

Cara Furman: Hello and welcome to episode 19 of Thinking in the Midst, a podcast about philosophy and action in education. With Derek Gottlieb, I'm Cara Furman. In this episode, our guests spoke to the challenges of engaging as women in a patriarchal society. They drew on philosophy in the interest of sharing, naming, and surfacing of experiences. They spoke to the ways in which thinking philosophically supported their navigation of the world, as women when delivering keynotes, networking at conferences, and giving birth, and how bringing these experiences into philosophy made for better philosophy. Repeatedly, they pivoted between their own perception and commitment to seeking out how others perceived from a different angle. They called listeners to recognize how far women have come, and how far we must go for a just and equitable world.

Welcome. It is so fantastic to see both of you this morning and evening, and we are here this morning to talk broadly about the patriarchy and how it affects lives in academia and other school spaces. To get us started, Liz, would you be able to introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about where you're coming from?

Liz Jackson: Sure. Thank you for having me. I'm Liz Jackson. I'm a professor in the Department of International Education at the Education University of Hong Kong. I'm also the immediate past president for the Philosophy of Education Society of Australia, and the interim editor-in-chief with Mark Tessar of the Journal Educational Philosophy and Theory, which is owned by were the good piece, that piece of society. We have great to join you today.

Cara Furman: Thank you. Lauren?

Lauren Bialystok: Yeah, lovely to be here with you and talking with my friend Liz Jackson. My name is Lauren Bialystok. I'm associate professor in ethics and education at the Ontario Institute for Studies and Education, which is at the University of Toronto. I'm also acting director of the Center for Ethics at the University of Toronto, and happy to be here.

Cara Furman: Thank you. Good to see you both.

Derek Gottlieb: Excellent. So, it's a broad topic that we're talking about today. Could you tell us or share with us the story of how you interact with this topic in your professional life, how you came to be interested in this in personal and philosophical ways, and so on? Lauren, would you care to start and then we will go to Liz?

Lauren Bialystok: Sure. Well, I certainly became interested in this topic, which, as aptly noted, is an exceedingly broad topic. Way before I knew who I was as a professional, way before I went to university, I think

this is partly a condition of being gendered in the world and observing things. So, but I identified as a feminist and I was interested in issues that I took to be related to gender from a very young age. And I think that part of what has sustained my interest and prompted some of my more formal investigations into these topics as an academic is that as a woman, I've become aware that my experience of gender and of being a woman is outrageously anomalous compared to most women in the world and certainly women in history. And I want to understand that and I don't want to forget that. And I want us to pay attention to the gains we've made and how they've been made and being vigilant about not sliding backwards.

Derek Gottlieb: Excellent. Thank you. Liz.

Liz Jackson: That's so interesting to hear. Lauren, I think I was thinking I come at this from a different angle. I mean, I had learned in school about feminism. I studied it at university. I thought I was a good feminist. And then I kept finding once I started my career that being a woman made a difference in ways that I didn't realize -- made a difference and this kept shocking me over the course of my career. So I think it began when I was a PhD student and a few times that conferences people would ask me if I was doing feminist philosophy. One of my someone on my dissertation committee said rather than studying multiculturalism, I should study the role that it plays in my life and that it has played in my life. I mean, first of all, I think has been made obscure sometimes because of the gains we've made and because we grew up in a period where we were told that women's equality had essentially been achieved, even though it hadn't. And that I'm just aware of how minimal or minimally noxious the role is for me compared to other women now and certainly other women in the past.

Cara Furman: Thank you for that. Thank you. So you've both written about issues related to feminism broadly defined working against the patriarchy, broadly defined. And one thing that's interesting about both of your writing is that you move from story to philosophy and from the personal over to the general in some really interesting ways. So I'm wondering if you can both share a little bit about what you have found as a researcher on these topics and invite you to begin with some of the fantastic stories that you tell to help bring a broad range of readers into what it is that you're really talking about here. And would one of you prefer to go first? Liz, do you want to start?

