

Claiming Space

Eliza VanCort's book, podcast and content teach women how to live 'unapologetically.'

BY NIA SPRINGER-NORRIS



If there is one message that author, survivor and speaker Eliza VanCort wants women who follow her to take away, it is to claim their own space. In her 2018 TEDx Talk, VanCort argued that, "The tools of this [new feminist] revolution are women telling their truths, saying their opinions and demanding change through their words. The most powerful tool in this revolution is communication."

VanCort survived multiple kidnappings by her mother who had a mental illness, a #MeToo moment at 16 and a traumatic brain injury in 2014. Her response was to channel her energy into helping women rewrite their stories and change the rules of what it means to be a powerful woman.

Connection is the secret to survival, VanCort says.

"I have a really wonderful group of friends around me," VanCort says. "I surround myself with women who are just extraordinary.... And I've

also gotten very good at getting anti-mentors out of my life. So, the people who are around me are really lifting me up, not tearing me down, and I think that makes all the difference."

VanCort also creates content for TikTok and Instagram. She says she does this for individuals who prefer to get their information in bite-sized chunks, as well as people who can't or don't want to spend a lot of time reading.

"I'm creating content because I want to make sure that I can democratize the information that I'm putting out there, and I know one of my kids is dyslexic," VanCort says. "I know a lot of people aren't as comfortable reading a book, although my son does listen to books all the time."

VanCort's book, *A Woman's Guide to Claiming Space: Stand Tall. Raise Your Voice. Be Heard.*, and her podcast, *Claim Your Space*, are guides to living unapologetically and making space for yourself in the world.



JEFFREY MOSIER PHOTOGRAPHY/COURTESY OF ELIZA VANCORT

A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO CLAIMING SPACE: STAND TALL. RAISE YOUR VOICE. BE HEARD.

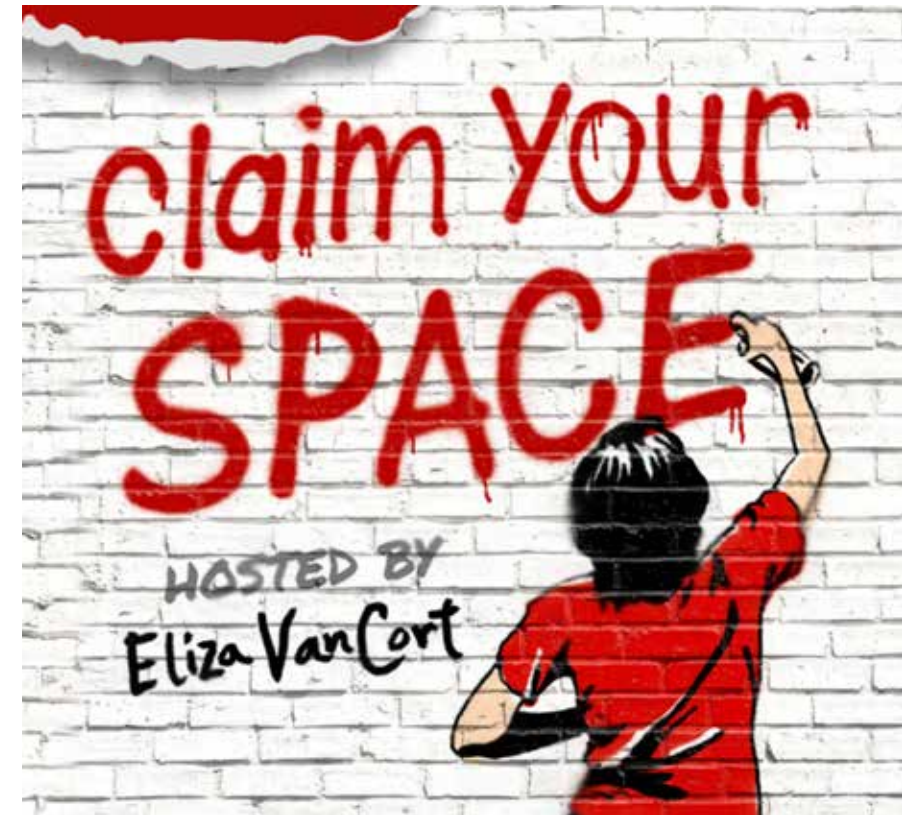
Originally published in 2021, and re-published in 2023 by Berrett-Koehler Publishers, *A Woman's Guide to Claiming Space: Stand Tall. Raise Your Voice. Be Heard.* identifies five key behaviors for all "Space-Claiming Queens": use your voice and posture to project confidence and power, end self-sabotage, forge connections, neutralize unsafe spaces and unite across differences.

VanCort didn't just rely on her own wisdom to write the book.

"I don't believe that this book is necessarily just my book," VanCort says. "I went and talked to experts in every area that impacts women. So, the book is full of the wisdom of women throughout the country and the world—and it's great wisdom, and we all need it."

"Claiming space" is a term that began to resonate with VanCort after a car crashed into her while she was riding her bike, resulting in a severe brain injury. After her accident, VanCort lost many of her communication skills, and she feared becoming "trapped in her own mind" like her mother, who developed paranoid schizophrenia in her late 20s. (The book is dedicated to VanCort's mother, who she describes as a brilliant writer and poet.) VanCort observed women in public and noticed that the women who seemed to claim their space were the ones who also were the most successful in work and life.

"Claiming space" dissects the moves that people in power use with their body language and speech to make themselves undeniably present. This could be through posture, volume of speech or even the lack of any speech at all. In one example, VanCort describes using silence as a power move when an influential business man spoke to her dismissively. It also delves into the tactics for chasing "anti-mentors" (e.g., people who, theoretically, should be your cheerleaders but make you feel sad and/or off balance) out of your life and escaping from the binds of chasing their approval.



CLAIM YOUR SPACE PODCAST

Her *Claim Your Space* podcast, which launched last February, features a guest every episode who brings a different perspective to the concept of claiming space. The podcast covers a variety of topics from data privacy to how it feels to be a Black mother who has lost her unarmed child to gun violence.

VanCort chooses her guests by finding and interviewing women who are doing "extraordinary things." At the end of each episode, each guest offers three concrete steps that listeners can internalize and act on to make the world a better place.

One standout episode (as of press time, the second season of the podcast was preparing to launch) is the March 22, 2023, episode, "A Man Is Not a Financial Plan," featuring Mary Ellen Iskenderian, the president and CEO

of Women's World Banking. In her interview with VanCort, Iskenderian unpacks the damaging messages that women receive about finance and the importance of teaching our daughters about finances. VanCort notes at the beginning of the episode that, prior to doing the work she does now, she was married to a doctor. She pursued her passions without needing to think about how to monetize them until she parted ways with her husband.

Claim Your Space is available wherever you get your podcasts; there are video episodes available on VanCort's YouTube channel, @ElizaVanCort. ♦

SPRINGER-NORRIS IS A JOURNALIST WHO CLAIMS SPACE IN THE WORLD OF PROFILE AND TECHNOLOGY WRITING.