

TIS Ep54 - Exploring Colorism with Dr. Sarah L. Webb

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

colorism, people, hair, introvert, black women, healing, black, accelerator program, skinned, sister, job, life, year, linkedin, makeup, thought, darker, dress code policy, sharon, part

SPEAKERS

Lisa, Dr. Sarah L. Webb, Sharon

Lisa 00:06

Welcome to the introvert sisters, the podcast by introverts, for introverts hosted by Sharon and Lisa, two INFJs with a lot to say.

Sharon 00:27

Hi, I'm Sharon.

Lisa 00:29

And I'm Lisa.

Sharon 00:30

And together we're the Introvert Sisters. And we never get that right. We always try to say it together and we never do. The Introvert Sister podcast is sponsored by All Things Equitable. We make it easy to be equitable. Thank you All Things Equitable. Okay, we are super excited everybody today about this episode because we're welcoming someone that we've been fangirling over for quite a while. She's a professor, speaker, writer, influencer/agitator. She's been featured in Forbes. She has rocked the TEDx stage, and she's the founder of Colorism Healing, Dr. Sarah L. Webb, welcome to the show.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 01:15

Hello, everyone. I'm excited to be here.

Lisa 01:19

Welcome. Welcome. Welcome. Thanks. Yeah, um, this, you might not know this, but certainly, certainly in my heart, this has been a long time. Right? Um, you know, we all have, you know, those people whose work we admire, whose activism journey, you know, we admire and so you're definitely on that list for us. And one of the reasons why we want to talk to you is of course because of your platform Colorism Healing, right. Colorism is a topic near and dear to Sharon's heart and mine. Sharon also writes about it, about colorism. And so for those who are listening, who might not be aware, who might

not know, what is colorism? Let's begin at the beginning. Let's start super basic. And we're going to build from there.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 02:18

Yes, so colorism is a system where people with lighter skin tones are at the top of the social hierarchy. And people with darker skin tones are pushed to the bottom of the social hierarchy. And a couple of things to keep in mind just in case, you know, don't want to assume prior knowledge. People can be the same race but have different skin tones. And people can be different races and have similar skin tones. And I also talk about how with colorism I include things like hair texture and features, you know, eye color, the size and shape of your nose. Although in recent years, those things have gotten their own terms called texturalism and futurism. For the sake of simplicity, I use colorism as an umbrella term to include skin tone, hair texture, and facial features, all those parts of how we look that have been associated with a particular race. And so again, and cultures and societies, countries across the world, it's a global problem. People with the more European features or features associated with Europeans, I'll say that with a skin tone or hair texture, they have more privilege in various societies and people with more African features or Indigenous features have less privilege and have historically been marginalized.

Lisa 03:41

Hmm. Okay. It's interesting that you mentioned about people of different races having similar skin tones. I remember a lifetime ago, I went to live in the south of France for a year after university. And my mother I mean, I'm sure you can relate to this story. Right? So very dark, very dark skinned father, light skinned mother. You can, you can see you know, the results are up between me and Sharon. Right. Anyways, so went to, went to France. And I don't know if I actually given it thought, but I was very surprised that there were a lot of what we would call, I guess, phenotypically white people who were darker than my mom, and it blew my mind. It blew my mind because of course we grew up in Barbados and in the Caribbean, of course, there are white people there. But you know, they look like what one would traditionally associate with white people, including although living in you know, in hot sun 24/7, right. But I was like how were you darker than my mom? Are you a white person? In fact, it is darker than my mom. So, it is very interesting, right? It's very interesting how that all shows up. Um, another question I have for you is your platform. I call it your platform, right? And the platform is named Colorism Healing. And so I'm curious as to why did you include the word healing in the name? I mean, the implication is that there is something to be recovered from. So can you tell us about that?

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 05:28

It's so interesting because I, I thought long and hard about the name because I wanted to get it just right. So colorism was the obvious part of the name. It was like, okay, obviously colorism is gonna be in the name. But then like, what about colorism though? I thought about, you know, I didn't want it to just be a platform, talking about colorism and like informing people about it and saying all this exists, I definitely wanted it to be a platform that could help create change, could help shift things, you know, start to think about solutions to it. So I definitely wanted the information to be merged with solutions and change and transformation. And I think so, I'm a spiritual person. And so I think the version of me, the younger version of me that created the website that thought of that name, was acting on an intuitive impulse. And only in retrospect, can I really understand why that name came to me and why I settled on

that name. But, you know, I don't think I fully understood why I was choosing that name. I knew I wanted healing to be something that could be internal and external. I think that was part of the equation. Because I think a term like colorism solutions seems to be focusing just on the external piece, like what can we do with it? But I think I've come to think of healing as something that's both inside and outside. So healing our internal wounds, healing our relationships is really important. Because colorism has frayed the fabric of our communities and frayed the fabric of our families, and it is threaded, threaded, threaded. And so that's amending right like, like you said, recovering from this thing. And also seeing colorism as one of the many illnesses or diseases of society as well, and how there's a need to attend to the damage that's been done. But yeah, the healing part is the core of it. Right? As much as because of the lack of awareness about colorism, I do have to focus a lot on just like teaching this. This is what it is. Here's the history of it. Here's some statistics, here's some research. But that to me doesn't mean as much as like, Okay, here's how you work through the pain. Here's how you work through the guilt. Here's how you manage the grief of what has happened. Here's how you start to rebuild and restructure your own mindset. Because I also think of healing our colonized minds from the poison that has been put there and kind of going through detox of poison. Oh, yeah, go ahead.

