



Daniela Pierre-Bravo Wants to Help You Navigate Being 'the Other' at Work

It's an experience many of us share: working in industries and spaces where we are the first or the only. How do you harness the strength and power of your difference in the face of pressure to conform? That question is the focus of Daniela's new book, *The Other: How to Own Your Power at Work as a Woman of Color*.

Alicia Menendez: The last time we spoke with Daniela Pierre-Bravo, she shared her story of growing up undocumented, making her way through college, selling Mary Kay cosmetics, juggling internships and odd jobs, and eventually landing a job at one of the buzziest news shows in the business, *Morning Joe*. Now Daniela is back with a new book, her second, *The Other: How to Own your Power at Work as a Woman of Color*. She's here to share her best advice on how to navigate the loneliness of being the other, we all know that well, and how to advocate for yourself when no one around you sees you or gets you. Daniela, hi.

Daniela Pierre-Bravo:
Hi, Alicia.

Menendez: Daniela, tell me about a time in your own life when you have been made to feel like the other.

Pierre-Bravo: I grew up in a small conservative town and I'm a white Latina. I can't say that I've ever had anything racist against me because of the color of my skin, but the big thing for me feeling like the other is that I was undocumented. My biggest goal in high school was to go under the radar because I didn't want anybody to even have a hint that my family was undocumented and that I was undocumented because I didn't want to feel like the other. I remember a dinner that I was invited to in high school. I had a boyfriend at the time and his family was really well known, Ivy league educated, very, very different from my family, worked the 9-5 job, really close family. Meanwhile, my family was like we'd be lucky to have a bucket of Lee's chicken at the end of the night and my parents were off to the second shift.

Pierre-Bravo: But I remember going in there, meeting the parents for the first time. I walk into this Italian restaurant and I was so nervous because I got so nervous when people asked about my background. Everything was going well. We would go through the appetizers and then we had some lasagna and then the mom goes, "So are you an alien or do you have papers?" Silence. Then everybody started laughing. It was a big joke. "No, Mom. She's undocumented. She's an alien. She's an undocumented alien," thinking it was the funniest thing in the world being sarcastic, coming to my rescue. I, Alicia, froze. I didn't even know what to do because that was my major fear, being caught. Being caught. Time was like, "Okay, I am the other and I don't belong, and I have to do everything that I can to find ways to find cues of inclusion, of belonging, because I clearly don't." It didn't help that my mom

at home and my grandma at home would say things like, "Oh, they would've never accepted you. Good thing that relationship was over because you never would've fit in."

Menendez: How did that feeling, that idea that you needed to cover, that you needed to pick up on cues then follow you into your work?

Pierre-Bravo: Well, I think it helped me at the beginning. I talked to a lot of children of immigrants and Latinas and minority women who at the beginning of their career, they do a good job of understanding the cues of the room. That's a very valuable lesson, understanding what people want from you. Being the yes girl. Volunteering for the extra hours. Doing the things that are not in your job description, all great things to be acknowledged and celebrated for entry level professionals. But the problem for me was that when I was handed a big girl job, I was in helping shape the editorial and bringing in guests. I had to shift from menial jobs to actually being a decision maker and using my voice and understanding my power because I had a seat at the table, but I just didn't know how to use it.

Menendez: Daniela, when I was writing my book, *The Likability Trap*, there were a lot of things that I had experienced that I imagined I was truly alone in experiencing. One of the joys of being able to interview a lot of other women was to hear from women who had different experiences, but also to hear women who had the same experiences I had and were able to name things that I was not able to name. You did a lot of interviews for *The Other*. Was there something that came up over and over again for these women?

Pierre-Bravo: Yeah. Loneliness, feeling alone. When you feel alone, it disables you from knowing that your duality, your existence is powerful and that it can have power in the spaces that you inhabit in the workplace.

Menendez: Can we unpack though what you mean when you say alone? Because I think sometimes that lands with people as literally alone. But my experience of loneliness is that often I have been in meetings where let's say I'm advocating for a story and I look around the room and I realize I have no one who's lived experience will allow them to have my back or something that I think is an expression of bias happens in the room. I have no one to lock eyes with across the table and be like, "Did you just see what I just saw?" It's not always specifically about being excluded so much as it is about not having people who you can connect with and say, "I know that you know where I'm coming from."

Pierre-Bravo: You're right. Loneliness comes when where it has an effect in the workplace is when you have an idea or you're trying to articulate something for yourself and the people in the room just don't get it. They don't get what it's like being undocumented. They don't get what it's like being a black woman who doesn't want their hair touched at work. There's all these little things that first of all, it's triggering because it's not just about our experience in the workplace. It's about our entire existence. These microaggressions that happen to us and these experiences of being singled out as the other have happened well before the workplace. When you feel lonely, you feel like it's your fault. It feels like you're the problem. I think that's the biggest thing.

