can be more locally managed just well.

JVN [00:48:54] OK. Yes. Now, like, what will it take to start healing Indigenous landscapes?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:49:02] Supporting the land back movement and the land back movement is basically, you know, a lot of people are using that, like, "Oh, they want to deport us, like, if we're not Native to these lands." Have you heard about the land back movement?

JVN [00:49:12] Isn't that like how that, like, didn't, is that, there's, there have been some of that in California where like they gave some of the, like, the land back or no?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:59:19] Yes, yes. So it's kind of like not just necessarily giving back the land because, you know, obviously there's, like, a lot of Indigenous lands have been urbanized, so you cannot give a city back to the Indigenous communities. But given that the autonomy to govern and steward those lands to Indigenous communities, especially the local Indigenous communities who have, you know, the history that dates pre-colonization, since time immemorial, the opportunity to stewards and govern their lands, that will be a way that we can heal our Indigenous lands right because obviously capitalism is teaching us that if we find five corn, like, we mentioned, you take all five, not just the one that you need. So I think that, you know, giving the stewardship to Indigenous communities can allow us to not just heal our lands, but also heal ourselves, right? Because you were mentioning how as humans, we also carry the trauma or the pain that we have some kind of experience. But we also forget that we also carry the pain from our previous generations and the trauma they also experience because of intergenerational trauma. So allowing us to not just heal our lands, but heal ourselves as human beings as well.

JVN [00:50:23] Yes. OK, so then other than, like, the Land Back movement, who else is, like, kind of doing this work? Are they, like, the kind of, like, the main, like, fierce movement right now? Or is there kind of, like, lots of different people?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:50:33] Yeah, there's a lot of people and I'm trying to think of like, for instance, in Guatemala, the Maya Kaqchikel community is actually fighting against the mining companies. Unfortunately, you know, they're facing a lot of violence from the government because, you know, they have send their police troops to, you know, throw rubber bullets to throw tear gas to. And it's our Indigenous women who are, like, in the front and center. But yet, you know, if you, if you are to see articles about the Maya Kaqchikel community, you probably will see more men splatter on the posters than our

females, our Indigenous women. So I think the Indigenous women and our Two-Spirit relatives, whether it be Muxes or whatever each community kind of refers to them, is basically the front and center of these movements. So anything that they're doing, let's just join behind them and support them.

JVN [00:51:22] Ah! Okay, so that's an example in Guatemala of fighting against, like, the mining, the mining folks. We also on our dam displacement episode learned about this fierce Indigenous community in the Amazon that pushed back on this one, like, dam, like, or at least like they're like, kind of did? So that's so that's, like, an example of, like, some healing in practice, like being able to be, like, kind of undone and kind of given back. But how can? Well, I think so my next question, I think I am actually just going to decolonize in real fucking life, honey, so you can, you can see how much you've taught me already. My question was how can scientists and non-scientists reflect on this positionality? But we're all scientists. So how can people, how can people better reflect on on how to help to heal Indigenous landscapes no matter who we are, Indigenous or not, no matter where you live, no matter who you are, how can we all, knowing that we are actually scientists, by way of being sentient beings who, like, you know, observe stuff, like, how can we start to reflect on this and make better choices?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:52:31] I think one of the things that I always tell everyone to start with is, like, start to learn whose Indigenous lands you're currently living on. And I think that once you learn whose Indigenous lands you're living on, like, research, what movements that community is kind of trying to amplify or is leading to, you know, to heal our landscapes because I think that, you know, oftentimes we always talk about, you know, situations being black or white. But in reality, we have to meet in the gray area, we need solidarity, we need collaboration, we need support, we need allies. And I think that, you know, for my communities, a lot of the movements that we're taking are against these large corporations that have been kind of desecrating our lands for so many years, whether it be for destructive energy sources like fossil fuels in the Maya Kaqchikel community as an example that I gave is against, you know, mining for gold and silver. And I think that being able to support those communities fight against not just for the fossil fuel industry, but other industries that are also ultimately desecrating our lands and creating a climate change to increase at a rapid rate. That can be a great way for us to, you know, become allies, become supporters.