Sharon 08:19

You lead us straight into, I mean, you talked about the role of education and telling people that this thing actually exists. So Lisa, and I, as she alluded to just now, have dealt with colorism all our lives. You know, everybody in our immediate families is slightly different shades. Lisa and I, I mean, you can see are different shades and people have even questioned our parentage as a result of that. So for the people that deny, can you give some examples? Can you imagine? Can you imagine?

Lisa 08:48

I mean, sometimes I just have to say, right, yeah, really open their mouths and says a mess of stuff. And I'm like, Why? Why would you even ask that question? Right, what makes you say this? Exactly. But anyway,

Sharon 09:02

let's not go down that, down that Randy road because you know, yes. So how, for the, for the people that deny it for the people that are not aware of can you give some examples of how colorism and shadeism show up in real life? I use the term shadeism, because that's the way that I originally wrote about it. But, you know, this is yeah, it's a term that's commonly used in the Caribbean more so as well. Right and how has colorism affected you personally? So two questions really in one.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 09:35

Mhmm there's a lot to face so I'll start with the second question because it maps on to your experience almost exactly. Having a dark skinned father and light skinned mother. Me and my brother are darker skinned. My sister's the middle child came out, you know several shades lighter than us, her hair textures even like a different curl pattern, her eye color is a little lighter. Our features are the same. So some people who can see past color will say, "Oh, yeah, y'all look alike." And then people who can't see past color, like "I can't believe y'all are sisters."

Sharon 10:13

Oh my gosh, I heard that so often!

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 10:15

"Y'all have the same father?" And then there's also the, I think that though made me more aware of colorism with having a sister in the household, because I think gender plays a lot into colorism. So I think if it had been like maybe my brother who was lighter skinned, I might not even have experienced certain things, but because it was, you know, a sibling of the same gender, then that made the comparisons. And it made the contrast and how people interacted with us and talked about us, and today is that much more apparent. And so go ahead.

Sharon 10:53

No, no, I just have to say that I've you know, there's so many,

Lisa 10:57

We're just here like snapping.

Sharon 10:59

Because, because, you know, there's so many times when you know, people say oh, your sister, she's the pretty one, right? Because you know, you're dark skinned, so you automatically have to be less pretty, right? Yes.

Lisa 11:11

I have dealt with, I mean, you know, I know we're literally preaching to the choir, so that this is really for everybody listening, but a subset of that is the smart, pretty dichotomy. I like to call it that right, because, you know, a part of what Sharon and I dealt with coming out of colorism was also that, you know, I was a pretty one, she was a smart one. Yeah. Right. And so which meant that, you know, for people, you know, on the outside looking in, we couldn't be both? Yeah, we couldn't, we couldn't be multi dimensional. So, you know, I was dumb but cute. No, no,

Sharon 11:53

I was I was I was smart, but unattractive,

Lisa 11:57

It's incredibly harmful. I mean, you know, I don't, I don't even know, I guess it must be. Well, I don't know who to thank for, you know that Sharon and I have come out of all of that. You know, with me, we are as you can tell, you know, we are tight. We are solid. Right. But it mentioned before it can really shred relationships. Right.

Sharon 12:19

So do you have any other examples of how it shows up?

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 12:23

Yeah. So this is where I like to talk. This is an opportunity, I think, to talk about the systemic impact, because it's not that the more personal examples, like growing up in a household are less important.

But people use that to trivialize colorism. And like, oh, well, yeah, that's sad. But we have to deal with racism, because racism is like changing how much money we make and what kind of jobs we get. But I always have to say in every conversation that there have been decades of research that prove that colorism also creates inequalities. The same exact inequalities that racism is creating. So when we talk about disparities in education created by race, there are parallels. These disparities and inequalities are based on skin tone. And speaking of siblings, some of the studies studied siblings, who grew up in the same household. So you can't say, oh, well, maybe their parents raised them differently. Or maybe they went to different schools and all these were siblings in the same household. And every time, every instance, the sibling with a lighter skin tone, was the more likely one to graduate from high school and then go to college. They earned like two and a half years on average, more education than their darker skinned siblings. When we look at statistics around income in different countries, and so this is an international research as well, in different countries, you consistently see that people have the same race who have more European features, female types who are lighter skin, have straighter hair textures, are earning more money and being hired for the more prestigious jobs. Right, the high status jobs in society are more likely to go to people who look white or who look closer to white, have lighter skin tones. And people with darker skin are both portrayed in the media, but also it maps on to how their lives play out in reality are relegated to lower status jobs, you know, menial labor jobs and you look at even the ways that the justice system and legal system processes people. And the perceptions of who is criminal, who is more violent. Who's more likely to be the victim in a scenario versus who's most likely to be the perpetrator of the crime. In this scenario, all these things are playing out in every facet of life based on the belief that darker skinned people are inherently inferior, inherently just lower class in general.