Liz Jackson: Sure. Yeah, I have some ideas about this. So I think the first time I decided that I had to write about these issues, it was based in having some interesting personal experiences, which made me think twice about the issues and their importance in academic spaces. So specifically around sexual harassment and the borderline areas of sexual harassment. So I think it was maybe six or seven or eight years ago. I was at a

philosophy of education society conference. And as soon as I walked into the room, I went to an evening event. It was a party in someone's hotel room. And as soon as I came in, I saw the hotel room was full of about 40 of my best friends, men and women of different ages, all kinds of different people. And as soon as I went in the room, I noticed that just about every man in the room had to touch me like I was some kind of magnet, either touching my arm or hugging me. And I was really surprised. And I started thinking later, why am I surprised about this? I think it's because I've been working and living in Asia so long, where people aren't as touchy-feely in general. But what really became interesting to me about this. So I thought, okay, this is kind of a funny experience. Then a day or two later, I mentioned to some some colleagues of mine, geez, our guys just really flirty or really touchy-feely these days. And she said, what are you talking about? Who did something to you? And then I realized I have to explain that somebody did something to me. And I found that to be quite awkward. And then I realized in that process that this woman was sort of flabbergasted that I'd had anything strange happen to me, that she'd had the opposite of experience as me. So this made me think more deeply about why how is it that certain spaces feel safe to some people, but they don't feel safe to others. So when it comes to conference spaces, there are some women who don't really notice there being anything related to gender or sexuality. For other women, they feel like they're constantly being made aware that they're a sexual object when they're going to conferences. And I found that this difference is quite interesting. And this is what made me think this is something worth studying more systematically. On the other hand, when we come to, if we think about another group which might be seen as being accused in this kind of discourse of anti-patriarchy, if we think about older men's experience, okay, some of them don't do anything strange, would never want to hug or touch anyone while others probably, you know, they think of it as a very friendly thing to do. And so from their perspective, they're not sort of hugging every woman they run into like they have to hug every woman they run into. And this, so this made me think it's really interesting to study. And then I started connecting it to, we know from a lot of social science research that women are, have different expectations, put upon them in the workplace in higher education. And I started getting into feminist theory more and more. And particularly, I think Arlee Fox child's work on flight attendants, the managed heart where she talks about flight attendants in the 1970s and 1980s, I really connected to that. And I realized, you know, she's not talking only about flight attendants who are smiling and happy. And they're doing this work not because they love being flight attendants, but because it's their job and because it's about the safety of customers. That this is common for a lot of social service fields, a lot of fields where you're helping and serving other people. And in those fields too, people have very different experiences. And it also goes into your emotion. So from a philosophical view, I found it very interesting to connect. What does this have to do with the motions? What

does this have to do with identity? What does this have to do with the workplace? And is this something you can generalize? Or is it not something you can generalize? So that sent me down the rabbit hole.

Cara Furman: I'm going to turn to Lauren in a second, but Liz, in your paper, the... I think the title of it is the smiling professor. You talk about both what performing emotions for others is like. And I thought that distinction was really helpful. And you also give some categories for the ways in which women often are asked to perform particular emotions in a professional space. And I'd ask you to go a little bit more and deeper about what you found because I know that the distinctions that you came up with, I was thinking about the whole week as I was thinking about some of my interactions. And I found it really useful.

Liz Jackson: Sure. So in the managed heart by early Hochschild talks about flight attendants often play one of two roles. One is the sexy girlfriend. And this is something you can see in advertisements even to this day that there's sort of flirty and there's the idea that traditionally people who are flying, there's a lot of business travelers who are men that they are someone they want to get married to or sleep with. A lot of the advertisements have even said, you know, you can maybe meet your wife on the next flight. And then they said the other role is like the kindly grandma or the kindly mother who you get on the plane and you're angry and she's there to support you and say, oh, you know, it's okay. It'll be fine. So I started just talking to every everyone I knew in academia about this issue who would stand to talk to me about it, men and women and gain different feedback from different people. So I said, you might say that there's the sexy girlfriend role in the conference where people are flirting. So I've had some of my friends tell me that after they give a conference keynote that they're so excited to give the conference keynotes, some guy will come up and just say how attractive they are or like they have great legs or something, which is really upsetting because you're excited about your work and then you realize you're just being hit on basically. In addition to this, I think something specific to conferences which is a role that I've found myself in and for some reason, I feel like I should age out of this, but I haven't yet is what I called the Sunny Daughter and the Sunny Daughter is someone who and I've had a lot of graduate students tell me that they've connect with being the Sunny Daughter. You go to the conference, you're excited to meet people and these older men start giving you a lot of advice. You aren't asking for advice. You're hoping that you can talk about intellectual ideas and you feel like you're being talked down to. Related to that is a big sister and I also experienced this role quite a bit myself. So I think an example I gave in the paper was that when I was on the tenure track as an assistant professor, male PhD students would give me advice about my career and about tenure track. And I find to this day people that are at the same level or lower level in terms of academic hierarchies have no problem giving advice and you know I don't think of myself as someone who

