

E12: Antiracist Parenting in the Context of Multiracial Families

Co-hosts: Soojin Pate and Hannah Carney

Guest: Melissa Beck

Intro (music by Mike Myth Productions):

SooJin: Welcome to the Antiracist Parenting Podcast, where we're working to create an antiracist world for ourselves, our children, and future generations to come.

Hannah: We are Hannah Carney and Soojin Pate. And we're coming to you not as experts but as parents who want to share our missteps and successes in raising antiracist children. Thank you for being on this journey with us, as we work together to build a community of antiracist parents who are raising a generation of antiracist kids.

SooJin: Welcome to Episode 12. Today, we continue our series on multiracial families with another special guest. But before we get to that, we have an exciting announcement for our listeners. We are launching what we are calling APP University standing for Antiracist Parenting Podcast University. And we're launching our first seminar starting this Fall it's going to run from September to January. And we'll talk a little bit more about that at the end of the show. But we're just really excited to be able to offer this learning and self-education opportunity for our listeners and also to expand, you know, our, our cadre of antiracist parents and caretakers. So and before we get to our special guest, we want to do our accountability check in and this is, as a reminder, our check in where Hannah and I come together and talk about the commitments that we made from the last episode. So Hannah, do you want to start us off?

Hannah: Yes, I'm so excited for APP University. And we will explain as Soojin said, like at the end of the podcast more about that, and also excited to meet our guest. And just to give listeners an idea of what I had committed to from last episode, I had two commitments. So the first was to make a donation to Kanoa Karakoa, which was a project that Kale had lifted up in our discussion. And so I did that one. And then my other thing was around paying attention to how shaming is showing up in my parenting practice. So overall, I noticed a few times where I kind of caught myself and apologized to my kids. And the way that I think about shaming is separating who the person is, and what behavior they are engaged in. So for example, one of my kids was doing something gross. And I found myself saying, you, you are gross, and that is shaming because it basically is telling them that their core being is something undesirable, and that can translate to the kid believing that they are actually gross and therefore unlovable. So I reframed and said, you know what, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that. You are not gross, and I love you. However, the thing that you are doing is grossing me out. And I'd like you to stop. And so that's kind of how I'm handling this right now is just trying to catch myself and reframing to focus on the behavior. And then also not feeling shame myself, if and when I do engage in shaming

behavior. So recognizing that I'm not a bad parent, I'm just learning how to better communicate with my kids. So that's where I'm at on that one, I have a couple other things I'd like to share - if that's okay SooJin - before your update.

SooJin: Of course.

Hannah: So I wanted to just share with our listeners that one of my kids has been displaying some challenging behaviors since our last episode. And we're in the process of engaging a family therapist to help us work through that together. And I'm sharing this because I want us to normalize asking for help within our community. So I just wanted to share that. That is an ongoing thing. And it's in process. So just wanted to talk about that. And then the last thing I wanted to follow up on was last episode I had mentioned that our kids are doing or were planning at that point, but now this has taken place, leading a Storytime with their peers to talk about race and racism. So in total, 14 kids attended. And we had a really great conversation. The kids - it was a multiracial group. The kids were very in tune with the feelings of the main character in the book, they agreed that he was experiencing both racism and bullying. And many of the kids were familiar with the term racism. And the kids were ages four to eight years old. And they really had a solid grasp of what racism looks like. I felt that every kid contributed to creating a brave space. And I was super thankful to my spouse, John, who made it a priority to have Storytime be a family experience. I really loved that he showed our kids by being present, that talking about hard things is important. And it's something that both Mama and Dad care about. So thank you to everyone who was at the Storytime and we're thinking through what a future offering might look like. We definitely learned a few things about making it run more smoothly in the future. Tony had the idea to let the adults share their thoughts and feelings and questions next time. So anyway, just wanted to give a little update on that.

SooJin: Oh, great. Thanks for that. I was just curious, like, how did your son respond when you apologized? And reframed?

Hannah: Yeah, I think it was helpful. I feel like that probably made him feel better about the interaction and maybe made him feel like, more like he could be himself. You know, like, because I don't think that he was really doing the thing that he was doing to be obnoxious, or like, annoying or anything. Like, I just think he's just kind of figuring out his body and like, and so I get frustrated and grossed out. I think it was good just to like, help him feel like you know, seen for where he's at in his development. And to not feel that like it's wrong or bad or something like that.

SooJin: So I, too, made the commitment to donate to Kanoa Karakoa. And so I was able to purchase two snorkeling kits, based on my donation. And then the second thing was, I made a commitment to begin planning for future episodes that focus on toxic masculinity, which came as a question that Kale

asked that, you know, he would like for us to examine in future episodes. So, you know, how does toxic masculinity show up in our lives and in our parenting so that we're not passing it on to our children. And that is a series that will be forthcoming, probably in the fall. And I already have a few guests lined up already, and so excited to continue to grow that series. So that's it for me. Hannah, can you set the intention for today's episode?

Hannah: Yes. And thank you for taking the lead on that series around masculinity that will be really important. So thank you. So our intention for today is to locate and listen to our quiet confidence that exists within each of us as we navigate our antiracist parenting or caretaking journey, and to ask for help when we need it.