Sharon 15:00

Yeah, and, you know, it's so, so interesting that you say that because of course, you know, in the Caribbean that plays out in these, you know, these ex-plantocracy societies, right, where, you know, that's the whole way the society was set up. And you know, in my grandparents era, you had to be a certain way, you had to be a certain skin shade to get a job as a teacher or to work in a bank, or otherwise, you know, it was the agricultural sector for you. Right. And while that is not as much the case now, it still exists, there's still that perception, and you know, there is still the superiority complex of the descendants of the plantocracy. You know, they still feel a certain way in relation to their Black peers. There's still a lot of ingrained self hatred.

Lisa 15:59

I thought you were going to go with inbred, but-

Sharon 16:01

Let me not go down that road. We're keeping it classy. But no, no, and, you know, there's, as you say, you know, it's harmful, it's harmful on a systemic level. And it's a multi generational harm. Generational trauma as well, you know, it's so, so awful. Yeah. Alright,

Lisa 16:28

So one thing, something you mentioned, I think, earlier on was about, you know, the topic, of course, you know, healing and sort of one's own self evaluation, self image, and so on. And I noticed that you

talk a lot about self love. Right, you talk a lot about self love, to talk a lot about affirmations. And I am a big, I'm a big believer in affirmations. And I do, on Tiktok, all I do is affirmations. Right? But it was interesting to me to see that again, part of the healing, your healing part of your work, right. You know, you talk about self love, positive self portraits, positive self talk. So tell us more, because I am, I was fascinated to learn that. Okay, that is actually one of your, right, one of your silos that you focus on?

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 17:32

Yes. Hi. I'm not like a trained or licensed therapist, I think actually because I'm Dr. Webb, I'm online, some people have assumed I was like a psychiatrist doctor. I like, you know, a mental health doctor. So just for transparency and clarity to anyone who's listening, my PhD is in Literature and Creative Writing. So that explains in my mind, that explains my focus on, you know, symbolism and representation and the stories that we tell ourselves and the kinds of art, the power of art, the power of words, the power of speaking. And so, based on my own experience, I've said this a few times, but I don't recommend anything that I have not actually been practicing myself. So it's not like I'm just going and like reading books and saying, Oh, someone said that, that could work. It's like, no, the stuff that I recommend are things that I actively practice myself and I have used myself as a testimony of the fact that they can work like I believe they work because I've seen them transform my life. I've seen them transform my mindset, and my mentality, and my emotional state. I believe that that allows me to make this possible for others.

Sharon 18:54

Can you give an example?

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 18:55

Yes!

Sharon 18:57

Or a few or a few? Listen, I love hearing a good phrase report.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 19:06

Okay, yes, I talked about this on a recent live because I'm also dark skinned. I'm Black, I'm also single, above 35. Right, and so that has a certain sometimes stigma and the culture but I was talking about how when I was going through I think my worst bout of depression. I would wake up in the morning you know, I mean, depression is when I was calling into work like I couldn't force myself to get out of bed and get dressed and go to work. So I have to like call in at the last minute and I was a school teacher so I don't know if we have any school teachers but like calling in as a school teacher at the last minute means you're probably not gonna get a stub, it's bad, okay? It means you're really doing bad if you're going to sacrifice going to school at the last minute. But what was happening at that time in my life is as soon as I wake up in the morning, the first thoughts that would pop into my head and it wasn't even like, I wasn't thinking about it, it just popped into my head was I can't do this. So that would be the refrain in my head. As soon as I open my eyes, I can't do this, I can't do this, right. And emotionally, I felt that. And so that low state prompted me to get serious about mental health and spirituality. And I started taking therapy more seriously, I started doing workbook affirmations, collecting. When I first started affirmations, I had this blue composition notebook. And I ended up filling it with 1000s of written

affirmations that I would find in songs, movies, like quotes I would search for on the internet, I just like started writing down all the positive phrases, and I would like write them over and over and over again, like all the way down to the page. Yeah, and I would like record them, and like let them play in the morning and doing all the stuff. And then one day like, and this was relatively recently, like maybe 2017? Early, I'm gonna say 2017 I woke up and the first thought in my mind was I love you. And I remember, like, you get to a place where the balance of feel good days starts to exceed the balance of feel bad days. And I think that that was a practical way for me to start measuring my progress. It's like the amount of hours in a day, the amount of days in a week, the amount of weeks in a year, where I could say I felt happy, versus I felt sad, or I felt depressed. And that, you know, looking at this year, for example, the vast majority of my days are just like, great now, whereas years ago, I was crying myself to sleep at night and not able to get up in the morning and like, or if I woke up, I would spend two hours, just spiraling out, like mentally, like my negative self talk would just like spiral downward and get worse and just, I felt so terrible. And so again, I think that fuels my work, knowing from where I've come, and just giving people the hope that it doesn't have to stay that way for the rest of their lives. And yes, it could be a slow process sometimes and you're in it and you're like, oh, it's never gonna change. But sticking with the process and being patient and seeing just kind of like having those practical things in place where you're at the end of every week, you balance out, like how many days this week that I feel good versus how many did I feel bad? And I do believe that over time, you're gonna see that balance get to a more positive place. Wow, I kind of don't know where I was originally going?