doesn't want advice or who has to play this competitive game with people. So a question here is what kind of personalities are the ones that tend to get that kind of treatment. You can also find something like the kindly mother or grandmother and then another, I mean one thing that this work doesn't deal well with is the diversity of sexual identities. So talking to a lot of women who identify as queer and as not cisgender and related identities, they're less sort of cis traditional stereotypical feminine that they feel like they get treated like one of the boys and I've actually had a number of women in another in this kind of camp and you want to be careful not to generalize too much but this other camp of women who say I don't have the guys coming on to me or giving me advice, I have them talking to me about how hot the chicks are at the conference and I've had a number of older women tell me that they get this kind of treatment like they're one of the guys which is also horrifying and disturbing to them on a different level. So it was yeah it was a fun exercise to do that and I've had a lot of people. I mean it's obviously a major simplification but it has I think it's connected with a lot of people.

Cara Furman: Thank you Liz. I will reiterate I think it was I found it really helpful and that it was giving distinctions that I recognized but hadn't had words to explain exactly what what I felt like I had experienced in pretty much all of those categories. I'm going to turn it over to you Lauren to talk a little bit about your research and what you have found.

Lauren Bialystok: I haven't researched the professional side of things as systematically as Liz had but as she was speaking I was thinking of a few similarities and differences in our experiences and how that's shaped how I think about it so I also really appreciate the importance of labeling some of these phenomena and giving people language to recognize how gender and sexist stereotypes are playing a role in their lives. I mean labeling is the first step in progress. One of my favorite things that I've heard Gloria sign them say is we haven't solved sexual harassment yet but at least we have a word for it. It used to just be called life. So coming up with terms like that is really central to raising consciousness and pointing out how sex and gender are operating on people. I've had some comparable experiences in philosophy of education or in the education world as Liz but I think one thing that strikes me that's worth pointing out is I came from philosophy and I noticed a contrast between the fields immediately and unmistakably and that contrast which is almost exclusively a positive one on the education side has stayed with me. So I think part of the reason that I feel more lucky and less affected by such dynamics is because I started out in a different corner of academia and professional life. So when I did my PhD in philosophy and I think this is still mostly true but it's moved in a somewhat better direction. The field was overwhelmingly male not to mention white. It's still overwhelmingly white but it was the most male dominated discipline in the humanities and social

sciences by law. It had about the same gender ratios as more of the hard sciences like engineering and furthermore the culture itself seemed to uncritically replicate some of what we would now refer to as toxic masculinity but I don't think it was I mean I don't think that was even really in the air then and for reasons that are understandable because I you know I was trained to think that good philosophy is as rigorous as humanly possible and that requires unapologetically deconstructing and criticizing ideas and arguments and receiving such criticisms. You have to have a very thick skin to be a quote real philosopher and that the people who were best at this had little time for the sort of niceties of making people feel safe or flattered before they issued their critiques that the way to do this is just to cut right right to the chase and I still saw people being friends and having positive relationships in this environment but what most of the older mostly male professors modeled for me as I was being forged in the institution of philosophy right out of undergrad in undergrad and right out of undergrad was a kind of cutthroat academic environment which I came to realize favored or particular form of male dominance and alienated women and racial minorities and other minorities not because we weren't as good at philosophy not because we couldn't think rigorously but because it was a combative environment where people who already had a lot of social capital and presumed dominance tended to flourish so when I came to education which was a few years after my PhD first of all I was in a much more female lead environment we know that the numbers statistics you know gender parity is much closer if not if not it's more women than men in education and the aesthetic just the way that we go about our business and what counts as doing the work also immediately felt different so when I came into education even though I was still doing philosophy in education I noticed for example that after a talk the the questions would almost invariably be prefaced with some form of gratitude or praise like thank you that was such an interesting talk I almost never heard that in philosophy almost never and that the people at the front of the room were much less likely to be old white men not that there's anything with old white men but we just I didn't feel as much of an alien and when back and forth more you know critical debates did arise they were done in a much less aggressive or show offy way than I had become used to I did often feel that what I was I couldn't participate in philosophical questioning in a formal setting when I was going through my PhD because you just had to be extremely self-confident and aggressive to do it the way that people would earn respect the way that you needed to do for people to give you respect so I guess you know one of my observations is that of course gender and sexism continued to play a role in all the disciplines and in all the professions and I've absolutely had moments much like Liz described where I became aware of myself or of other women in our field in a way that was disturbing but I also know that we've made a lot of progress and that there are contrasts and I'm interested in this kind of double edged sword of doing philosophy in a way that is really rigorous and where people expect to be pushed on their ideas and called to

