



Conscious Life presents
**HEALING TOXIC
RELATIONSHIPS**

Breaking Free from Oppressive Power Dynamics

Guest: Dr Roxy Manning

Disclaimer: The contents of this interview are for informational purposes only and are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. This interview does not provide medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or psychological condition.

[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow

Hello and welcome back to this conference. My name is Jaï Bristow and I'm one of your hosts. Today I am so thrilled to be welcoming back the wonderful Dr Roxy Manning. Welcome, Roxy.

Dr Roxy Manning

I'm so glad to be chatting with you again.

Jaï Bristow

I'm so glad to have you back again. Roxy, you're a clinical psychologist, an NVC nonviolent communication trainer, and the author of two new books which have just come out, *How to Have Anti Racist Conversations*, *Embracing Our Full Humanity to Challenge White Supremacy*, and co-author of *The Antiracist Heart: A Self Compassion and Activism Handbook*. Great.

Today I want to start by asking you this theme of toxic relationships, what does that evoke for you?

Dr Roxy Manning

At its simplest a toxic relationship is a relationship that we have with someone else that isn't serving us, isn't attending to our needs. And that because of perhaps our personal habits, culture, and even circumstances, we don't know how to either exit, or to change for the better.

Jaï Bristow

I think that's a great definition, one that's not serving us, and that we can't or don't know how to exit or change. And so what are some relationships that come to mind when you say that definition?

Dr Roxy Manning

Many different kinds. I've worked with parent-child relationships, and especially adult parent-child relationships. Sometimes I've had adult children say, I can't speak to my parent anymore because they don't see me as an adult. They're always seeing me either as a child, or as in some ways like their fault, their failure.

[00:02:00]

Or even in some cases I've had one client whose mother saw her as basically the father who mother had divorced. And so was putting a lot of anger and pain, and attributing a lot of things to the child. So one kind is relationships with people that we are related to by blood, where they don't actually see us, we're a proxy for their pain. So that's one example.

Another kind of toxic relationship that people struggle with all the time are work relationships. So it could either be a co-worker who isn't seeing us, whose way of coping with work stress, with the perceived competition at work, is to put down everyone else around us. And that's relationships that can be really hard because people often feel trapped. I have to stay in this job because I need the money, this is what I need for my career. But the relationships aren't there.

And then the third kind, and the kind that I talk about in my books are the kinds that are between groups. It's like when I'm walking down the street well, not walking down the street, that's too temporal. But sometimes I'm in relationships with people who don't actually know me at all, but they're making a lot of assumptions about me, because of my gender, my ethnicity, and many different pieces.

Those are also relationships that are not healthy, and where a lot of times it's the culture, some cultural values around who's okay, who's not okay, impact how we're experiencing that relationship.

Jai Bristow

I love those examples of relationships you've given, because sometimes people hear toxic relationship and they immediately jump to relationship with partners. For example, abusive relationship with partners, which is definitely something we touch upon in this conference.

Jai Bristow

But I love how you're talking about relationship with parents, relationship at work, and relationships just in general out in the world, and how all those are relationships that, as you defined earlier, can be toxic in the sense that they're harmful to you, and they're very hard to get out of a lot of the time.

I think those categories you gave in particular can be very difficult to get out of. It can be extremely difficult to change, and or get out of a relationship with our parents. It can be very difficult when it's a work situation and you're reliant on that job financially. And it can be even most difficult, perhaps when it's with society at large, with people that are in the street, that are projecting onto you, and how you can internalize all of that.

Dr Roxy Manning

Another example of that third kind is your neighbor. It's someone that I, in some ways, have no necessity to be in relationship with, but they can actually make your life a pretty living hell. Especially if they're projecting all of these things around, you're the black person who moves into my neighborhood, and you can't sell your house, you can't move that easily.

[00:04:54] Jaï Bristow

So how do these relationships that you've given examples of, and this toxicity in relationship, how does it connect to the work that in the books you've just written around sort of like antiracism and racism?

Dr Roxy Manning

I wrote the books and I focused them on antiracism, because it's something that permeates, tragically, pretty much every society that I know of. And essentially racism is an example of an oppressive power structure, where we have set up one group to have power over another.

And this is what happens in all of our relationships. Society says parents have power over children. That, in some cultures still, husbands have power over wives. So we have all of these relationships where they're power structures. The books, even though they're focused on antiracism, are trying to share concepts around how to manage relationships, and how to advocate for equity in relationships, that translate to all the kinds of oppressive structures that people might experience.