Sharon 22:55

This is, you know, people to, you know, to know that, that you know, this works and that they can have hope and that they can heal and they can get better. And so now I want to move on to something a little, a little different. That, you know, I noticed that most if not all of your photos are taken without filters or makeup, which I personally tend to do. I personally tend to do, you see me here, short, natural hair, ball bearings, not a scrub of makeup on my face. Right? So in this age of filters and Photoshop, why is this an important part of your work? How does this relate to your work? And why is it an important choice?

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 23:34

Yes. Okay, so that doesn't remind me of something that Lisa mentioned that I wanted to bring out, which is like the positive self portraits. And so the idea of like self portraiture, and the mirror image and reflections of ourselves and like the power of photography, the power of selfies, because you know, a lot of times in our culture, we think, Oh, it's just a trivial thing, or it's just ego or they're just conceited, or they're narcissistic. But what I say is that for black women, the audacity to think you're worthy of one, having your photo taken and posting it and allowing the world to enjoy it like as a black woman, having the audacity to think that about yourself is revolutionary. Yes, come from a history and a legacy where we've constantly been told that we should not see ourselves as beautiful we should not see ourselves as worth looking at, in in a respectful way. Right? Looking at objectified or hyper sexualized, but on our own terms. I think that's why selfies are so powerful for black women, because it's the image created on our own terms. Yes, but for me, the the very transparent answers part of the answer is that I've never worn makeup. And so for me, it's not a radical transition, right? I know like Alicia Keys, for example, came out and saying like, Oh, I'm gonna stop wearing makeup. But for me, I just am not. I'm a

minimalist. I don't I never was interested in like the time and effort it would take to apply makeup. But I take that energy and I put it into like, Oh,

Lisa 25:15

I think you're my new best friend. I've been trying. For years people been fighting me on it. Oh my gosh. It's so funny because Sharon Sharon is coming to visit soon. You know, we have some stuff planned, some of which is going to involve makeup and I'm already like framing myself, for what I'm going to say to say Okay, remember, we have to apply some. Because I know you we we know we know and accept each other you know, and I accept that she is a minimalist. And she accepts that, you know, I love all the Frou Frou in the world. And we support each other, we support each other.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 26:06

Yes, but I will wear lipstick because I like color. I like that feature of my face. Yeah, I like color. And I am like I like aesthetics. Like I do like aesthetics. Like I'm very intentional about my outfits, the clothes I wear, how they fit me the combinations of things, my hair. Even though I'm a minimalist with my hair, I still appreciate like how the, I'm talking as if people can see what I'm doing. The crinkle after I untwist my hair, I appreciate the particular crinkle that it has. But I was saying is that I've taken that, you know, attention to detail that people usually apply with makeup. And I've applied it to like the style of my room or my setting or like the flower arrangements or the curtains. Right. So I think it's the same energy just applied in a different area of life. But I do think that the power to dare to look at yourself and say, one I'm worth looking at, and I'm choosing to see myself with my own eyes, not through the lens of the lies of white supremacy not through the filter. Speaking of filters, right, white supremacy, anti blackness is a filter that people have had over our perceptions of ourselves. So removing that filter of white supremacy we realize we look damn good, right? Oh, my makeup, no makeup, hair up down short, long. When you remove that filter of white supremacy, you're like, Oh,

Sharon 27:53

I love that, Sarah. I love love. Nice. That's that's the line right there. The filter of white supremacy. Speaking of which, all right. This next question is kind of related with we we kind of get into this very slightly or you did at the beginning talked about how colorism is the umbrella under that you have texturism and futurism, et cetera, et cetera. And so I want to talk about texturism. I you know, I used to have an another podcast that was really actually dedicated to black women and here I'm talking about texturism and similar things right. So it's a, it's a passion of mine because that is another mindset that absolutely needs to change. Right? So I noticed that you wear your hair natural right? I am a 4C hair queen, right. Before Sahara queen and but you know I under no illusion as to what role hair texture plays in the assessment of black beauty. Right? And so although we like you dipped into at the beginning, but can you go into more detail about how textualism plays into colorism?

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 29:12

How much time do we have?

Sharon 29:14

And employability? Employability you know, I call it I call it the Beyonce factor which and I love Beyonce. But I think you understand what I mean. Would Beyonce be Beyonce if Beyonce did not look like Beyonce. Right? Right.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 29:27

Girl of course!