SooJin: Lovely, lovely. Okay, so it's my honor and privilege to be able to introduce our listeners to our very special guest for today, Melissa Beck. And Melissa and I, we met at an AAPI Black History Month event that was sponsored by Act to Change, where we were invited to talk about anti-Blackness in the Asian American community. And we totally connected totally vibed. I think all of the panelists that were invited to that event, we were totally vibing off of each other. And as we were preparing, Hannah and I, were preparing for the series on multiracial families, I was just thinking like, oh, my goodness, Melissa, you need to be on our show. And so she graciously accepted our invitation, and she's here today. So, before I ask you to introduce yourself to us, I was wondering, would you like to set, do you have an intention that you'd like to set for today's episode our conversation today?

Melissa: I actually when Hannah just said something about quiet confidence. I wanted to share a small story about how important it is to actually really embrace the choices that you make, even if you think that maybe they're not the right thing to do. And I say that because I have, I'm coming in on the tail end of a full entire year of being enrolled in remote learning with my two little girls. So I have a kindergartner and a second grader. And we've all been in this house for 15 months. And my second grader came to me literally just last week, so when you said quiet confidence, it was like, oh, good, I'm where I need to be. She came to me and she said, Mommy, I'm overwhelmed. Because we had been in the house for this long and I figured, okay, we're coming on to the tail end of it. Everybody's vaccinated. And this is a child who has, you know, been cut off from her world outside. And so we have put her, we've enrolled her slowly, but surely, we're baby stepping into outside. She takes a little soccer class in a backyard with four other little girls, masks. She's enrolled in Krav Maga now, which is like Israeli self-defense, where they actually speak Hebrew. So there's a little bit of immersion there. She has an art class, and she has she joined softball, so a lot of things outside. And, you know, she was tired, she, it's a lot, it's a lot of change from being in the house all day to now doing a lot of stuff in preparation for, you know, outside opening. And when she came to me and said she was overwhelmed in my mind, as an adult, we feel that every day. And for some reason, I don't know what it was, you know, sometimes your mom brain tells you to stop and really, truly listened to your child, because

you're so involved in getting the hour-to-hour thing done that you don't hear the child. But for some reason I stopped and I said, you know what, first of all, overwhelmed is a big word for a second grader. So clearly she feels it and understands it. So I said, you know, I don't even know if this is allowed, but you're not going to log in to Zoom school today. I'm going to email your teacher. And I'm going to say you're taking a personal day. Do they allow second graders to have personal days? I don't know. But in this household we do. So I got crafts out, I put them on the table, I put every snack out and in you know, little hands' reach. And I said I don't care what you do today, as long as it's quiet. So you know, you can rest and relax. And I got misty eyed because 20 minutes later, I see her with my bottle of cleaning spray and paper towels, and she's wiping down the bathroom. And I'm like, what are you doing? And she the word she said was I'm helping.

SooJin: Oh my goodness.

Melissa: And I was just like, I know I made the right choice in letting her have a personal day. But that this little person is now taking the time that I gave her and bestowed upon her to do her own thing. She's helping me because I felt so seen as a mom, you know, because you do all this invisible labor in the background. And you don't think anybody cares or notices, but my kids did. And I was just like, wow. So I was so happy. It was like a cyclical. I take care of you and you take care of me -

SooJin: Yeah.

Melissa: - moment. And so my intention is, you know, in sharing that story is as moms, you know, really listen to your kid, when they share something with you. And, you know, do the thing that you don't think you should do. I don't know that eight-year-olds need a personal day. But hey, for us, it was very warm moment that we shared. And it was nothing. It was tiny. It was small. But when you said quiet confidence, I just was like, yeah, that.

SooJin: Oh my gosh, Melissa, that is such an incredible story! And thank you for modeling what fantastic parenting looks like. Wow, that is amazing that you listened and believed your child and you gave her what she needed. And in turn, she gave you what you needed, like self-care is collective care. It truly is.

Melissa: Yes.

SooJin: Wow, that is so beautiful.

Melissa: And everything inside me told me not to give her - because that sounds crazy. Yeah, an eight-year-old needs a break? But children do need breaks. And I remember my husband came home early.

And you know, she was not in our makeshift classroom. And he was like, what's she doing out here? And I remember being like, this is not an open conversation to have in front of her. Because I knew as the dad who's not the primary parent that he would go into why is she not in class? And I didn't want that energy. Yeah, he just had this understanding. I was like, we'll talk about it later. You know, just be because I needed her to feel like this is what we do. Yeah, this is out of the norm.

SooJin: Yes.

Melissa: And I'm going to start incorporating that. When you know, regular outside life opens, it's not something that I had ever considered or thought of, until pandemic, but now here we are - kids need a break. Just like moms need a break.

SooJin: Yeah. Oh, so beautiful. Okay, so, I mean, we, we are learning so much about you just in that little narrative that that you shared. But now I know that our listeners are like, okay, who is this woman? So who are you? Where do you come from? And what do you do?