Pierre-Bravo: When that happens, that translates into us reverting back to what we know, which is, "Okay, we need to see ourselves through the eyes of somebody else and what they want from us. If we're not giving them that, and if we're creating cognitive dissonance to what they think a woman is supposed to be like, what a minority woman is supposed to look like, say like, then it's our fault and then we need to change." For me, I can bring it back to my experience being the only Latina in a room, understanding immigration and the

nuances of immigration a little bit better than my colleagues at the time. I had the responsibility to sometimes double down on guests or sticking on a story because I knew the impact and so sometimes that loneliness can be empowering. I think that's the shift that this book does is to understand that you're not alone. That's the whole point and to understand that our duality and that our otherness is what makes us irreplaceable. It makes us unique and it's what's going to set us apart.

Menendez: You have now written two books about women in the workplace. I have written one book about women in the workplace, and one of my greatest takeaways about the industry and the way that women have been conditioned to think about this type of book is that we want actionable items. We are living the problem. Thank you for articulating the problem, but we want to know what's next. What were your favorite actionable items?

Pierre-Bravo: I really find this powerful tool for microaggressions.

Menendez: If someone doesn't know what a microaggression is, can you tell them or give an example?

Pierre-Bravo: Yeah. A microaggression is, for example, there was this Asian girl that was interviewed for my book and her boss asked her, "My daughter is having trouble with her homework. It's a Chinese. Can you help her?" That's not where she was from. And so she didn't know what to do in that moment.

Menendez: You don't know what to do because you're processing the slight, which is that you've been misidentified.

Pierre-Bravo: Right.

Menendez: But you also know that if you come back or come at this the wrong way in your response-

Pierre-Bravo: There's a retaliation. Oh, absolutely. If corporate... There is one thing to say stand your ground, report to HR, these are all important things, but I steer clear away from blanket career advice because people have real repercussions. One of the ways where I found that was really effective speaking to experts and other people who have been able to walk away from these conversations positively, both for themselves and the person involved, is to ask for clarification. Ask them a question back. A really easy thing to say is like, "Oh, what did you mean by that? Oh, do you think I'm from China because I'm actually from the Philippines or whatever." Asking for clarification in the moment not only disarms, right? It's not like you're saying something that's going to disrupt the relationship. You're just asking for clarification.

Pierre-Bravo: That clarification does two things. One, it allows them to hear what they just said. It allows them to either double down on the comment or say, "They're sorry." Because some people, Alicia, people are dumb. They say things that maybe they didn't mean, or that say things that they're ignorant so it could give them an opportunity to be like, "Oh, actually, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean it that way." Then it gives you a chance to educate them. The second part, if they double down and they continue to make the statement in a microaggression, then now you have real data to then take to HR and have a serious conversation because you know that they know what they said was a microaggression.

Pierre-Bravo: The other thing... One of the things that I learned from my male colleagues in the news business that I think is very effective is to use direct language, whether it's in a meeting or whether it's in an email. Avoid fluff words like I'm not sure if this works, but no worries. If not, I was thinking maybe. I've tried to eradicate those words from my vocabulary and in a meeting, one of my favorite ways to explain something that I'm trying to get for them to do is my recommendation is. You're not using fluff words. You're not trying to make people comfortable or accommodate. That's one of the things that happens with women who

again, feel like the other. They want to make that cognitive dissonance as small as possible. Direct language and say what you want to say and get to the chase. For negotiating, one of my favorite things is a lot of women get discouraged when they get a know. It's inevitable.

Pierre-Bravo: We can write tons of books on how to negotiate effectively and sometimes it's just a bad time for the company or sometimes you have real gaps in your experience that you need. But instead of just walking away from that meeting and saying, "Oh, okay." Get the metrics that you need. Get the real metrics that you need and the qualifiers that they're looking for for the next meeting. In that meeting, when you get a know, make sure you don't walk away without saying, "Okay, great. What was the things that were missing for this salary or this promotion. Okay, great. When do you think I can check in next? In three months? Four months? And how can we build a plan so that I'm checking with you that you know I'm getting to the goal that we've already talked about."

Pierre-Bravo: Then the last tip is, which I think is really powerful, and I learned on my Mary Kay days, whenever you're trying to seal the deal, embrace the power of the silence. Zip it and don't say anything, because there's some research out there that shows that when you, again, try to avoid filling the room with words, trying to avoid that discomfort that you put it on the other person and they're more likely to agree with you or say yes. Those are some of my favorite tips.

Menendez: I want to be clear for our listeners this is not purely theoretical or academic for you. You have actually lived this. You came to Morning Joe as a page, you ascended to become a booker, you and I have had a lot of conversations over the years about the fact that while you were amazing at your job, you liked your job, it wasn't the vision you had for yourself or for your career. We've had a lot of conversations over the years about what I think is one of the hardest pivots to make career-wise in media and that is going from being a person who is behind the camera, who's doing production work to being someone who was in front of the camera. What made that pivot possible and what did it require of you?

Pierre-Bravo: It required of me understanding that you have to create something. You have to go through the steps of something that other people don't understand. I, for my entire life, have had to see a vision and create it and go through the motions by my own accord. The most important thing is to be okay with the discomfort that comes when people might criticize you or might not believe in it. That's really hard, because for women, you know this better than anybody, we like to be liked. We like to make sense. We don't want to create dissonance.