Sharon 29:29

Right. So over to you.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 29:32

Oh my goodness, yes. To hair. I actually was just thinking the other day I was I was gonna I was gonna do a poll on Instagram. So my largest audience is on Tik Tok actually, but then my most engaged audience I would say is on Instagram. And I want to poll my Instagram followers in particular, about whether they think colorism or texturism has the strongest hold on us as black people because I feel, I'm feeling like I feel like the texturism thing may actually be a little more difficult to, pun intended, untangle ourselves from. Because, and here's why I think that because it's the most easily manipulated feature. It's harder to change your skin tone, it's harder to change your nose, it's harder to change the size of your lips, but your hair can change like that. And so I think for that reason, people kind of have this attitude, this subconscious attitude of, well, if I could, since I can change this I better, right because this is one feature I actually can change to be more accepted, so I better than change it. And the audacity of not changing it when it could so easily be changed? Well, that's a very audacious view, right? Because people can kind of understand okay, well, yeah, you know, you it's not much you can do about your skin tone, even bleaching creams don't work that well, right. They really just the result

Lisa 31:01

That is a whole other unfortunate. Yeah.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 31:05

In terms of hair, whether you do chemical relaxers or you know, extensions or wigs, it's so easy to change the way your hair looks. And so people don't tolerate you not changing it. The choice to not change your hair is like upsetting to black people I'm talking about us.

Sharon 31:24

Lisa 31:24

Yes!

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 31:25

The expectation is like that, that's the one thing we can control the most as black women. So we give out we give each other a really hard time about not fitting into that appearance. And I always have to explain that I'm not judging black woman's choices for their hair. Simply acknowledging the roots, the

history of where a lot of these choices come from in the first place. It's not that you're, that you hate yourself or that you're evil, or that you're doing something wrong, if you choose to straighten your hair or you know, wear straight extensions or something like that, but I think the the prevalence of it, we're doing ourselves a disservice if we do not if we try to deny that it's so prevalent amongst black women because of white supremacist violence that has been enacted against us. And I think we can practice compassion and heal from that emotional, psychological, and physical violence that made us feel we needed to change in the first place. But you're right, Lisa, that, you know, of course, white people if they're setting the standard, they're gonna make themselves a standard, and that includes hair texture, they think, Okay, well, I'm no professional. And so in order to be professional, you have to look like me, which means your hair should do. Yeah, and so you know, the Crown act, I think is is revolutionary, and is right on time. Yeah. Because for so long, we've been able to say, Oh, don't discriminate against me because I'm Black. But if you have a dress code policy, my mom worked at a bank. And they added to their dress code policy that your scalp can't be exposed. Because it was around the time where black women were wearing cornrows, cornrows were coming back into style. They were like part of the fashion of the day. And so they added to their dress code policy, no hairstyles that show your scalp. And I was like, that's clearly targeting braids.

Lisa 33:26

You know, it's a dog whistle. It's a dog whistle thing, because, you know, they haven't used the word targeting. They haven't heard the word race. They haven't used the word black. But we know what your we know what you mean. And again,

Sharon 33:37

this is this is a phenomenon that's also prevalent in post colonial societies. Obviously, because, you know, I remember, I remember going for a job in my 20s, and I had my hair in some rather beautiful braids. And I was told if you get the job, you're gonna have to lose those. Right? There are, you know, in the 80s, there were people that didn't get jobs if they had locks, right.

Lisa 33:57

I mean, can we can we can we bring it forward? I mean, yeah, yes, yes. No, no, because I guess what I want to say is that it was happening then. Yes, it is still happening. There's a, there's a school in Barbados, that shall remain nameless. Right. But, but go check on Facebook. But there's a school in Barbados that recently they recently sent out a notice, telling, and this is a black majority country. Yeah, right. saying, you know, if you're here, you're here has to be quote, unquote, tidy. Write your hair has to be, you know, can't be beyond a certain length. And if it's beyond a certain length, it has to be long. It can't stand it can't be in the air, essentially. Yeah, right. There's a whole list of things. In a black majority country run by a black female prime minister, this is a toxicity that we are dealing with.

Sharon 34:54

Yeah. And this is it is enduring, it is enduring and that's why that's why the work that you're doing Sarah is so important because, you know, black people all around the world black and brown people, people of color, you know, we need to heal from that we need to get beyond that. Definitely we need to you know, oh, it's so hurtful. Yeah.

Lisa 35:14

And then then you get into I mean I call it the Great Baby Hair Conundrum of the past several years you know that's that's another subset of it as well because, why are we so focused on it now? The beauty addict part of me is like, "oww yes, slay them edges!" Right? That's one side right? Oh yeah, drop them pearls and that bling. I love it. It's editorial and it's done by black people. Yeah. But you know, we kind of we're not gonna fully digress there. But, um, you know, I do wonder why why are people especially people with hair texture? Like my like I said, I have 4C hair, right? Um, I you are trying to get this to look like your pure Caucasian. It's like, two tubs of gel in your hair, to make it look like something that is not. And as you said before, again, aesthetically say in terms of style, nothing wrong with it. But if you feel like you can't leave the house unless your edges are asleep. That's where.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 36:29

let me tell you, Lisa, people will argue me down, I get so much hate and backlash for this perspective. Because people say Oh, well Black women should feel free to be allowed to do their hair however they want. And that's precisely my point.