Melissa: Okay. Hi, good morning. Thank you so much for having me. First of all, I'm very excited to be a part of this. When we did meet during Black History Month, SooJin, I remember emailing you immediately and be like, oh, gosh, I hope I'm not too forward. But I had read, you know, in your bio, that that you had this podcast, and I was like, I need to do this podcast. So I was so excited when we got together and you invited me on with you and Hannah. My name is Melissa Beck. Formerly Melissa Howard. Your listeners if they are in their 30s and 40s, they might know me from MTV's *The Real World: New Orleans*. I was featured on that show in the year 2000. So many, many moons ago. I came into that show as the half-Black, half-Filipino cast member. I don't know if you watch the show, but the show is like, you know seven strangers picked to live in the house. There's usually one female person of color - that was me. Since that time, I left that show. I did a couple other things in TV but I ultimately found my calling which you know, sounds cliché and corny but it was motherhood. I married my husband. His name is Justin Beck. He is a musician and owns a merchandising company. So we met through that MTV channel and have since had three daughters. I have a sixth grader named Shalom. I have the second grader Mazia (sp?) - Mazia "Personal Day" Beck. And I have a kindergartener named Shira, my husband is Jewish, I converted to Judaism. And so we are raising a very super multicultural family here on Long Island.

SooJin: Wow. Okay, I feel like this podcast could be easily three hours long just based on your intro. Okay, but we're going to tighten it up. We don't have three hours. So with that said, our general question that we've been asking all of our guests, is how are you raising your children to be antiracist, especially in this context of a very multicultural family? You know, Black, Asian, Jewish, like, yeah, so if you wouldn't mind sharing a little bit.

Melissa: I think that when we talk about antiracist parenting, in practice, we have to first talk about how we live our everyday life, in learning how to see. So a lot of the messages that we get as young people and then that we go into, as we, you know, bring these babies into the world to become full and whole people is that we should not see the whole thing of colorblindness. Yeah, we don't see color. And we don't do this. And we don't do that. And I think that that is just a short sighted and wrong message, I think that children should see. So one of the most important parts of how my husband and I have come together to raise these girls is I had a conversation with him very early on in our relationship before we had children. Where I said, you know, I explained my experience as a half-Black, half-Filipino girl growing up in a mostly white environment, and explained that every day, somewhere down the line, someone reminded me that I was not like them, but at the same time, I was getting an outside message that no one should see the color and I'm like, but if you don't see the color, then you don't see me. And I don't want to raise our children to not see. I want them to see and ask questions. And so a lot of the practice of antiracist parenting is really just immersing your kids in environments where people don't look like them. And where they are allowed to ask questions. And those questions are not asked in hushed tones. So when I say that, I mean like, if you take your child and this has happened - if you take your child into, say, an Asian supermarket. And you know, I grew up going to Asian supermarkets, so I'm familiar with the smell. An Americanized child who doesn't go into those kind of supermarkets would be like, ew, what's that smell? So like that right there is a lesson. That right there is, okay. First, we don't say that, obviously, you notice a smell. But think about all the things that are in this supermarket. And so you take that, and you make the thing that was negative about what they noticed that was different from their everyday regular, probably mostly white environment. And you flip it, and you make it a lesson on this is who we are, this is what we do. And this is what we're doing right now. And so my husband and I, you know, it, we had to get to a place where it was okay to talk about things, those things, because he while being Jewish, you know, still grew up, seen and perceived as a white person. And was raised not to talk about this stuff. And I was like, we're not doing that we're going to talk about all of it. And so, you know, as a result, we, you, my kids, I take great care and effort to expose them all the time. And a lot of times it feels I think probably for white parents to like, branch out and like, seek this stuff, they can sometimes feel out of their element, and like it's doing too much. But I think it's so important to do, because I don't ever want my children to be the kids in the group that you know, whisper things about, oh, look at that Asian guy. Look at that... I don't want it to all of that is born in we're not supposed to notice the differences. And I'm saying we're allowed to and that's okay. And it's so cool. So that's the foundation of my antiracist parenting is every day, if there is a lesson, give it. Even if you're not ready, even if it's hard, and you don't have the words, recognize that it's a lesson that needs to be taught and, you know, just normalize *seeing*. That is so important. I don't know where we got this message that we don't see color. I don't know why that took off. But we have to undo that.

SooJin: I love what you're saying. Because what you're essentially saying is like, we need to normalize difference instead of normalizing sameness. Because sameness is a myth. And it's a lie. And it's I mean, it's not true, right? I mean, like life, natural life is full of diversity, it is full of different things. And so why so like lean into that, and become really good at seeing difference and recognizing difference in a way that isn't denigrating, that isn't like ew, right? Like, like what you were saying. Yeah, yeah. I was wondering, so given just how multi-layered and multiracial your family is, do you have conversations around identity with your children? Like how they identify, and if so, what does that look like? What does that sound like?