account for their arguments but not done in a way that is unnecessarily harsh or alienating and not done in a way that simply perpetuates the existing power hierarchies where some people are predictably more confident about the quality of their ideas and their entitlements to press people on their ideas and I think we do a reasonably good job overall again I'm speaking in relative terms not in absolute terms but I think it's been interesting to think about how my sensibilities around what counts as a good philosophical argument or a good philosophical back and forth like at a conference has to be tempered with unawareness of the role that power and especially gender dynamics play.

Cara Furman: Before we go on to the next question, Lauren -- and you've recently written a book, I don't remember the title, exactly, but about sex education in schools, and thinking about how education um one of the things is how education and educational environments frame how we approach particular issues and topics and sexism of course plays into that -- could you talk a little bit about that work?

Lauren Bialystok: Sure so the thank you for the opportunity to plug it the book is called Touchy Subject the History and Philosophy of Sex Education and it's co-authored with Lisa Anderson who's a wonderful American historian and this does take us into somewhat different territory but I guess uh educationally it's a good reminder that whatever the subject we're always already conveying messages about sex and gender about the role that having a certain body plays and how people are treated and what they are presumed to need to know or not need to know and when and how that information is supposed to influence their behavior sex education is a really prime example as my my colleague the historian shows in her part of the book for example it was taken for granted until the early 20th century in the United States that at least white middle class women did not need to know and we're not supposed to know anything about sex until they got married which is you know thankfully a conceit that we've slept off nobody I think today even very conservative people are likely to believe that if they do they should at least know that it's logistically impossible so that's no longer our our starting point but the ways that ideas about sex and gender as well as of course class and race and other features of our identities affect what we learn what we encode as appropriate for ourselves and people like us that continues to require a lot of very close attention and critical scrutiny and it continues to be the case in sex education or what passes for sex education that students get very different messages depending on the kind of bodies they have and the gendered roles that they are coded as having and that these are I mean to the extent that we we haven't perfected sex education by a long shot this is bad for everybody but part of the reason I was interested in this work and one of the things that was repeatedly corroborated in my research is that it's worse for girls as you would expect it's worse for racial minorities it's worse for queer kids but just between boys and girls teaching the birds and the bees in whatever off the rack thing they're

exposed to, girls suffer more, girls continue to get messages that contain sexist double standards sometimes extremely overtly such as in abstinence only until marriage education where they are literally told that if they have sex before marriage they are equivalent to a piece of chewed gum or a used shoe that nobody would want to buy because we all know that virginity is a commodity but even in much less overt ways including in so-called comprehensive sex education and of course this also has to do with the hidden curriculum the design of schools other messages about how differentially people are treated based on their bodies and their gender so it's unfortunately a site where we can see very clearly that as far as we've come and in some ways we've come a long way baby we really still live in the 1950s in some ways and because of this narrative that we don't live in the 1950s because of the narrative that feminism has triumphed and we've achieved gender parity, it's increasingly hard to recognize the ways in which women and girls remain systematically disadvantaged and especially on the topic of sex education given double standards and very destructive messages about sexuality.

Cara Furman: Thank you Lauren, and I appreciate how you keep reiterating this concept that we've come a long way in many ways and have a long way to go but also that the message that we're getting is that we've come a long way and there's no more work to be done so I really appreciate that how you're rephrasing that in different contexts.