Lisa 36:48

Exactly.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 36:49

If Black women are being honest, most of their hair choices are not about being free to do whatever they want with your hair. Most of our hair choices about fear. To say, "I'm too scared to leave my house without doing XYZ to my hair." And we can be in denial, and act like it's all about freedom of choice and freedom of expression. But the vast majority of us are making these choices from a place of fear, and not from a place of creativity and liberation and freedom.

Sharon 37:22

So I'll just say, that's a nice segue into my next question, which has nothing to do with hair. The activity? Yes, I've somehow found the time to be part of the LinkedIn for creators first ever incubator. So can you tell us more about how that came about? And what the experience is like?

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 37:43

Yes! So in January, like around New Year's of 2021, the very top of the new year and 2021 I knew that I had to leave both my current job and my current location. I said, Okay, I'm taking this year, to set myself up to set myself free. From this job, and from this place, I was in central Illinois. I had a tenure track professor job, you know, you know, on the surface, like, like, Oh, that's a great Oh, my gosh, you know, whatever. Whoo, but it was not it. Not where it was happening, okay. But let the lack of diversity, the level of just completely normalized whiteness, like, I mean, like, you know, they say racism is everywhere. But it's not quite the same everywhere. It was, it was at levels in central Illinois that I had never seen, and I live in Mississippi. I dont know how familiar your audience is with different locations in the United States, but I live in Mississippi, like the South of the South, and I'm from Louisiana. Yet, to me, Central Illinois was the worst. And I know I'm kind of going a long way around.

Lisa 39:10

No, it's a long way, it's a beautiful way. That's fine. Okay. Yeah.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 39:14

So there's this very phenomenon across the country called sundown towns and your sundown towns were historically cities and towns where Black people have to leave by sundown. If you're Black, you have to be out of town by sundown, or you're going to get lynched or shot or something bad's gonna happen to you. And so the state of Illinois, even though it's not known as the South, the state of Illinois to this day, when I moved there in 2018, had the highest number of sundown towns in the country. Ah, people think like, oh, no, it's not the south, we're free. Nope. Because one thing I've noticed is that the South is extremely racist, but at least there are black people there. Where I was living, it was extremely racist, and it was like 90% white, right? So you have that extra layer of like, very racist, and it's very white, which is, I just cannot bear that. Okay. The south at least I could find a historically black college, I could find like black owned businesses. And, you know, there was just like a black culture there. Okay, so I had to leave to get out of that.

Sharon 39:23

Wow.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 39:25

The job, it wasn't that much better, like my co workers and colleagues, you know, just the fact that they were content to be in a location like that says a lot. But it was just, you know, there was less than 1% of the faculty, faculty and staff were black. You know what I mean? It was just not great. I had a student, a white student, email me to ask if Black people really do smell different than white people. I was like, I don't I don't, I don't like this enough to endure that level of racism. Okay, so all of 2021 I was saving my money, I was building up initiatives and efforts through Colorism Healing. So in the fall of 2021, I think it was September. I just randomly on Facebook, saw on a LinkedIn ad promoting the Creator Accelerator Program. And I was like, this was right on time and took a shot. I think I could have a good shot at this. So I applied. And then I'm in early November, I was sitting in my sister's office and my sister is still in academia. It's her thing, it's not mine. I know that now. So I was sitting in her office on my on her campus in Texas. And I got the email, and my like, almost fainted. And they were like, congratulations, we accepted you into the Accelerator Program. And I was like, Oh my gosh, and so me and my sister we're celebrating and jumping up and down and like we went shopping. But the goal, the reason the impetus for it was. I had been holding myself back since 2011 really.

Lisa 42:06

That's super specific.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 42:09

it was the first time I blogged about colorism, okay. Okay. Okay. First time I found the courage to talk publicly about colorism was 2011. So it's a very pivotal year for me, because before I realized,

Lisa 42:22

I mean, you were 2011. I'm okay what happened in 2011.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 42:28

We wouldn't be on this podcast if it were not for 2011. You know,

Sharon 42:33

I hear that.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 42:34

And so like, I was always meant to do colorism healing full time, but I was scared. I was like, Oh, I'll go the safe route. I'll get a PhD and become a professor. And then like do colorism healing through that work? All these like ways and reasons of not really stepping into my purpose. And so this LinkedIn Creator Accelerator Program was is part of the the structure or like a milestone, that is one confirming for me that I am on my right path, I am on this path of purpose. And that I can do it because it's like, can I really make this my life? Like, can I not have a traditional job and just do colorism healing the way I want to? All these things that like, again, as Black women, and as a dark skinned Black woman who's kind of like you're made to feel like you have to like play it safe, right? Like, I can't dare to dream and who am I to think that I can live the life of my dreams and all these things. And so the Creator Accelerator Program was like, the first big thing that was like, Girl, if you don't get, you don't get to step in. And I really applaud LinkedIn for how they structured the program, right? They gave us complete autonomy over what we would post over how we would post it. They gave us you know, parameters around how often so we had to post four times a week.