Melissa: Yes. So, um, we don't have hours, but I'll make it quick. So being a biracial person and having two siblings, so I have a brother and a sister. As you know, genetics as they are, we all came out different. So if you saw my brother, you would just see a young Black man. If you saw my sister, you would see someone who looks like you know, you would go hmm, I wonder what she is and you would think I bet she's half-Black, half-Asian, or you would think she was maybe you know, she's gotten Samoan before. You would try to guess on what she is what you would understand that there's an element of, you know, Black in there. So then with me, I came out looking the way that I look, light skinned. My hair can do different things, and I have a kind of racially ambiguous look. And so all three of us growing up in the same household, same parents, all were perceived differently. And so we each went in different zones. So you know, my sister, I would say she is you know, a southern Black Auntie, she's into Jesus, she, you know, she identifies as a Black woman. Whereas if I said that I identify as a Black woman looking the way that I do the outside perception, which I should not be concerned about. I also want to say that for biracial people, your concern is not how people perceive you, your concern is how you live in your body. That would not be as easily accepted. And so when I brought my three children into this space into this world, and they look the way that they look, they each three look different. The little one looks like a little tiny version of me, the middle one looks kind of Asian, light skinned, so you would think she was you know, maybe half white, maybe half, you wouldn't guess Filipino, you'd guess maybe Chinese. And then the older one, you know, is kind of like a white girl. So they all three, and it's amazing how that has sort of put them in different spaces, in their little social realms. So but what's interesting is my middle one who is the second grader, I don't know what it is, I guess, you know, you just through osmosis have these things, she is what I would say, my Blackest child. Sounds crazy, but you know, she will see people with braids and be like, I want that. Her hair can't do that. But she wants that. And obviously, we don't know where it came from. But obviously it comes from a space where all of that is normal to her. So when she sees a Black woman with braids, she doesn't not see herself, because she has my dad who is a Black man, she understands. That's a part of me. And so when I've had to say you, your hair can't do that she's like, but I don't, I'm not understanding. So really, their pictures of themselves, I freely let them have it. And I don't say you know, what you are and what you are not, but they know they are Filipino, Black, and Jewish. And in that they can go and explore. None yet have asked what that means. Because I don't think that they

think it's weird or different. I wish I could explain it. We're all in here kind of just you know, on our own little island just being. And my job is to control the being while we're in here. Because when you send them out into the world, that's where they get those messages of what are you? You can't do that because you're this and you're that or you're not Black or you're not this you're not that - those messages come from out there. And so I only can do what I can do in here. But yeah, they don't wonder what they are because I've told them every day what they are and who they are.

SooJin: So what are you doing to prepare the being in this world so that when they do meet those messages outside of the environment, you know, the loving environment that you're curating in your home space? Like what are some of the things that you're doing to like, prepare them?

Melissa: Well, here I go with one of my long winded stories. My middle one, Mazia, just got her iPad taken away. She got her iPad taken away because she was playing that Roblox game. And I monitor their usage. So on the Roblox game I had noticed on my phone on my app, I can see what she's doing. And she hadn't had very much activity. So I was like, oh, interesting. Maybe she just got over that game. But then I went and I checked on her and she was playing the game. And I was like, how are you playing the game if I don't see activity on my app? And I noticed that the kid – smart - set up a whole new separate account and was using it any which way, having conversations and she was in there with a little girl from her Zoom class. And I can go in and I can see their chats. Mazia set up her avatar, her character as a Black girl. Her friend had a question about that. Her friend said why does your avatar look like a Black girl? You have white skin. So now I'm reading these chats and I'm like, oh my gosh, here it is. Here's the message. It's time to do the learning. Oh, no. But also why is she in here chatting. I told her not to chat.

All: laughing.

SooJin: And she created a separate account so she couldn't be monitored. Like what?

Melissa: Right. So I'm in here, like I told you not to, but also are you going to answer these questions?

All: Yes.

Melissa: So now I'm like scrolling through the chat, like getting my fingers are tingling trying to see like, how did my child - what are the messages that I've given? And how is she going to receive these messages? And Mazia was, it was just so simple. She was just like, no, I can do that. And you can too. And the girl goes, yeah, but your skin's white. And she was like, okay, but not really. And she was like, Yes, it is. And Mazia goes, if you think about it, no one is. I'm just, you know, this. And I can see she

didn't have because, you know, you don't have the words when you're little. You don't have the words when you're an adult.

SooJin: Yes.

Melissa: So I can see where she was trying to go. And finally, it ended up in, do you remember the Martin Luther King thing the teacher told us? And I'm thinking, oh, she's really going to take it all the way back to the civil rights movement. And her story, the way she explained it to the little girl was, Martin Luther King made it so that you and me could be friends. And this doesn't have to matter. So you could do it too. And I remember being so proud of her, because that could have devolved into a whole other weird conversation, it could have required me now talking to this girl's mom, like. She got it taken away, so she's not talking to anybody. And I'm not talking to anybody's mom. But...

SooJin: It could have also devolved into her, like seeing just even being questioned by her friend as some kind of internalized shaming moment.

Melissa: Right.

SooJin: She could like, something is wrong with me because I chose a Black avatar, right? And she did not even go there. Not even an ounce not even an inch, because of just how strong she is, in her sense of identity, which is what you helped curate and develop. This is why it is so important people!

Melissa: Yeah. And like, I felt like, here I am, like, you know, your armpits start sweating. You're like, oh God, I don't want to get this wrong. I don't want to say the wrong thing. And here she is. She just, you know, she was like, were you not paying - it was so simple, her response - were you not paying attention in class? You're not supposed to care about that part remember? And also, we could all do this. Here are all the options, you could pick them too, why are you not? So and I can't tell if it's, um, I don't want to give myself just all the credit. I think a lot of it is truly again, putting them in environments where they see everything all the time. So you know, this sounds so silly, but we go to the dim sum spot in Chinatown, not to the gentrified one we go to you know, we, since they're little, we take them to Afropunk, which there's some weed smoking in there, and you got to navigate how you're going to do it. But um, it's I really do think it's about exposure, so nothing that my kids see is weird or not like them.