Lauren Bialystok: I can give you a I can give you just a catch word for that if you want that can be useful. So the term post feminism has come to refer to not an ideology not an anti feminist ideology, although you can find plenty of those if you want to open the paper and look for them, but more this Zeitgeist, this attitude that feminism has accomplished its work this which is a lie right which is it's a myth that's given to younger women in particular that although their mothers and their grandmothers fought for equality and that was right to do when that's a good thing if you're a feminist now you're just cranky because you don't realize that you've already won and now taking it any further is just selfish and also reverse sexism it's just blaming men for things that they can't be responsible for. So a lot of young women really do dutifully come to embrace this message that we're in a post feminist era fewer young women now want to identify as feminist because they've been given the message that everything's been taken care of and at the same time they report ongoing sex and gender based discrimination in their lives and they are actually less able this is tragic to you know identify it and do something about it then women in my generation and Liz's generation were even though in some ways things were worse in the 80s and 90s because at least we were entitled to claim that it wasn't over yet and now it's a real problem when young women say basically that they are treated as sexual objects or they're coerced into sex but it's their fault it's not someone else's

fault because after all we live in a post feminist stage.

Derek Gottlieb: Thank you, thank you both. I think that that last point is so powerful, the idea that, I mean, I think a lot about the the connection between an assumed broad-based pursuit of social justice or like the acceptability of social justice being tied to a real deep-seated desire to just never have to think about the issues that that justice would involve ever again and so like the way that those play into each other really fascinating. Also your book is phenomenal -- touchy subject is a wonderful book and everybody should get it.

Lauren Bialystok: Thank you and and Derek also has an important role in the book I don't know if you want to be outed.

Derek Gottlieb: It's indexing.

Lauren Bialystok: yes thank you to Derek did the index thank you Derek.

Derek Gottlieb: I did I did I got to read it first is the way that I like to think about it. Um, so, so much great thinking in both of your uh in both of your considerations I'd love to ask each of you how you see your work is so fascinating because you're you're you're thinking about the spaces that you're operating in the disciplinary and uh and conference spaces that you're operating in and you're doing it from within that discipline with the tools and the uh and the methods and that and stuff so I'd love to uh hear you talk a little bit about how you see uh your identity as a philosopher coming to bear on these issues how do you use the tools of the methods to think about or the tools and the methods of the discipline to think about and uh turn the discipline back on itself a little bit and get it and get people in these spaces to think harder about those issues uh Liz let's start uh with you if that's okay

Liz Jackson: sure um for me I uh I think when I started working on the subject of sexual harassment and and the article we were discussing before um the smiling philosopher I was also aware that there was some serious issues with sexual harassment going on in some of our societies so I was the president of the philosophy of education society of australasia um when I discovered that there were some interesting patterns of some really um terrible behavior that were going on um and that's actually the part of what inspired me to start writing about the work was there's the methodological complexities in studying this topic so what happened was uh when I was the president we learned that there was uh one or two older uh so we're in um australasia so it's australia and US Islands and the Asia Pacific there was one or two older white men who were targeting young international um women of color, Asian women, and uh telling them that they were very important and telling them that uh you know if they wanted to take some walks together they could do some publications and these women would tell me what happened and they would say you can't tell anyone

because I don't want you to get in trouble at that point I'm a tenured professor and the president of the society and they're absolutely terrified about the situation um at the same time I know there was some issues going on in PES and America with uh doing surveys and talking to people about their experiences and in the in the process of trying to get women to speak out in uh the australasia context and in observing what was happening and people trying to do surveys of women in uh united states and and not just women but of all groups of people and their experiences uh that people are not always comfortable talking about these issues so this is the first thing not everyone's comfortable talking about these issues just like Lauren said people think it's their fault people internalize it uh it it took me you know until I was 35 or 36 before I said isn't there something weird going on with all the guys grabbing me uh because before that time I had actually been thinking you know I must be doing something wrong uh so people are afraid to say anything they're ashamed to say anything alters their perception of if something's acceptable or not uh so we all have different standards of what's acceptable all all of us in this discussion have different standards of what's acceptable right um in terms of do you want to hug people do you want to um you know hold people's hands when you're talking to them we all have those different standards so this makes it really philosophically interesting so I I started realizing this by talking to a lot of different people coming from a lot of different perspectives um coming from cross-cultural perspectives uh different parts of the world where gender norms are very different um another uh minority cultural contexts in western world uh and realizing that the traditional social science methods of discovering whether or not their sexual harassment aren't really effective in this context um at the same time I connected with the colleague of mine um Anna Luisa Garcia Munoz um in Chile um who's doing what's wrong sexual harassment and all around the world most women would say they haven't been sexually harassed but uh if you ask them has any man in a position of power might you feel uncomfortable 100% of women will so this is an interesting methodological challenge where I would say it's a great example of something that's traditional social science research methods is going to have a very hard time tracing and where a philosophical method is useful useful where you're um trying to elaborate different concepts and you're trying to understand different aspects of the situation so one aspect is our perception of what's acceptable behavior one aspect is the nature of a relationship so that there are people one aspect is the whole education we've had over our lives about the way we act in professional spaces uh and so I find doing philosophy helpful in order to think through um the answer to this question is not just to stop sexually harassing people or bothering women right if that was the answer to the question we wouldn't have this issue so this is why it's so philosophically fascinating as well um so so what's really going on here is quite complex and I think thinking philosophically helps me think about that complexity as well as the complexity of the solution the solution is not to tell everyone um to