Sharon 44:00

Mm hmm.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 44:01

And in my mind, I was like, I'm trying to post seven to 14 times. In my mind,

Lisa 44:07

Because I mean, cuz it means you're already. I mean, you're right, right, you I mean, you're churning out content, at a rate. I'm like what in the world!

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 44:17

Right, sounds like a bet like four times a week. I was like this, you know, very, very easy for me to do. But the only difference was that, for the Accelerator Program, it had to be original to LinkedIn. And I think there's like, Okay, this is more work than I was anticipating. Because I can't like reuse that for Instagram. It was like, fresh. It has to be original and unique to LinkedIn. So it was like an extra thing. It was more work than most of us really thought. But it was worth it. It was worth putting in the extra effort to create exclusive content for LinkedIn. And I like my engagement and my audience has grown so much since then, and it's really a goal of mine, was to tap into the business world, right and teach, to educate business owners, business leaders, managers, supervisors about this thing that's impacting their employees that's impacting them right as leaders, and thinking about their biases, net perceptions of darker skinned clients, or darker skin employees, or darker skinned co workers or co workers with natural hair, co workers with like big lips and a big nose. And like all these stereotypes and implicit biases and explicit biases, and disparities that are happening in the workplace. I knew if I wanted to

reach that audience that LinkedIn would be like a great place to start expanding my reach there because so much of Instagram and TikTok and Facebook has been just, you know, people, just the general population, and not necessarily people who are who are thinking about how to apply it in the workplace or in professional settings, I think that might have responded to your question.

Lisa 46:07

Yes, yes, you did. Absolutely. And and thanks. Thank you for that. Um, of course, you know, we're the Introvert Sisters. And so, you know, we're planning to ask you, we were planning to ask you whether or not you're an introvert. But then, but then I saw one of your recent essays, titled On Being a Single, Dark Skinned Black Woman. And I'm going to right, so I'm gonna read, I'm gonna read this excerpt, right. And it says, "I would measure every potential relationship based on how it compares to my solitude. There's really no competition. It helps that I'm introverted, but there's no one's company I enjoy more than my own. I love people. But I'm not waiting on anyone to start living. I'm not waiting on anyone to join me in my adventure of a life. I've always been that girl going places and doing things solo, because I wasn't going to keep myself from things I enjoyed and desire to do, simply because others weren't interested in joining me. And we are seeing more and more dark skinned black women really embracing this." And I was like, oh, okay, all right. So I read I read this and of course it okay. Well, first of all, the introversion question has an answer right. So I see intersections between you know, the, you know, introversion, colorism, you living the life of your dreams being happily single, like there's a lot packed in there. This is just, this is just an excerpt. Right? And it's a two essay, it's a two essay series? Right?

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 47:52

Two part essay.

Lisa 47:53

And so tell us more. Tell us more about all of this juiciness that I just read. How we arrived there and have you always know that you're an introvert and right, all this stuff? How do all these intersections play out for you?

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 48:11

Oh, this is so juicy. I'll finally tie it into the conversation around colorism because my sister is naturally extroverted. And I think her being lighter skinned that added to her popularity is that she not only was like she lighter skin, but she was very extroverted. And she she was like always meeting new friends. And me being darker skinned and introverted. People often thought she was a nice one. And I was mean, I wasn't mean I'm just introverted, and have a little bit of social anxiety. You know what I mean? Yeah. And so that's an interesting, you know, perception and the way people project that onto you. But, so that being said, I always knew I was introverted, even though I didn't even before I knew what that word meant, like, just in terms of developing my vocabulary. I always knew that my leanings were to solitude. My sister, my sister often teased me because I was, again, that little girl playing by myself, and she used to say, Why are you talking to yourself? I'm like, I'm not talking to myself. I'm talking to my imaginary friends. Yeah. Other kids like they want to play with other people, other humans. And I was totally fine, just me and my imagination. Right and always knew about myself, and I always felt comfortable in that. Although I will say, introverts, especially it's getting better now. But like, I remember

one time going on a family trip, and I brought a book with me. That's not something uncommon for introverts to do, like on a trip or whatever, yes. And so someone got mad because they thought I was being anti social. They're like, why don't you overhear talking to people? You know, you're, you're visiting family and you're sitting over in a corner reading a book that's so rude. And I just saw like, I was so confused y'all, I was so confused and hurt, that, my natural way of choosing existing was felt so natural to me to sit on the porch and read a book and someone was taking offense to that, right. But it also just gave me like peace throughout my life. I was on another podcast and someone was, you know, talking about the power of introversion, they were they themselves said that they were extroverted. And the way they put it, there was like, I wish I was more introverted, because then I wouldn't be so thirsty for other people's attention.

Lisa 50:43

Honesty, though. Yeah. Honesty, I respect that.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 50:49

Yes, I appreciate that honesty. But I think that allowed me to be more independent and to not give in to peer pressure. So I'll give one specific example. I there was, I was in high school, and there were a group of girls I had been hanging out with and eating lunch with. And you know, in high school cafeterias, like, oh, what table you're gonna sit at, you don't want to be alone. And I just got a bad vibe from these girls. And they were like, getting up to go do something that I didn't want to do just morally and ethically was not part of who I was. And so I said, you know, I'll pass like, Y'all go ahead, I'm just gonna stay back. And so I sat at this long cafeteria table by myself. Um, and I think those kinds of moves, one are necessary and important. But also, because I was introverted. I think I had more power to do that. I was more empowered to do that to stand in my own integrity. But what I also saw was that there were a couple of other people who started staying back with me. Me having the courage to sit at the table alone, made other people realize, you know, I don't have to follow these mean girls either.