SooJin: Yeah. That's really beautiful. Um, I remember when you had during the event, you had talked about colorism and your family. And you're kind of alluding to that just talking about just how the different shades you know, that are represented not only among your siblings, but also among your children. You had shared that colorism was rampant in your family. And I'm wondering how if you're

doing anything differently in your parenting, where that's not being reproduced, like among your children?

Melissa: Yes. And this is not to disparage my mom. But you know, Filipino, colonialism, things happen and there has been an importance and a desirability placed on being light skinned and my mother would make open commentary about how light skinned I was and how you are so mestiza (you are so pretty). And my sister and I, in our adult lives, have unpacked that and talked about it together. And she was like, you don't know how it would feel for me when mom would say those things. And she, my mother did, you know also again, didn't have the tools or the resources to understand that what she was saying could be hurtful to her children, or how we would be internalizing that. And, you know, I also early on didn't, I was told I was the pretty one, I was told, and I, and I was told that we look alike, but I was told I was the pretty one, because I was light, and I, I started to unpack that and understand it. And then I really started to get to the heart of it, and my sister would be like, it would really hurt me. So, I make it a very clear point that all of my kids, even though they're varying, and they tan differently. And they this and that, we all it is not a I don't make any commentary about any of that. All of it is about and you know, it's hard, you have children, and you love your children and your children are, are a reflection of you. And of course, you're going to be like, oh my gosh, you're so gorgeous, I love you, I wish I had your hair and da-da-da-da-da, but I also every time we pay them compliments, they are rooted in how smart you are, how funny you are, how cool you are, how interesting you are, how resourceful you are. The little one is extremely cute. That is true. So she is a little vain, because we do remind her. But I think it's so important to make sure that especially with girls, that you lead with compliments that are not about how they look or how they present. And instead with, with compliments about who they are and what they can do. Kindness, you know, you're so kind that was so smart of you that you, you know, thought to put the chair there so you can get up to here. Little stuff, and they pick up on that. But then also, when you do pay them those compliments that are about their beauty, that you teach them to say thank you and accept that because I remember for also a very long time because I had been told I was the pretty one. And then I was made to feel bad about it. Because my sister didn't like that I was told I was a pretty one. I did not know how to take a compliment. And like that's as an adult woman that's like, so annoying and gross. When you're like, like really grow up, someone paid you a compliment, just say thank you and move on. But I've had to learn that in my adult life. So my children have no shortage of confidence. Because, you know, I say, wow, you're so cool. You're so smart. And then lastly, you're so pretty. And they'll be like, thanks. I know, thank you. But it's an important skill set for a child to accept a compliment and don't do that self-deprecating thing that I spent all of my life undoing.

Hannah: So I have a question. What do you as parents either use as sort of resources? Or like, do you have children's books or toys or things that you use as sort of like to facilitate those conversations? Like what have you found helpful?

Melissa: Yes, um, so very early on, I started creating their library. As a Jewish family, there's a thing called PJ Library, you can sign up and free books will come to your house forevermore. You don't even have to be Jewish. Free books PJ Library, they come to your house and as your children, you enter their age and all of that. And as your children age up, the books come addressed to them for their age group, and it their real time stories about you know, Jewish identities. So I remember getting I was, I had my oldest one. And then I was pregnant with my middle one. And I remember getting a book called my sister something. And it was a book about an older sister getting a baby sister. So it tracks like your life process and your life journey. And the books come and they sort of speak to like that kid where they are. But also it teaches about the Jewish holidays. So I've been signed up for that for maybe eight years now. And so and the books come You know, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and they're all age appropriate stories where we can, you know, have our kids read in an understanding level about our Judaism and our faith. But then also, I have always been a big proponent of all the books about, about Black, about Filipino, about Korean, even stuff that we ain't. I get it. So we have books about Indian food. We have there are really cute hardcover books about all the different kinds of cuisine and I find that food is one of the best ways to raise an antiracist child, actually, because food is where you teach a child that different is okay. You don't have to like it, but you do have to be respectful. And that's a hard intangible lesson when you're talking about people. But when you're talking about cuisine, they can get it. So like, even just, you know, when my mom comes to visit, and she cooks me traditional Filipino stuff that I don't know how to do, she must be so ashamed. You know, we have them focus, and they pay attention. And you know, things smell different. And things look different, and they taste different. But this is what we do. So you know. And I know that sounds like so simple, but people don't think about it like that. So you know, when you have your child, you bring them to an Indian restaurant, you know, you try to open them up. I mean, I'm annoying. I asked the waiter questions and all kinds of stuff. But every day is a way to immerse your kids. But as far as books, I think that it's important. And I've also started to collect the, you know, the LGBTQ books. So I don't know if you remember this, but a long time ago, maybe it was on Oprah. That book came out *My Princess Boy*. And at the time, when that book came out, it was like groundbreaking crazy, oh my gosh, a little boy is going to wear a dress. But now, as you see, and things take time, that is so normalized. But I remember having that book for when my big one who's now in sixth grade was little, and I have still been reading it to, to my little one now. And that is all very normal to them. So I feel like if it's available to them, and they can pick it off of the shelf as though it was Charlotte's Web or as though it was, you know, Eric, Carle, may he rest in peace. That sense of normalizing like this is just in our house. And this isn't here because it's less than this is here because I just think it's fun. This is here because I think it's cool. So a lot of it is like not packaging it as a lesson and packaging it as oh yeah, here we are. This is just like, you know, brushing our teeth. This is just like drinking water. These are the books we have in our home.