create a safe space because 90% of people think they're in a safe space including all of the women who've had weird things happen to them at conferences they still would say they're in a safe space so uh so that what is happening is very difficult to understand and what is the solution is also very difficult to understand and this is where I find another method of just really engaging in dialogue with really different people really trying to connect with people who have the opposite perspective as I do so I worked um and spoke with a lot of people who are really skeptical about safe spaces policies who find them offensive and problematic and when I was president of pizza I saw that as my role was to understand why would some people be against a safe spaces policy um who are you know wonderful people but they also have a totally different view of the world than I do they've had a you know a different experience of the field than I've had um and if we don't talk to each other we don't even know that um and in terms of the publishing then I've really just tried to give voice to a lot of different perspectives and show perspectives that aren't only my perspective and ask other people to share uh their perspectives as much as possible and it might be anonymous and it might be anecdotes and and uh you know that's not going to be rigorous from a social science view but if if people can put themselves in another person's shoes then I hope that that actually does help solve the problem although you know probably the people who I would like to benefit from learning about these experiences probably don't read my articles or my books or are going to listen to this podcast but we'll see.

Cara Furman: Thank you thanks Liz. Lauren?

Lauren Bialystok: Well that's hard to follow up. I'm not going to answer the question by talking so much about turning the tools of philosophy against the discipline or the profession as such but maybe how I feel like being able to think about these things in philosophical ways has affected me and in my own self understanding and motivated me to pay more attention to what other women are experiencing and some of the more systematic forces that are working on us. One experience where this contrast between the kinds of autonomy that I typically enjoy as a woman and the the experience that most women historically have had was made really clear to me was in childbirth and I found that being able to think with a feminist philosophical lens about a whole range of steps in you know pregnancy childbirth raising an infant breastfeeding raising children now it has been helpful and given me some comfort and when I've talked to other mothers I've also found that we we crave this kind of insight and analysis and collective reflection on our experiences which our our field can offer us. When I gave birth to my first child you know I went into it like the educated affluent urban white woman that I am I thought just like in almost every other facet of my life I would have quite a lot of control over what happened to me my choices would be respected I would be able to you know talk or negotiate my way out of things that weren't going well

and that you know ultimately I would be in in a very reliable healthcare system so even if things didn't go according to plan my my body and my medical needs and my baby's medical needs would be attended to. Now fortunately we're all healthy but my actual experience of giving birth was at the first time possibly the most disempowering thing I've ever experienced this moment when I was supposed to be you know doing the quintessential womanly thing of pushing a baby out and becoming a mother and having all those chemicals and feelings flood through me I actually felt alienated inadequate terrified and that is because I especially realized on some reflection the medical complex that I was involved in and our culture at large since the since I was little and first imagined becoming a mother had taken over my agency to give birth and I felt very acutely what I know many women feel in many more different areas of their life on a daily basis than I do that my body was not my own that my choices and my reasoning weren't respected and that if I did not submit if I did not allow my body to be managed by other people something terrible would happen and interestingly it's not that I allowed myself to be managed by men it's not that any particular person's in anything wrong everybody was just fulfilling their role as a matter of fact the obstetrician to whom my care was overturned when my midwife had to turn over the care was a woman and my my husband was doing everything he could to support me so it really pointed out to me that these are structural choices that disempower women you can read about the over-medicalization of birth if you want I won't go into all the empirical research on that but the over-medicalization is not an accident it's not merely a scientific choice it's not merely a choice of efficiency although it's all of those things as well how hospitals want to run more efficiently it's a choice that was made at different moments very deliberately you can read Adrienne Rich on this it's absolutely chilling to take over women's control of their bodies and women's knowledge of how to help other women through childbirth and hand it over to especially then an exclusively male medical establishment all in the name of science and it led to me having a profoundly frightening and alienating experience that involved much more bodily injury than it needed to and when my second when I was giving birth to my second baby I decided to have a home birth and I wrote about that I don't think home birth is for everyone I don't think that all feminists should have home birth it's not about that it's a moment again of contrast where I came to realize that forces were working on me because of my embodiment and because of cultural norms that we have come to absolutely take for granted and that we can use philosophy and we can use feminist thinking and we can use talking to each other about some of these topics that we are discouraged from talking to each other about and that philosophy in particular as this most cerebral discipline has mostly jettisoned and mostly marked as Liz mentioned earlier as less than real philosophy and just women's work or just the personal private side of things which is not really intellectual but we can use all these things to raise consciousness and to start making changes and to stop taking for