Lisa 52:00

You gave them, you gave them permission. Yeah, you gave them permission.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 52:05

Oww! Thank you, Sarah, because I didn't want to go hang out with them either. You know, I felt like I had to.

Sharon 52:10

I love the power of introversion there. That is wonderful.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 52:15

So yeah. I think going into this being single thing. I definitely had my period, I was on TikTok. And I saw a young woman that I empathize with so much, saying how she's about to turn 30. And she just, you know, hopes that God sends her someone to share life with because she's never been in a relationship. And unfortunately, she says she's also never been close to her family, which I think has made a difference for me in terms of like, okay, yeah, I haven't had a romantic partner. But I'm, like, best friends with my sister. And my mom, I talked to them every day and that kind of thing. But I remember when I

was about to turn 30, like, you know, late 20s Not being scared or like sad. But I was about to turn 30 and I had never been in a relationship. Never had a boyfriend or anything like that, and like much less gotten married, right. And so I've been there and so I don't want my celebration of self love and like contentment and being happily single to make other people feel bad about where they are, because I but I think I'm able to enjoy it so much more now precisely because I have been down and out about it in the past. And I feel this like sense of liberation and freedom very similar to you know, when I went natural and, you know, when I started opening up about colors and and finding the courage to do that. Like it's just this ever evolving, ever expanding form of freedom and liberation, you know, multiplying into other areas of my life. And being single was one of those things where I was still trapped just like people can still be trapped in wanting to straighten their hair, you can still be trapped and wanting to bleach their skin. I was still trapped and feeling like I needed like a romantic relationship and feeling terrible, terrible because I didn't have that validation. And now I'm free from that, you know, and I don't know if I'm like fully free from it. Like tomorrow I could like end up crying because I see a wedding. I don't know but, I'm way more free than I was a few years ago.

Lisa 54:17

Oh, yeah, we all we all have that script, right? Whether we mean it's kind of like in the ether all around us. Right? We all probably no matter where we grew up in the world, there's this script, you know, you especially, especially for girls, right? Yeah. You know, you you know, first of all be a nice girl, be good girl, be a nice girl and then grow up get married young, 2.5 kids, golden retriever, etc. Right. And, and so therefore it's so ingrained that any variation from that makes you feel, you know, like, makes you feel less than except right Right. Right.

Sharon 54:56

Okay, so say that again, It's so important to separate yourself from that. And so it sounds like that's what you've been able to do. And you know, that's really, really wonderful. And you know, I guess it's, it's a journey, isn't it? It's a journey. And you know, my last question for you is that your mantra is "Breaking Through in 2022." And I really love that idea. So are you breaking through and what else, big, have you got planned for this year?

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 55:15

your mantra is "Breaking Through in 2022." So what are you breaking?

Lisa 55:35

We did, we did a little research, we did a little research!

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 55:43

I have to I have to shout out my mantra from 2021, which is "Getting it Done in 2021." Okay, so there's this overarching mantra, um, "follow all hunches and pull no punches" like that, again, being more comfortable and confident in my spirituality, like trusting my intuition, like okay, my hunch is to go left and sort of go, right. You know, trusting that more often and seeing how the magic that happens when when you go as you are guided. And so breaking through, has a lot to do with what I was saying about, you know, having played small in the past, having held back. So like breaking through the self

sabotage, breaking through the the self doubt that says, I can't do that, or who am I to do that? So breaking through my own self imposed limitations, and you know, it's only March.

Lisa 56:39

Right, right, right. It's only March. Early days yet.

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 56:44

It's early days. I will say I am breaking through in the sense of part of me was like, Okay, I'm traveling the world. And I went ahead and booked Airbnb in different cities. And I on my own I was like, Okay, I was like, I was scared to like book Airbnb ease and like, am I really gonna go here? Do all these things by myself? But like, I did it, and so now I'm committed because you can't, I did like one month reservations, and there's no refund for one month. I'm like, I'm either going like, just forfeit the money or imma go. So I think that is like a tangible, like concrete milestone that I've seen. I'm looking forward to just push continuing to push myself out of my comfort zone for the next, what, nine months?

Sharon 57:35

Okay. That is wonderful. Thank you so much, Sarah. This was a healing and empowering conversation for us and hopefully also for our listeners and viewers. Thank you very much. Please be sure to follow Dr. Sarah Webb everywhere LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, her website we will drop all the links in the show notes. Thanks again to our sponsor, All Things Equitable, we make it easy to be equitable. Thank you for being here and for listening, and we will catch you on the next episode. Bye!

Dr. Sarah L. Webb 58:11

Thank you.

Lisa 58:21

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