Hannah: Thank you super helpful. Before we do kind of a lightning round part. Is there anything you would like to promote like a business or project endeavor initiative? Anything that you just would like to share with our listeners?

Melissa: I do I have a podcast too. It's called Imperfect Strangers. It's not I wouldn't say it's educational. It's a little silly. But it's me getting to know another mom. And interestingly, she's a white woman in Ohio. So Midwest, and sometimes topics of race have come up. And they have been uncomfortable conversations or they've been, you know, enlightening conversations. But that's not the premise of the show. But you know, two women getting to know each other and two women from different backgrounds getting to know each other, of course, it does come up. So there is an element of creating a friendship. And I do think it's so important too especially between moms creating a friendship with moms that you would think that you would not vibe with or wouldn't necessarily choose. And so she and I are definitely the premise of the show is to strangers getting to know each other. We've never met in real life. She is a white woman. I am not. And it has been really fun. But if you want to check that out, if you want to hear me tell you these long winded stories, there's a podcast for that. It's called Imperfect Strangers podcast.

SooJin: I love it.

Hannah: Okay, so lightning round. Your answers do not need to be fast or anything like that. It's basically just whatever comes to mind first, and it's just about questions about you. So for example, fill in the blank antiracist parenting or caretaking is...

Melissa: Seeing.

Hannah: Thank you. Yes. What is the last thing your kids did to make you smile?

Melissa: Um, I made salmon for dinner last night, and the middle one told the baby, mommy works really hard to make this food - you better not waste it.

All: Laughing.

SooJin: Dang!

Melissa: I also think that middle one really is like wanting some stuff but yeah.

All: Laughing.

SooJin: Hey, you'll take the compliment. That's awesome. Oh, that's really sweet.

Hannah: Love that. What are you reading right now?

Melissa: Oh my goodness. So funny you say that you guys are going to think this lady can't possibly be real. But we actually just went Memorial Day weekend to a Jewish family camp. Unfortunately, it got rained out - torrential rain, 50 degrees, freezing cold, but I had actually packed the Michelle Obama book because I had never gotten around to reading it like when it came out, and there was all the hype, and I physically bought the book at Target because you know, when you're on your phone, for some reason people don't respect that you might be reading. They think that you're doing memes so I physically bought the book so that if and when I had quiet time at this camp that I could, you know, look scholarly, and like it was hardcover. So I just started that. And I'm late to the train, but I just started that, actually this past weekend.

Hannah: Cool. Yeah, I was late to I just finished reading it not too long ago.

Melissa: Oh, yay. Okay, so I'll circle back with you when I get to where you are.

Hannah: Sounds great. What are you doing to take care of yourself?

Melissa: So, ladies, all of this is very informative and nourishing of the soul. But there is also a person inside me that is superficial. So the second I got double Vaxed, baby, we put those facials back on the calendar. Put that Mani/Pedi back on the calendar, I am hairless and smooth. I have gotten dermaplaning, I have gotten hydrafacial, every facial package you could get. I said you know what? I saved so much money, not eating in restaurants. I'm taking the savings, then I'm buying all of the skincare. Okay? And I don't know if you've noticed this, but I'm glowing and positively glowing.

SooJin: You are glowing!

Melissa: You know, my self-care is vanity and I am not ashamed.

SooJin: Own it, sister!

Hannah: Good for you, I love it.

SooJin: And we're seeing the dollars show. You know, the investment in your face.

Melissa: Cheek bones popping, I'm about to get these eye lashes put back on. Listen. Breathe all the COVID on me because I'm about to be cute.

All: Laughing.

Hannah: Okay, one thing, what is one thing you're committed to doing in your antiracist parenting journey?

Melissa: I am going to open myself up to experiences that I would rather not do. And so this is where I bring it back to the family camp. So the family camp is designed for Jewish families to come together. And you know, have a sense of community, obviously, with the babbling brooks and the tug of war and the bonfires, none of that was able to happen. So we were miserable in our little cabin. And I had to, you know, keep my poker face on with my children, because I also believed in the ethos of this camp, which was, you know, immersion into Jewish life. And a lot of the messaging of the camp is to take lessons and social issues that are happening today and incorporate them into their camp lesson. So it's not just you know, sharing in friendship, it's also you know, let's talk about Black Lives Matter. Let's talk about stop Asian hate, unfortunately, because of the way that the weather turned out. We weren't in, you know, a setting where we could really get deep down in that. However, while I do not like the outdoors, and I do not like camping, I still agreed to go to it. Weather permitting next time, I will put myself back into that position because I do believe in the ethos of that camp. So a lot of it is you know, when we say get out of your comfort zone sometimes that means physically so that your kids can take in a lesson. And so that that I'm going to commit to you, which sounds crazy, anybody that knows me, especially if I just said I spent hundreds of dollars on facial care - would not believe that I would do camping but I did. And it was rustic.