granted some of the ways which as I referred to earlier with regard to sex education sexism still acts on us invisibly and we're given the narrative that because of legal wins or because of culture changes or because of medical advances you know they're their dear it's not really an issue anymore

Cara Furman: thank you both of you for your answers and for sharing all these really compelling stories that then fit with really rich philosophical analysis of these experiences I really appreciate both I'm going to share something very brief and then turn it to our final question which is about kind of what do we do so Liz you spoke about the subtlety and Lauren you just talked about the systems of how these things play out and I wanted to share one very short anecdote which is that very recently at a conference I was talking to a male conference male colleague about work about our work and we were engaged in a serious conversation about it and another conference goer kind of out of the blue or it seemed out of the blue to me said um how lucky it is that you both managed to find jobs at the same institution that's so unusual because you're married and my immediate response was what have I been doing what could I possibly have been doing to signal that I was married to this person who I'm not married to was there something wrong in my body language and it was only in reading your paper Liz where I thought oh okay this happens all the time like women at conferences people assume that they must be the spouse or if we're really talking about something we must be married or sexually engaged in some capacity and then my next instinct was to think wow I've been sort of demoted from being an object of sexual interest to what was once the object of sexual interest and now I'm the wife and that's the role that I'm now suddenly playing in this conference and that's kind of weird and confusing um so all of that is to say I don't think the person who asked that question in any way is a bad person or an unkind person that somehow I just fit into this category um and so that's a bit of a way in to say that I think we've got structures and particular behaviors that are both coming into play um so my very quick advice would be probably just don't ask if people are married unless they talk about their wedding um that just seems like maybe a good step just like you don't usually ask people if they're pregnant unless they've revealed that they are pregnant um but I'm going to ask both of you to talk about what could we be changing structurally or what could we be changing in terms of the ways that we act and treat people uh to to improve on these issues. Liz?

Liz Jackson: and so like I said before I think I think sharing the different experiences and stories is really interesting and helpful um I think the first time I realized that I had a unique experience I was alienated in a way but I think actually everyone has a different experience and everyone's grappling with this so I remember when there was a larger um me-to movement which is sort of coincided with the me-to movement and philosophy of education I remember talking to so many women who are just my friends across fields not even in academia who'd say is

something wrong with me if I don't think I was sexually harassed is something wrong with me if you know I think this you know you know if yeah just like what you said if someone thinks I'm someone's wife did I do something so I think that that is really helpful in healing because these topics have been considered taboo just not even worth talking about like the shame of of womanhood of femininity um so I think exposing those stories um I think the people who are um I think there's some backlash against the idea of safe spaces and the idea of conferences really going out of their way to avoid bias and bullying I think there's some backlash from that from people who just have never been asked if there's some woman's boy toy when they're at a conference and there's a part of me that's optimistic that if that person you know can put himself into your shoes just a little bit for a moment the he'll think oh that's actually shocking and now I understand why this is a worthwhile endeavor um this connects to a larger issue of talking about these things being women's work and being um the work of you know it's like being the the diversity person or being the and feeling like you're being treated as worse than um there's there's so many incredible events um just at PES this last conference there's an incredible event about the history of the committee on the status of women in the profession telling stories uh and I think everyone in that room felt like they gained a lot from that but it's really sad to me that there weren't very many men in that room um like I want to learn of the experiences of other people too I want to know what it's like to be a different a different person than myself uh so I think part of it you know some people might say it's like dumbing down philosophy but I'm all for it because I feel like I'm a way smarter person because I have this complexity of human experience in my head um and I think that that just so you know I think we need to have conference sessions all about uh the universal subject and how necessary it is and then once we get everyone in the room we just go hardcore into the you know mess with the patriarchy stuff.