Jaï Bristow

That's fantastic, I'm so glad you clarified that. That it's not just about race, it's about that power dynamic. And you talk about it from the point of view of antiracism work, but it's applicable to so many different power dynamics.

Dr Roxy Manning

Exactly.

Jaï Bristow

What are some of the main takeaways, for example, from your book of recognizing and working with those power dynamics. How do we recognize when we're in those toxic relationships?

Dr Roxy Manning

So how would I recognize when I'm in these toxic relationships? The first one is to have this fearless self-acknowledgment. Sometimes, depending on the relationship, we're not willing to admit that we're experiencing cost. So it's like, I've got this job, I have to stay in this job. It's paying my bills, it's feeding my family. And because of that, we start to internalize this is about me. There's something wrong with me, rather than there's something about the way this person is showing up, and relating to me that's actually harmful.

So the first piece is to notice, am I thriving? Am I actually growing and being my full, authentic self in this relationship? And if I'm not, it's toxic. I noticed, for myself, I've been in relationships that weren't physically abusive, so it would be hard initially to say, that's a toxic relationship. But what I noticed I was doing was, I would stop asking for what I wanted. I would always be scanning and paying attention to what the other person needed, and making sure that they got their needs met, at the expense of my own.

[00:07:35]

Once I realized how much I was doing that, then I realized, this is a toxic relationship. This is a relationship that's not serving me. So that's the first piece. Are you actually being your authentic self? Are you meeting your needs? And are you giving up on who you are in favor of the other person?

Jai Bristow

I think that's a really good barometer to go off. And again, applicable to all kinds of relationships, whether it's intimate relationships, whether it's friends, whether it's parents, whether it's work, whether it's your neighbor, whether it's someone else. That, am I able to show up and be myself? Am I able to have my needs met and ask for my needs? And I can't remember what the other point you said was, but that sense of just, am I able to be authentic? Am I able to feel that ease in this relationship? Am I thriving in this relationship or not?

Dr Roxy Manning

I just want to say that thriving part, way too many of us have learned and internalized that we need to settle, that thriving isn't the barometer we're looking for. It's just like, if I'm not being harmed, it's okay. It's like, no, you need to thrive.

Jai Bristow

Maybe the title of this talk should be Upping Your Standards.

Dr Roxy Manning

Yes.

Jai Bristow

Because so often, and I think it's true, I'm non-binary, but I was socialized as a woman for 30 years. I think especially people who are socialized as women, people from the Global Majority, people who, and for those who aren't familiar with that terminology, people from the Global Majority are essentially people who aren't white.

I think for people who live in a body that is oppressed from the moment they're born. We even more have this idea that we have to settle, we have to accept what we're given. We have to be grateful for the crumbs we're thrown, and that if we ask for more, if we have expectations of being treated equally, being treated with respect, of having our own autonomy and power, then that can be really confronting for people, that's disruptive.

Then we're often labeled as difficult, as bossy, as angry, as demanding, as all these negative things, which is only used most of the time for people who are already in oppressed bodies, marginalized bodies, and not used for example, for straight, cis white men, a lot of the time.

[00:10:07] Dr Roxy Manning

It's that whole saying around there's the assertive male leader and there's the bossy, aggressive female leader. This idea that just asking for what I want if I'm in this body that has been socialized in the suppressed category is too much, it's not okay.

Jaï Bristow

I think we've done a really good job of explaining and addressing what these toxic relationships are, and what they look like, and how we can feel really stuck in them. How do we escape that? Again, whether it's work, or with a neighbor, when it's to do with projections, and expectations, and categorizing, and hierarchy that's being put on us, and that we're not necessarily choosing. So what do we do? How do we free ourselves from these toxic, oppressive, painful, limiting relationships?

Dr Roxy Manning

One of the things I'd like to invite people to do, is to pull back a little bit, even though it might seem counterintuitive. A lot of times people go, I need to leave, I need to stop, that relationship is toxic. We even use words like toxic. And I love what we're doing, because we're talking about toxic relationship, not toxic people. I tried to make a differentiation between that.

And that's the first place I always want people to start. I want you to think about what it is that you're trying to create? Because whatever we do, whatever story we build about what's happening in the relationship, is a story that we can easily turn on ourselves.