And even as a displaced Indigenous woman, I'm currently on Duwamish Lands, right, Seattle, named after Chief Si'ahl. I am learning how to be a welcomed guest, so I'm learning how to, you know, I'm basically participating in events that the Duwamish tribe is leading. I'm kind of building that relationship with the local Indigenous communities, even as an Indigenous person. Because, you know, at the end of the day, these are not my

ancestral lands. I'm displaced and I'm, you know, an unwelcome guest and we're moving at least, you know, we have to navigate those relationships till we become welcomed guests, right? Because these, like, what I, my grandma always taught me is that we should see Indigenous lands as somebody's home and then we just enter somebody's home without even knocking at the door. So we are an unwelcome guest in their homes and then we have to, you know, built our relationship so that they can open the door to us and become a welcome guests. So I think that will be a good start. To dismantling and decolonizing settler colonialism and patriarchy.

JVN [00:54:41] Yes. Yes, OK, next question. So what do you think? Because you are an incredible educator. What do you see as the role of Indigenous science in classrooms and environmental policy?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:54:53] I think that, you know, what we are discussing even today in this episode, it's like a lot of the things that I teach students, and I think one of the things that I guess it might be the Indigenous ways that I was raised is that I shouldn't just see myself as a knowledge holder. Like, I'm also learning a lot from you, especially recounting other testimonies. So I think that as a learner, right, to teach Indigenous science, we still have to embody that multidirectional learning where we're just learning from one person. We're, you know, doing that multidirectional or learning where we're learning from one another. And I think that with environmental education, especially when you take a class, it's only the instructor, the teacher, the professor kind of lecturing you as opposed to, allowing you to bring your lived experiences all your, you know, testimonies or other recounts that people have shared with you as a part of that learning process. And I think that with the way that I bring Indigenous science to the classroom, I always tell the students that, you know, I'm not just the expert or the knowledge holder, like I might be the expert in my lived experiences, but we all have lived experiences that we kind of find something that unites us in those lived experiences. We can amplify Indigenous movements as a whole as a group, right, as relatives, whether we're displaced or whether we're Native to these lands.

JVN [00:56:16] Yes, queen! What is next for you and your work? Your first book just came out, I feel like it is, like, just going to be very successful. What's coming up for you?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:56:27] Yeah, I think I'm going to say I'm still going to be in academia, so I'm still going to move through that trajectory. And I think that, you know, I would love to write another book, and seeing that might be in the works as of now. And then seeing what is something that you know, that people may want to read or learn more about. And I think that one of the things about our generation as millennials and Gen Z is that there's more openness to learn from one another as opposed to the previous

generations, not to bash them. But you know, there's the, you know, the previous generations are more kind of closed up to, you know, learning or wanting to learn from other identities. And I think that, you know, have a lot of hope and faith for our generation, especially the millennials. I think we're leading the pathways so that just, you know, we're doing. How does the saying go: we walked so they can run? Is that? Yes. Yes. So we walked as, as the millennials so the Gen Z can run and, you know, address those disparities in those systems that need to be the constructor or decolonize.

JVN [00:57:28] Yes. And then so and then I think if you're listening to this episode and you're just, like, have been snapping into Z-formation this whole time, if you are just like, "Yes, preach, queen!" like, we're going to make sure that we list all of the links so that people can find you. Follow your work on the episode description of whatever they're listening to the show on. But if people are just, like, obsessed, like, they're, like, that's not going to be enough. Like, I think I'm experiencing, like, a passion or, like, career shift or like maybe not even career shift. Maybe they're just, like, because we're decolonizing aren't even doing fucking careers, we're not even, no, we are doing careers but, you know, but we're doing it, like, responsibly and stuff. So like, what if, if listeners are just obsessed and they want to learn more, what resources could we direct them to?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:58:11] I guess the Land Back movement will be a great way. Also, like native-land.ca, where you can learn who's Indigenous lands your occupying or are living on, so you just type in your zip code and it kind of shows you the Indigenous territories, And then let's see and just reading more Indigenous scholarship because I know that Indigenous scholarship or Indigenous-written books don't get as much kind of publicity or they don't, you know, people are not really interested in them. So, you know, picking up more Indigenous books, Indigenous, you know, books written by Indigenous peoples. So that, you know, because one of the things is that as Indigenous peoples, as you mentioned, we're place-based. So we all have different ways of teaching. Different knowledge is that we have formed through the generations, so there's always something to learn from other Indigenous peoples as well.