Cara Furman: and Lauren what would your your suggestions be?

Lauren Bialystok: well I second what Liz just said um -- I I want to say that I see a lot of encouraging signs of progress and I also see some trends that will make it harder if we continue down this path to continue to draw attention to the kinds of problems that Liz and I have been talking about I talked about how there's a post feminist zeitgeist and there's a huge amount of backlash both covert and in a lot of legislation extremely overt about rolling back gains in women's equality and women's freedom and I think most of us who work in our field are very aware of those and fairly united in um opposition to them there's also I think a form of tension that needs to be acknowledged among people who are all striving towards some version of gender justice that it's become rightly um urgent to talk about the even more invisible and minoritized people's experiences of oppression so that now we rarely talk about women or gender without an intersectional ends and when we talk about women uh some people

don't talk about women actually as a category but we talk a lot more about uh trends and non-binary and gender non-conforming people and um gender fluidity and the ways in which our binary categories of sex which have historically been overlaid with a binary category binary categories of gender are inadequate and oversimplified and do harm to other people and that sometimes the women's movement or advocating for women's equality has entrenched some of these blind spots this is really important to talk about um and also I think some people have become afraid of talking about women and girls without any further qualification um or even feminism I think that I think even among people who are very broadly oriented toward gender justice and to you know solidarity in anti-oppression politics are worried that feminism has this kind of archaic ring and that it only serves a certain minority of people at the expense of others I think this is a very worrying mistake and we need to both diversify and figure out how to work in solidarity across various forms of gendered and sexed experiences and various forms of discrimination and remember that around the world and in our own backyard and for time and memorial women and girls have been targeted as a particular subordinate class and this continues to affect even as Liz and I have been talking about you know white heterosexual women there is something that is about uh gendered and embodied experience there that does not need to be further deconstructed by race class sexual orientation although in other times it's important to get a finer-gray analysis and talk about the different and sometimes worse experiences of people with multiple forms of marginality so I would just urge us to continue thinking holistically and specifically to continue thinking about women and girls as a group of people who are discriminated against no matter how they identify in us an assortment of sectors and spaces and the frontiers of gender justice the groups of people whose experiences have still hardly been heard and whose particular needs for justice need even more concerted reckoning it's it's a difficult balance to strike but I think that's where we need to go.

Derek Gottlieb: Thanks so much for that wonderful thinking. Lauren with respect to what you just said I'm reminded of a really good recent book by the political theorist Nathan Rochelle DeFord they published this then under Rochelle DeFord it's called Solidarity in Conflict -- it goes deep into those particular issues trying to figure out exactly how to to manage both of those tensions that you just described. Thank you so much for all of your wonderful work on this topic it's been a pleasure and prepping for this this show to revisit all of your work Lauren I know we're going to see you giving the keynote at OVPES in the fall and that's going to be phenomenal.

Lauren Bialystok: yeah it's been wonderful to be in conversation with you both.

Derek Gottlieb: thank you for taking the time today to to come on the show and talk to us about your work and your experiences

Lauren Bialystok: thank you for having us this a pleasure

Liz Jackson: yeah thank you I wish I could have heard more from from the two of you but it was great to to hear from you Lauren too and and yeah great to to get this conversation out there so thanks very much.

Cara Furman: and that is our show many thanks to Lauren and Liz for taking the time to talk to us as always do subscribe to the show and leave us a rating and a review to help others discover us as well the email address at which you can reach Derek and I together is thinking in the midst at gmail.com we also have a form linked in the episode description if you'd like to suggest future topics and or guests including yourself a special thank you to senior lecturer of art and director of emery community art center and barges who shares I think the reason I'm so hooked is because it's helping me better understand the state and stakes of public education but also everything else and how it's also interconnected it's also exciting because your guests tend to be people who are analyzing these forces but they are also infiltrating it they are culture makers like artists so for Derek got leave and in two weeks when we put up the next episode I'm Cara Furman and we'll see you next time