Here's an example of what I mean. If I'm in a relationship with a partner that's not working, and I say, I need to leave this relationship because that person is evil, that person is bad, they're too needy, they're asking for what they want all the time, I never get to ask for what I want. That can give us the impetus to leave. We can say, okay, now it's clear, I've got to leave this person's bad, and evil, and horrible.

But what happens is that when we leave with that framing, we start to also then judge ourselves. It's like, am I now too needy? Am I going to be that person? And so we need to have a different way of looking at this. This is what I love about nonviolent communication. I don't think about the person as evil or bad. I think about the person as limited. And I think about myself as not having the capacity to deal with where that person is in their life.

I'm leaving because of that reason. I'm saying I need to set boundaries because I don't have the capacity to hold whatever it is that you're doing right now. It's not working for me, and I don't know how to make it better. So that's why I'm setting a boundary, not because you're evil, not because you're bad. And therefore I'm also not evil or bad. I'm just attempting to tend to my needs. So that's the first piece, is to really think about whatever I do, I want it to be in service of creating a world where everybody thrives. And if everyone is thriving, no one is demonized.

Jaï Bristow

I think that's fantastic. What I'm really hearing is that it boils down to a compatibility issue. Not one person's good, one person's bad, there's no villain or hero in this story. Everyone has their limitations and everyone has their capacity. And sometimes there's an inherent lack of

compatibility in someone's limitations, and someone's capacity to hold those limitations. Those limitations might be quite extreme, someone might be exhibiting very toxic, very abusive behavior, and might need to do a lot of healing.

[00:13:38]

At the same time, the question to ask yourself is not, how toxic is that person? It's, what is my capacity or my willingness to stay in connection in relationship? Is it serving me? Am I having my needs met? All the things you were saying at the beginning. Can I show up authentically in this relationship, and can my limitations be met? And does the person have capacity to hold my limitations? Do I have capacity to stay in connection with this person and their limitations?

I think when we're talking about, again, different power dynamics, whether it's around race, and all these other things, those are some questions to ask rather than necessarily running away from the conversations.

I think we're going to get into this now with the nonviolent communication. But there's tools to stay in connection with oneself and others, even when we're faced with a lot of charge of negativity, of toxicity, and really looking at, okay, what's happening in the field right now? What's happening in the relationship? Rather than that person's evil, I'm out of here, because I'm good, for example.

Dr Roxy Manning

I feel like as I hear you, you've really summarized this really well. And there's one thing that's coming up that I want to make really clear for our listeners. It's that, by saying that the person is not evil or bad, I'm not saying that there's something wrong with me for not being, having the capacity to take care of them. This is exactly what I'm trying not to do. And I think people resist this idea because we have been taught this very binary view of the world, either you're bad or I'm bad. So if I'm going to say you're not bad, it means I'm bad.

It's like no, we all are human, and as humans if we're each different puzzle pieces, this is a time when our puzzle pieces don't match, where the capacities, and the strengths, and the skills that I have don't match yours, don't match what you're able to offer, and vice versa. I really want people to free themselves from any self-judgment. If you say I don't have the capacity to be with you, it doesn't mean you're a bad person.

Jaï Bristow

I'm really glad you brought in that clarification, because I could hear myself as I was saying, as I was summarizing what you'd said, when I got to that point of, if someone's exhibiting really harmful behavior, has really strong limitations, is being aggressive, and I don't have the capacity, it's like, should I have the capacity to stay with that person? There's these shoulds that can easily come in. I really appreciate how you're expressing that it's not about judging yourself. It's not about how much capacity you should have, or how you should be. It's also not your responsibility to be there for someone else's healing.

I love that you said that, because especially when we're talking about people who've been socialized into oppressive identities, this is one of the things that we're taught, that it is our responsibility. Some of the rules that are unconscious, that govern us is, you need to do everything to make the person with the higher status identity feel comfortable, safe, welcomed, at cost to

yourself. This is a narrative that we're changing, that we get to say, they don't have the capacity, I don't have the capacity, and neither of us have to do anything at cost. We get to choose how much we're willing to offer or not offer.

[00:17:00]

I love that. I think that's so important. I really appreciate you bringing that in. Roxy, I want us to talk a little bit about... You talked earlier about the boundaries, because when we're in those situations with different limitations and capacity. How do we communicate healthy boundaries?