All: Laughing.

Melissa: But it's important for my kids and the beauty is it was all Israeli families and nobody was complaining. Nobody was like, wow, it's freezing, nobody was like, well, there's so much mud, everybody was still there. With the forefront of the trip being community, everybody was still so happy to see them. And so like, as an Americanized, you know, parent who needs air conditioning and all the creature comforts of home, I really had to step up and do what they do so that my kids can see, you know, not every day in life, you're going to be comfortable, you have to make the best of it. I'm so happy to report that my Jewish husband was the one who couldn't hack it. And he was the reason why we left early. But next time.

All: Laughing.

Hannah: Yeah, thank you, thank you for sharing that really, really important. Kind of getting out of our comfort zones. I love that. Okay, last question. What question would you like Antiracist Parenting Podcast to answer in a future episode?

Melissa: You know, what would be an important question is we should figure out a way to talk to young people. And I guess, by extension, talk to the adults who are teaching these young people how to discuss cultural appropriation versus appreciation, because I found that when I'm trying to explain it, I stumble a lot. And then I'm like, wait, is that appreciation? Or is that appropriation? Hold on a second. And then I have to stop myself. Because if you see a lot of young people the things that they enjoy, enjoy and the things that they're taking in, in our lens. Because we've been on this earth for so long, we say, oh, you can't do that. That's inappropriate. But then I'm thinking, well, here we are. We've told them to see all these things and appreciate all these things. And now they want to and then we're like, oh, yeah, but you can't do it like that. So I think that we need to find like a blueprint or like a guideline for like, how we explain when it's wrong versus when it's appreciative. I think that's a tough conversation.

Hannah: Yes, definitely a gap area for me, too. Thank you for bringing that up.

Melissa: You know what I mean?

Hannah: You know, oh, yeah, totally.

Melissa: Example, I have a very good friend. He lost his business during the pandemic. However, before it, he had a vintage shop where he, you know, sells beautiful vintage stuff. And he had found a case of these old Cheongsams, and he gifted some to my children. And my little one wanted to wear one to dim sum. And my husband was like, should we do that? And here we are having this whole entire conversation, like, can she wear this traditional dress to the dim sum place? When she's not? Like, it was like that. And I was like, see? So where do we draw this line? And me as a Filipino why am I having difficulty with this conversation? But then it's like, I should be asking this question.

Hannah: Definitely. Is there anything else you'd like to say or share before we say goodbye?

Melissa: Oh, my gosh, this was so, this went by so fast. I feel like we weren't even really on a podcast. I feel like we were just three moms talking and hanging out. Well, with me doing a lot of talking. No, thank you so much for having me. I can't wait to see how this comes together. And I can't wait to like, share with my kids one day.

SooJin: Thank you so much. It was so wonderful to get to know you better in this space, and just love all of the stories you shared about your kids and the conversations you're having. I know it's going to be - look, it's so very so very informative, and educational, for sure. And also fun, which is like the beauty of who you are. You're able to teach in a really playful, fun, engaging way. And so thank you for that.

Melissa: Oh, thank you so much.

All: Thank you.

SooJin: Okay, so wow, great. She's so great. Isn't she - like just really wonderful energy and has so much to share because she's lived so much. So yeah, curious about what your takeaways are from the conversation we had.

Hannah: Yeah, I love the kind of the frame of learning to see learning how to see I think that's so important. I definitely feel like you know, that question that she brought up about cultural appropriation versus appreciation is something we definitely need to explore more on the podcast and that's just an area for me too, to learn and grow about. Um, yeah, I loved kind of like just exploring and exposure to different, you know, people and cultures, all of that, like just having that experience and building those experiences for your kids. And like learning through food. So, yeah, I just really, it's just really interesting to hear kind of like how they, as a family are navigating and kind of how it's coming through with their children's identity and identity development.

SooJin: Yeah, I too loved like, what resonated with me, which kind of mirrors what you were saying is just about, like, normalizing difference. I loved how she said, you know, everyday is a way to immerse your kids in difference, you know, and people who look different from you who have different cultures. And, and I really, really love that. So that when you do meet people who are different from you, which is inevitable that is going to happen, your response will be respectful, it will be yeah - you meeting the difference will be in such a way where it's not again, shaming, vilifying denigrating, you know, creating some sense of hierarchy that is less than, so I really appreciated that, um, and then, but, you know, at the same time, I feel like that, like, while that is important, I also think that depending on like, your identity, and where you live, it's also really important for certain people to be surrounded by people who look like you, you know, where that's not the norm. So like, my daughter, for example, you know, she goes to, as all kids of color, most of them go to predominantly white schools. So it's really important for me, that she is in space with people who look like her. So I take that advice. And I think all the advice that is given here, like you, we encourage our listeners to take the advice and think about it within your context, right, because all the advice that we share isn't necessarily universal, it's not necessarily going to apply to every person, it's because of our different social identities. So for white people who are normally around people who look like them, you know, who are in mostly white, or all