Pierre-Bravo: I think for me, especially with somebody that was a booker and had, oh, my God, the smartest colleagues in the world, and for me to be like, "Oh, I'm going to go to Las Vegas and I'm going to go to the spin room and try to get candidates backstage. Oh, but can I also interview Latinos in Nevada and just maybe do an on air segment and throw it on Morning Joe and then pitch it to other shows?" I was behind the scenes. There was no reason why I should have done that. Or when I was at the Forbes conference and I got an interview with Serena Williams, because I had talked the day before on stage about financial wellness that I had pitched to write about on Know Your Value when I was still a booking producer. The PR person for Serena Williams that day was in the audience listening to me speak about financial wellness and they were doing something on stage like that with Serena the next day.

Pierre-Bravo: They emailed me and they said, "We want to do an interview. Can you do the interview?" Again, I was a producer. I had no business interviewing Serena Williams, but what did I do? I called my boss and I said, "Hey, I have an interview with Serena Williams. I'll take care of a crew. I'll talk to Forbes. I'll make sure I have a camera. Can you play this on Morning Joe and then you we'll put it on Know your Value." Thank God my boss said okay and I had the support of Mika who has been a great supporter of me and they let me do it. But I had to build it. I had to give them on a platter what it was that I wanted them to see. It's easier for people to say yes that way.

Menendez: This might sound silly, but I think it's important because this is part of the finesse of being a person who is marked as other in the workplace, which is that when I met you Daniela. You were dressing like a 45 year old soccer mom. Preppiest person I've ever seen in my entire life.

Pierre-Bravo: Oh, my God. That's hilarious.

Menendez: A colored shirt, loafers and adorable. Love the preppy look, but it never felt like it was true to the essence of who you were. It's been interesting to watch you as you've done the work to ease up and actually give yourself the space and permission to become Daniela as I know you. I'm looking at you right now. You have on a tank top, a layered necklace, you would not have been caught dead at work a few years ago in those things.

Pierre-Bravo: So true. Well, that's what it's all about. I think writing this book honestly has really helped because I'm going on a journey and it's the journey that I want to take the readers, which for people like us, for people who have been othered, for people who have looked for rules of inclusion, for people who have looked for cues and looked how to maneuver and how to create ourselves through the eyes of somebody else, we want to be liked. We want to make sense to other people. All of my life, I think I knew who I was at my core. I knew my worth at my core, but all of the other stuff, the way I talk, the way I dressed, I think subconsciously I gave that away to my environment and I think in my book tour in 2019, I was dressing like a reporter because like-

Menendez: I'm glad you said it. You didn't make me say it. Yes, you wore a sheath dress.

Pierre-Bravo: But the thing is I didn't know. I didn't know what it was like to be comfortable in my skin, even with the clothes that I wore, because I just wanted to be an image of what I thought was appropriate. But those things matter because it's when we feel comfortable in our skin, that's part of taking up space because, and this is the number one thing that I found when I... because you and I have both interviewed leaders at women who have been at the top of their fields. The number one thing where you know somebody's in a leadership position, I think is ease.

Pierre-Bravo: The way that they take up space, the way that they talk, the way that they walk, it's ease. When we're trying to be somebody else and we're dressing in uncomfortable tight clothes or we're dressing like an old woman when we're 25, we're not going to be at ease, no matter how much we practice what we want to say. Our physical self has to be at ease as well. I was talking to somebody really quickly the other day about career advice. You can put so much bullet points of career advice, but if you don't figure out what's going on internally and understand all the subconscious beliefs that you have about yourself, those tips might work once or twice, but they're not going to be able to be integrated in a way that's substantial that's actually going to get you far.

Menendez: The other thing that happens when you show up like this is that you give permission to younger Latinas who are in the office to begin to show up as they are. You give them at least an alternative path forward.

Pierre-Bravo: That's the whole point why I wrote this book, why I've decided to be uncomfortable and put myself out there and be raw and real and honest because I want people to be reflected in those stories. I want people to understand that they're not alone in the journey and that they're other people that might not know them that are rooting for them and it's about our whole community as you mentioned. It's not just about us as individuals and our individual success.

Menendez: Daniela, thank you so much for doing this.

Pierre-Bravo: Thank you so much. I always love talking to you.

Menendez: Thank you as always for listening. Latina to Latina is executive produced and owned by Juleyka Lantigua and me, Alicia Menendez. Paulina Velasco is our producer. Manuel Bedoya is our marketing lead. Kojin Tashiro is our associate sound designer and mixed this episode. We love hearing from you. It makes our day email us at hola@latinatolatina.com. Slide into our DMs on Instagram. Tweet us @LatinatoLatina. Check out our merchandise that is on our website, latinatolatina.com/shop. Remember, please subscribe or follow us on Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, Goodpods, wherever you are listening right now. Every time you share this podcast, every time you share an episode, every time you leave a review, it helps us to grow as a community.

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