I want us to talk a little bit about this NVC as a wonderful tool to stay in connection, whilst also making sure everyone's having their needs met. That we're all staying within capacity, within our limitations. I'm wondering if you could talk about how we do that. How we have these painful conversations that look after ourselves, that make sure that we're showing up in a way that's authentic, and that's not creating and perpetuating harm.

Dr Roxy Manning

Absolutely. I love again that you are referencing nonviolent communication because this really is such a powerful tool, and consciousness to think about how to set these boundaries. How to name harm when it's happening so that everyone is clear about what's happening. No gaslighting is happening, one of the things that can happen in toxic relationships. And how to then ask for what you want, and understand what you want, and ask for the thing that's actually going to help you.

Another place where I tell people to start is to be able to talk about what's happening in the relationship. So if my neighbor, so let's use toxic relationships in terms of maybe a racist neighbor. If my neighbor keeps making slurs when I walk down the street, if they're always calling the city government on me for really minor transgressions. Like, oh, your lawn is one 8th of an inch too high, so I'm going to report you. This kind of very subtle harassment, that's an example of things that are happening that I might not be able to articulate.

I want to first be able to clearly state to myself what's actually happening. What am I responding to that I'm experiencing as toxic, and being able to name those observations clearly to myself is important. But sometimes when these things happen, we think of them as one-off. Okay, he called the police once, or when I was having a party, or he knocked over my garbage cans. Or whenever there was garbage day pickup, it's just once, maybe it was the wind that knocked it over, or maybe it was someone else who called the police. We start to make a lot of excuses. So we need to also be able to look at not just what's happening with this person, but also the timeline, the history of what's been happening, and the systemic context.

We've been talking a lot about being socialized in certain identities. And so it's also helpful to look at, is this happening to anyone else on this block who doesn't share this identity? Or is it only happening to people with my identity? And to acknowledge that as well, to say that that's a real thing that happens, and I need to be able to name that. So the first step is to understand and name what is happening.

The next steps would be around really acknowledging, and this is the part that can be hard for us, acknowledge that there's impact. Acknowledge that when this is happening in my neighborhood, I'm realizing I'm no longer feeling safe. I'm walking home, and instead of home being a haven, as I

see my house, I start to contract. I start to wonder, is there going to be poop on my lawn? Is there going to be something that's a signal of how much challenge is happening in the place that I live?

[00:20:31]

Acknowledge your feelings, acknowledge the needs that you're having, I'm wanting safety, I'm wanting acceptance, I'm wanting belonging, I'm wanting respect. All of these things matter, so acknowledge this to yourself. And then to think about what are the constraints that you're facing? And this is something that I think people often don't talk about when we talk about toxic relationships.

Sometimes people, for instance, choose to stay at that really toxic workplace because of the constraints. It's like, I have to put food on my table. So the question is not necessarily, can I afford to leave this job right now? I can't.

So now it becomes, what can I do to set some boundaries, or to make this tolerable until I can get myself in the position when I can leave my job? I always invite people to think about, understand your feelings and needs, and then don't go just to the immediate, this is the only answer, is to run away. It's what happens to me if I choose this path? If I choose this other path? What can I actually afford to do, or to give up? Or what am I willing to lose if I confront this person?

Jai Bristow

Fantastic. I really love those steps you've provided because there's really this sense of observation. The first step you were talking about, what is it that this person is doing? So if I'm feeling uncomfortable, what are the actual facts? What is this person doing? What is the objective reality? And then contextualizing that, looking at, is this happening to other people who look like me, for example, is this a personal vendetta? What's going on here?

Then the next step is recognizing the impact and the feelings. This I'm feeling uncomfortable, I'm tensing up, I'm dreading going home, I'm having fear, whatever it might be. And then, and I think it's so crucial, this next step you were talking about of, what can I do about that? So instead of immediately running away, it's that contextualizing, of like you say, there are constraints often.

I love how you're giving examples of a neighbor, of at work, I think it's also applicable to partners, to housemates, to family members. I recognize exactly what you're saying, and how I've been in these dynamics in so many different situations. I had it with a teacher when I was a kid, and at the time I didn't have the language to understand what was happening. And now, in hindsight, I see that I was singled out and bullied by a teacher, for example. So it can happen in all these different dynamics.

You have to look at the constraints. As I was a pupil it's hard to just leave the school or leave the classroom, for example. If you're at work you might be reliant on that, and it might be hard to find another job. If it's your parents and you're living with them, and you're reliant on them for food and shelter and all those things, it can be really difficult. If it's a partner and you've again living together, or invested in property together, or you have children together, or your lives are entwined. You're also maybe just very in love. And so it can feel really hard.