white spaces, the suggestion of being around people who are different from you, and like maximizing that, and taking every opportunity to do that, that is good advice for you. But for people of color, where we are constantly around people who are different from us. And being in a context where it's rare for us to be around people who look like us, that advice isn't as resonant or applicable, maybe, or relevant. I'm not to say not to say that, like, you know, like, we, we all need to normalize difference in our lives, all of us, whether it's around race, whether it's around sexuality, or gender or disability, you know, all that stuff. But within the context of race, which is kind of what we've been talking about today. I think it's important for folks of color, if you're in predominantly all white spaces, give yourself permission to find those spaces where, like, there is a sense of sameness. Because that's important to have that reflected back. I know it is certainly for me, you know as a woman of color, in mostly white spaces. It's really self-care for me when I find spaces where I'm around people who look like me. I was recently in Duluth, and with a bunch of Korean adoptees like we were, yeah, a bunch of Korean adoptees. And it was amazing. It was amazing to just share space for like, you know, five hours, we're all together talking and not having to worry about whiteness, or, you know, or tracking like how what we're saying is going to land on people because they have a different racial or social identity.

Hannah: Yeah, really good point. I am planning to make my commitment around signing up for the PJ Library. I think that will be a great resource. But I also what I was hearing from Melissa was that it is sort of grounded in Jewish culture and tradition. And so that will be a good learning opportunity for my kids and myself to learn about being Jewish, and also just expanding our library our home library.

SooJin: And I'm going to make a commitment, that phrase, you know, everyday is a way to immerse your kids in difference. I think, I want to build on that. As it relates to, like, around gender and sexual identity and sexuality. Especially now that she's 13. And, you know, yeah, like, puberty, and there's some, like, her changing body and there's curiosity. And like, for example, you know, she asked me several, like a month ago about, like, you know, whether or not she should shave her legs. And then like, you know, like, it's really up to you, you know, some people who like to, but there's plenty of, of girls and women who don't, you know, it's really kind of like, what's your aesthetic? What do you prefer? And, and, yeah, it's really up to you. And so and then I also said, you know, you can also try, you can experiment with it, and see if you like it or not, and change your mind later, you know, and so, so she decided, like, okay, I want to try and so, so we'll go from there. But I think, you know, I'm really intentional about like when we talk about things around gender, not for it to not be so binary. And I think I know, I can do a better job in that. So that's what I'm going to make my commitment to.

Hannah: Sounds good. Okay. So do you want to give a little bit more information about the fall seminar that's coming up?

SooJin: Yeah. So you know, one of the things that has been coming out from this podcast series and from our guests is, you know, how do we connect, you know, across difference, because that is kind of a core principle of antiracism is learning the stories and narratives of other people who are different from you. And not just your own, if racism dehumanizes, antiracism humanizes, and the only way that we can humanize each other is to get to know each other, beyond the stereotypes, beyond the socialization that we're getting from media that is divide and conquer, you know, that is working to keep us separated, that is working to keep us segregated. And so that is why this seminar on becoming fluent in each other's narratives got started or where that idea came from. And the title is coming from post-colonial scholar Jacqui Alexander, who says that a key way to combat the different isms in our society is to become fluent in each other's histories and each other's narratives. And so that's essentially what it's about, you know, it's a four months seminar, there's nine sessions, it works out to be about two meetings a month, where we learn about other people's histories and other people's narratives. And like, what are the key issues and the different communities of color that we're going to be focusing on? And also, what are the key issues for white people? You know, because I think, like, I think a lot of white people end up knowing more about other people's histories and not about their own history, like in terms of like, what whiteness is, what white supremacy is, and how it shows up in their lives. So we'll also be talking about that. But yeah, we hope you sign up and because it's kind of a launching pad in the sense of helping you to develop and hone your skills for self-education on your own, so that you can take what you've learned in this four months and run with it and be able to do this on your own because it is a lifelong journey.

Hannah: Awesome. I definitely feel like for me, the course is a way for me to fill some gaps that I have in my learning. I feel like a lot of my learning is really focused on African American experience in the U.S. And so just a better understanding around Latinx, and Indigenous, and Asian American kind of cultures and histories, that to me is really what I'm looking forward to, and then also just connecting with the other people in the class. That's, I mean, that's kind of getting at, like, you know, this. A lot of people like me who are white, like, we might not have a lot of, like friends of color. And so like, I'm kind of viewing this experience as a way to, like, make those connections to like, as a starting point to have deeper relationships across difference. So just wanted to kind of share that piece of what I'm thinking about.

SooJin: Oh, thank you for lifting that up. Because, yes, we are going to be building community together. And hopefully it will be so strong, that this community will feed you and sustain you beyond the four months. Right. And that's, that's typically what you know, as an educator, you know, that is really important for me. And those are the kinds of learning environments that I am very deliberate and intentional about curating - that the relationships and the bonds and the connections that we make during class are so strong that the bonds and relationships and the connections go beyond the

classroom and I know it's been true for my students, and it's been true for me because I still am in relationship with my students after all these years.

Hannah: Yes. Well, thanks SooJin for leading this. I'm super excited. And to our listeners, please sign up. We just hope to see you there and we love you. And yeah.

SooJin: Thanks everybody.

SooJin: We just want to say thank you for joining us today. You can find more information about us and past episodes on our website antiracistparentingpodcast.com. A big shout out to Mike Myth Productions for the intro and outro music.

Hannah: This work requires us to challenge ourselves and take care of ourselves. Be well.

SooJin: Be antiracist.