JVN [00:58:56] And if you're listening to this part of the episode and you have not heard me say it already, that is such a coinky-dink because your first book is out yesterday, you can get it right now. It is called Fresh Banana Leaves that are just coming in, as I have had such an incredible hour and 15 minutes with you. This is an incredible episode with incredible information. And actually, I don't want to skip this part. Is there anything that we missed that you would just, if you were just like, "Girl, you didn't ask me that?" or, like, is there anything that you just feel like we need to, like, make sure folks know, not to put the pressure on you in this final hour. You can also feel complete, but if there's something you

or just someone who you're really inspired by, or if there's anything that we missed, this is your, this is your moment.

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [00:59:39] Yeah. And I think that, you know, people can learn from you, right? Because I think, like, I don't know if you like to be praised, but I'm, like, you know, you being, like, bringing people, being willing to learn from other people is a great way to, you know, incorporate how we can decolonize the way that we have been taught. So, yeah, thank you for having me and, you know, continue to listen to here. Hopefully, people continue to listen to your podcast because I think, you know, I've listened to all of the episodes, almost, and you know, there's a lot of learning that we can take from other people. So, yeah, following, following you as a model to how we can decolonize the way that we're taught that, you know, people are our research subjects are areas of expertise rather than the experts themselves. So thank you for having me here.

JVN [01:00:19] OK, I don't know why that almost made me cry. It literally made me emosh, you listen to our podcast?

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [01:00:24] I have your book, too, so I'm going to pretend you signed it.

JVN [01:00:25] Oh my, god! No, you should send it to me! And I'll sign it! That is, like, whenever I really respect someone and then I don't, I don't know why I like working on it in therapy. I, like, never expect someone who I really respect to be, like, into my work because I'm always, like, invalidating my work and made me so emotional. Maybe it's because when I was feeling…

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [01:00:46] When I got the email, I was screaming, I was saying, "I can't believe this is Jonathan from, you know Queer Eye." Yeah, I'm actually a fan. So I was a little bit nervous.

JVN [01:00:54] Oh my, god, Dr. Hernandez! You are, like, making me blush. You are so incredible. I'm so excited for you, and I'm also so excited for you to continue to share your scholarship. I think it's so. Look, you didn't have to share what you have spent your life learning with people and the way that you have in Fresh Banana Leaves. So I really, really encourage people there. So much wisdom in there. We're going to include some excerpts in it for our social. But we are just so excited that you came on the episode. We are such big fans of yours. I think this was, like, the third time someone's ever made me cry in the podcast. There's been like over 200 episodes, and I was like, kind of major. [CROSSTALK]

JESSICA HERNANDEZ [01:01:31] But crying is healing. Even what my elders always told me it's, like, you know, a lot of our Indigenous songs are like, they sound like wailing or like crying because, you know, that's our ancestors speaking through us or, you know, healing as us. When we cry, we're not just healing for ourselves, we're healing for those previous generations that, you know, needed that healing or still need the healing, right? Because they're still with us, spiritually speaking.

JVN [01:01:54] Dr. Jessica Hernandez, thank you so much for coming on the podcast. You're amazing. We love you so much.

You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. Our guest this week was Dr. Jessica Hernandez.

You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on.

Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thank you so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, please introduce a friend and show them how to subscribe. Yes!

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Our editor is Andrew Carson.

Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, and Zahra Crim.