[00:23:38]

You have to ask yourself these questions of, what are my options here? And really take the time to integrate that, to question that, rather than immediately, the all or nothing, I have to just push through it, or, oh, my God, this is too much, I have to run away and just cut contact.

Dr Roxy Manning

I want to just add a tiny piece of that because it feels so important. My first job after college was working as a counselor in a shelter for women who had experienced domestic violence. And there was so often this question of, why didn't you leave sooner? Why didn't you leave? Almost like you wanted this. And it's because people were not holding the constraints. People were not holding all of the other very important needs that people were meeting by choosing to stay. And it's not that I'm saying that people should stay in abusive relationships at all. It's just that I want us to be able to hold ourselves with compassion, as we find the strategies that let us exit in ways that are healthy, in ways that actually attend to all of our needs, not just one.

Jaï Bristow

I think that's so important. You need the exit strategies, you need to take time to put things in. You know, you were talking about people ask, why didn't you leave sooner? I think another thing to really name, and I talk about this a bit with Zayna Ratty in our interview, sorry, with Zayna Brookhouse, change of name. Is also sometimes once you've left, you can feel the pull to go back, even though you know that it was abusive, it was toxic, it was manipulative, it was unhealthy. It can be really hard.

One of the things I've learned through doing all these interviews for this conference is how, when you're in a new situation, your system, your nervous system automatically wants to go back to what's familiar. And even if what's familiar is harmful, it's easier in some ways to go back to the devil you know, than to go down a new path. I just wanted to bring that piece in as well, because I think it's super important.

Dr Roxy Manning

I want to add to that, that it's both that sense of, okay, at least I know this, I've learned how to navigate this. But it's also that we are also not acknowledging that there are a lot of times, needs that are met in those relationships. If it's my parent, no matter how abusive that parent is to me, there's this need of connection, of belonging, of family, of intimacy with someone who knows me deeply.

And that can be very seductive, I want to be with this person who, no matter what happens, at least they know this part of me, this sense I should be loved by this person. And so it becomes really challenging to leave all that, to be alone, to be isolated when we're trying to leave the situations. At some point I'll talk about the need for us to do this in community.

Jaï Bristow

Fantastic. I think it's so important what you're saying, because if none of our needs were being met, we wouldn't stay, some needs are being met. And in however well or attuned way they're being met or not, some needs are being met. And that's part of what makes it so difficult. And

that's part of what makes this whole conference exist in some ways, because we end up in these toxic cycles because some of our needs are being met. Therefore there's the fear that those needs won't get met if we leave, as well.

[00:27:03]

Roxy, there's a couple more things I want to get into. You talked about boundaries, you talked about how the next step is establishing boundaries. So let's talk about that. And then I also want to talk a little bit, you mentioned earlier, about gaslighting. I think that's another really key point to include. So could you talk a bit about the process of setting and holding boundaries?

Dr Roxy Manning

Let me start with gaslighting first because it will become relevant when we start to talk about boundaries. When I think about gaslighting, I think about somebody who's essentially trying to deny my reality. Here's what I'm observing, here's what my experience is, here's what I'm feeling. And they are either denying that it happened, or creating a completely different narrative than the one that makes sense to me.

There's often this power structure where we have been socialized to accept that other person's framing of the world. It's my parent, they are the authorities, I'm supposed to listen to what they're saying. It's my partner, they're the ones, especially if they are from gender that socializes dominant, they're the ones who are supposed to be in charge and understand how the world works.

And so gaslighting just leaves us questioning our reality. There's a part of us that knows, this isn't matching up with what's true for me, and there's that discomfort about it. But we can get really, it's crazy making, when we are experiencing gaslighting, this utter denial of what we know is true and what we're experiencing.

Now when I think about boundaries, I think it's really important to talk about the difference between boundaries and limits. When I think about boundaries, it goes back to how we're framing all of this, and focusing on my capacity. I want to know what am I able to offer, what am I able to do? And I communicate that clearly with the other person.

When I think about boundaries, the holidays are coming up, for many people, in many parts of the world as we near the end of the year, that's a time when toxic relationships are huge. You're visiting family members who decide, who are really clear, that they don't like you because you're the black family member, or you're the trans family member, or whatever your identity is that they can't stand. They have a habit of saying horrendous things over, and over, and over, that everyone says you just need to accept because this is family time, it's holidays, we need to be together.

This is a great time when knowing your boundaries is essential. If you know what your capacity is, a capacity again that lets you thrive. You can decide before you go to this family meeting. I thrive when people are not putting down my identities, when I don't have to hear slurs, and name callings, and lots of microaggressions about my identities. And so I want to tell my family ahead of time. If people start to talk about, or make commentary about, my identity as a queer person, I will not stay in the room because it is too painful for me. It's more than the capacity that I have to hear that, and hold myself with care, and to hold you with care. So in that case, I'm going to leave.

[00:30:14]

So the boundaries are basically telling the person, if you do X, Y or Z, here's how it matches my capacity, and here's what I'm going to do to take care of myself. I'm not trying to control the other person. And that's different than when I set a limit, which is me trying to control the other person's behavior. So I might tell you, you don't get to talk about this. I have no control over that. So if you talk about this, or if you don't talk about this, I actually can't control that.

And so what's really going to happen is, you're going to say something, and if I don't have clear boundaries within myself, if you talk about this, here's how I'm going to respond. I end up staying, I end up taking it, I end up suffering. So instead of trying to control the other person's behavior, let them know when you do X, Y or Z, here's what happens inside of me, and here's what I'm going to do to take care of myself this time. And then they get to choose how they respond. Is it within their capacity to say, okay, I'm not going to talk about that, because having you in the room is important to me or not?

Jaï Bristow

I think that's a really helpful distinction. I've heard that described as boundaries and rules before, but I also like the language, boundaries and limitations. I really want to appreciate how you're describing that. That just saying, hey, this is what I'm going to do to keep myself safe, to look after myself.

And again, what you were saying about gaslighting, everyone has their own version of reality. And sometimes maybe people do do it consciously, but maybe sometimes they don't do it consciously, when they're denying your reality. When they're saying, for example, no, the conversation went this way, I was perfectly calm and reasonable, and you were the one who was shouting. And you're like, I really don't remember the conversation going like that. I'm pretty sure it was the opposite.

I know that gaslighting is quite intense, and the way people really deny the experience, and the reality of the person, but it really makes me think one of the things I teach in my six module course on power, privilege and prejudice, is exactly that, that sense of we all have different realities, we're all living in our own little bubbles.

It reminds me of a few years ago on the Internet, there was this big scandal about the dress. Was the dress black and blue? Or was it white and gold? It's a very harmless analogy, whereas gaslighting is actually very harmful. But the reason I'm using this analogy is because we can see how rigid we can get about our perspective, how our version of reality feels objective, it feels like the only version of reality possible.

It feels like you've said this before, this idea that we can start questioning, either we assume, okay, this version of reality is clearly correct, so the other person is definitely wrong. Or we think, start doubting ourselves, the other person seems so sure, they're telling me this is the way it is, maybe I have an eyesight problem, maybe I'm losing my mind. Maybe if we're looking at the dress issue.

But this is so true in relationships, in other versions, these different perspectives and the way we can go into the, I feel like I must be wrong because the person seems so sure, and we start doubting ourselves, or we position ourselves very hard and rigidly off I am right, therefore you are wrong.

[00:33:36]

So I like how the boundary isn't telling the other person you're right or you're wrong. And it's not saying I'm right or I'm wrong. It's simply communicating, hey, this is what I need to do in order to keep myself safe. That when you say these things, it makes me feel extremely uncomfortable, and I won't tolerate it, and so I will leave the room. If this person keeps doing this, then I won't come to Thanksgiving, I won't come to Christmas. Or actually this year because of what happened last year, this year I'm going to choose to celebrate with my friends. And I understand you're really upset, I would like to have a phone call on the day, but if you're too angry, then maybe we chat some other time, or whatever it is. But it's like regaining the control, and the autonomy that's needed.

So we're back to the original definition of toxic relationships, is the ones where you feel like you don't have autonomy. You can't be authentic, and you can't change them, or leave them. Here it's a way of regaining that autonomy, regaining that control, and saying, this is how I'm going to change it, and if it doesn't work, this is how I'm starting to step out.

Dr Roxy Manning

I think what's really helpful, and I just want to lift it up some more. Let's use this example of the black and gold dress. If you tell me that the dress is gold and white, and I say that the dress is black and blue, then it doesn't matter. It does not matter. I can say I really wanted a dress that's black and blue to me, and I'm hearing for you it's gold and white, and that's great. But it's not reading that way to me. And so I am not going to wear this dress because it's not working for me. It's not saying that it's not gold and white for you, it absolutely could be. And in that case, you get to wear it if that's what you wanted. But I'm really just focused on what is true for me and what is serving my needs.

So exactly when people are saying things like, well, but we always spend time together at Christmas and it's wonderful and lovely, or whatever the holiday is. I can say, actually, it has not been lovely for me, it's been stressful because I keep having to defend who I am, or I keep having to defend my partner, because they're not welcome in this house, and it hasn't been a place of joy.

I'm actually wanting, I agree with you, I want Christmas to be a time when we all experience joy. So I'm going to actually choose to be somewhere else this year, not because I don't love you, but because I'm wanting to have that experience of what that holiday means to me. And being really solid inside of yourself, that it's okay to ask for that. That's the other thing that we tell ourselves, it's not, but it is okay to say, yeah, you get to ask for what you need.

Jai Bristow

100%. I'm aware of time. But I want to ask you one last question, which I think is really important when we're talking about these topics, because what happens, I think these are really good tools. NVC is a wonderful tool to use in the service of autonomy, authenticity, setting boundaries, liberation. But sometimes it can also be used as the opposite, sometimes people use these tools to be manipulative, to enforce painful, harmful structures.

With the example we were giving, with the difference reality someone can be to a trans person, well, my reality is that you're the gender that they don't identify with. And so I'm going to use NBC to say that every time that you use the name, or the pronouns that you identify with, I'm going to ignore it because I don't believe in that. Or it's my right and reality to be racist, they might not use

these words, but that's essentially what they're saying. I am going to continue to use derogatory, harmful language around you, or your partner, or whoever it is, or just in general. What do we do in those situations?

[00:37:53] Dr Roxy Manning

Absolutely. You have a right to do whatever you want, to believe whatever you want. I also have a right not to experience it. So, again, it's that place of setting boundaries. If I'm telling you the thing that you're doing, calling me by that name is harmful to me, and it is not my wish and you insist, then I get to exit. I get to say, okay, then I'm not going to be in this relationship right now, I'm not going to be in connection with you, because it is too painful for me to hear you use a name that is not my name. And I want to be with people who are willing to honor what is true for me. I'm not judging you because you're not, that's your choice. And you get to work through whatever it is that you need to work through there. But I get to take care of myself.

I love getting away from the idea of, is it my right, or is it wrong? Or whose perspective essentially is the correct one? I don't need to have that argument with you. I just need to know what is the perspective I want to be true for me, and to honor that one.

Jaï Bristow

Thank you. I think it's also okay if the person is judging the other person. You said, I'm not judging you for that, and maybe we don't have to turn and vilify the other person, but it's okay, we are human, and so it's about not judging ourselves for judgments we might have.

Yes, it can be really painful when someone is being racist, homophobic, transphobic, or any other kind of discriminatory behaviors or language. Whether it's towards us, or towards someone we love, or towards someone we don't know, whether it's just in general. So I think it's okay if we have judgment come up in ourselves in that moment. But again, it's not our responsibility, we can just set a clear boundary, and we can walk away.

Dr Roxy Manning

Yes. I think it's important, I realize when I talk about not making judgments. I didn't actually set the framing of what I mean by that. And so the judgments that I don't want to make are what I call moralistic judgments, which is the person is good, the person is bad, the person is evil, versus the judgments I am completely willing to make, which are connected to needs. Like, that is harmful, that is not working for me, that invalidates my experience and my identity. So I am completely fine with making those kinds of judgments because they're connected to the needs that are important to me.

Jaï Bristow

Thank you for clarifying that. I'd love to go into that a bit more, but unfortunately, we're out of time. So, Roxy, how can people find out more about you and your work?

Dr Roxy Manning

Sure. Easiest way is to go to my website, which is my name, roxannemanning.com. Or you can also find out about the new books at antiracistconversations.com. You'll find the books, you'll find

trailers, videos, but best of all, at that site, you'll find my new podcast, which is called Fierce Compassion, where I've been interviewing some pretty amazing thinkers and folks who are doing antiracist work in unique, or creative ways. So ways that are not just traditional protesting, but maybe through art, through music, through literature activism, education. So come check us out.

[00:41:03] Jaï Bristow

Fantastic. Thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciated this conversation.

Dr Roxy Manning

Thank you, Jaï.