

Emily: I'm Emily Kumler and this is Empowered Health. Do you ever feel like your voice isn't heard or doesn't matter? What if how our buildings are designed contributes to women feeling insignificant. This week on Empowered Health activist [Soraya Chemaly](http://www.sorayachemaly.com/)<sup>1</sup> and I discuss why [women suffer from autoimmune diseases](https://www.aarda.org/who-we-help/patients/women-and-autoimmunity/)<sup>2</sup> more than men and why we're just expected to have to wait for bathrooms in public places.

Soraya: This is Soraya Chemaly and I'm a writer and an activist just wrote a [book](http://www.sorayachemaly.com/books.html)<sup>3</sup> about women and anger and I'm really delighted, Emily, to join you today on Empowered Health.

Emily: I am so excited to have you. I'm feeling really angry and so I sort of thought you'd be the perfect person to talk to today. I feel like there's so many issues that I want to try and cover with you, but I thought, you know, this podcast is really about women's health and one of the things that I was really struck by was in, I think it was your TEDTalk, have you done two TEDTalks?

Soraya: I have. I did a [TEDx talk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJqtUUDhaxA)<sup>4</sup> maybe three years ago in Barcelona and I just did a [TEDWomen talk](https://www.ted.com/talks/soraya_chemaly_the_power_of_women_s_anger?language=en)<sup>5</sup> in November.

Emily: Okay. So I think it was the more recent one where you talked a little bit about an autoimmune disease and how that sort of being considered a female problem. And I thought, you know what, that's really interesting. If you can elaborate a little bit on that, I think that will get us going.

Soraya: What I found when I was researching this topic is that there are lots of relationships between the way people experience their emotions and their physical health. And in Western medicine certainly, those relationships have downplayed or ignored or really misunderstood. And so I was really focused on what happens if people suppress or repress anger and strong negative feelings. And what seems to happen is that it degrades health in many, many ways, physical health. And so if you look at illnesses in which the [majority of people experiencing them are women](https://www.wsj.com/articles/escape-from-the-chronic-pain-trap-1391220523?tesla=y)<sup>6</sup>, so yes, autoimmune disorders, chronic pain is another category. A lot of eating disorders, anxiety, sort of mental health distress. A lot of those involve this quality of mismanagement of emotion, this emotion in particular. And so it's not so much that it's a causal relationship. It's not that, oh, you repressed anger, you're going to have an autoimmune disorder, but that there is a relationship, it's not well understood at the moment. And that the thing that connects all of these predominantly quote unquote female ailments is often that people are not expressing anger.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sorayachemaly.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aarda.org/who-we-help/patients/women-and-autoimmunity/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sorayachemaly.com/books.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJqtUUDhaxA>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/soraya\\_chemaly\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_women\\_s\\_anger?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/soraya_chemaly_the_power_of_women_s_anger?language=en)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/escape-from-the-chronic-pain-trap-1391220523?tesla=y>

Emily: For me, it sounds a little bit like it's two-part, they're not expressing anger but they're also not being listened to.

Soraya: Well that's it, right. Becomes a really circular problem because in fact [women's experience and discussion of pain](#)<sup>7</sup> is treated in a lot of the same ways as their experience and attempts to display anger, which is that it's trivialized or minimized or ignored. And so that makes it worse, right? You say I'm in pain, somebody says, oh no you're not, or you can't really be serious. It's not that bad. And then you get angry and the response to that is don't be silly. Why do you sound so angry? And it creates this really bad feedback loop,

Emily: Right? Sort of a crisis of credibility on all sides,

Soraya: On all sides. That's right. And there was just a study released I think two weeks ago by [Yale](#)<sup>8</sup> that showed that in the evaluation of teenagers, boys and girls, when they report pain doctors are just much more likely to believe boys and to dismiss girls.

Emily: I read that and I remember also there's another study that talks about how women probably have a [higher pain threshold](#)<sup>9</sup> and that's also really phenomenally interesting, right? You're like you're expected to just sort of suffer through and you're probably experiencing more pain than a man is or a boy. So what is the sort of remedy to that? Is it? I feel like, you know, on a very sort of personal level, I have a son and a daughter and I've tried to raise them as sort of gender neutral as I can, being cognizant at least of those little things. And there definitely are things that come up, right? Like I have to brush my daughter's hair every morning, my son, I don't have to do that. So that's a fight that we get in regularly that has just to do with her being a girl. But you know, when it comes to anger, it's interesting because my daughter is definitely a passionate young woman. And on one hand it's really annoying and frustrating that I can't, you know, kind of conform her. And on the other hand, I really love that about her. And I sort of wonder, you know, in terms of raising boys and girls, what are some sort of tangible, like, I love that [10 words every girl should know](#)<sup>10</sup> that you have. Are there other things like that that you would say to, like the moms who are listening or the aunts or grandmothers who are sort of like, let's, let's try to change this?

Soraya: Yeah, I mean, I think first of all, it's hard to admit to how deep and wide the issue is because even if an individual parent wants to do their best at eliminating or not perpetuating gender biases, we live in the world and the world does that by default. Right? And so it just becomes sort of [?] to think that any individual can do this on their own and that the world will not intrude in a detrimental way. And so yes, I think parents and mothers still spend a lot more time taking care of children, so they have disproportionate influence. In that way, parents can do

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<sup>7</sup> [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=383803](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=383803)

<sup>8</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/jpepsy/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/jpepsy/jsy104/5273626> \*The study looks at children, not teenagers

<sup>9</sup> <https://nypost.com/2019/01/11/women-have-a-higher-pain-threshold-than-men-study/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.rolereboot.org/culture-and-politics/details/2014-05-10-simple-words-every-girl-learn/>

a lot on their own. And to be honest, it's almost more important what dads do in this way because [dads tend to hold kids to more rigid gender stereotypes](#)<sup>11</sup>. A lot of studies show that too, dads hold boys to particularly strict rules about masculinity without meaning to often.

Emily: Like just, you know, don't cry, don't cry, suck it up.

Soraya: Suck it up. And you know, there's something called a [skinned knee effect](#),<sup>12</sup> which I talk about, which is that, you know, a girl falls and she's of rewarded for showing vulnerability or anxiety. But if a boy falls, it's brushed off and he's told to do it again. And these are just things that we think of as maybe normal that aren't necessary or normal. You know, they're totally socialized in terms of how we perceive bodies and movement and control of space and all these other things. And so I think yes, there's a lot that people can do when interacting with children. But I think even more importantly is that as adults we can talk to each other and hold each other accountable and that can be really hard, right? Within the parameters of an intimate relationship, whether you're in the same-sex relationship or a different sex relationship saying to the person who may be parenting with you or grandparenting with you, hey, you know what? I would much rather that we didn't use that language with kids for the following reasons. That can sometimes be hard for people. You know, people have different opinions and then escalating that even further to the institutional level where you have to engage with teachers and coaches and religious figures. That's when I think organizing helps. That's when you need a community around you of people who are like-minded and some people can step forward and some people can step back so that you're not always the one raising your hand and challenging people to change.

Emily: I mean, I think all of these sort of, they're not even nuances. I mean in some cases I feel like they're just so obvious, but I think,

Soraya: They're so blunt.

Emily: Yeah, but it is so entrenched. And you know, I sort of feel like that's why I think things like the [Me Too movement](#)<sup>13</sup> has everybody so excited and I think, you know, things are changing but it does sort of feel like some of these systemic things, I mean I loved [your example of the bathroom](#).<sup>14</sup> You had told a story about how you were at a museum and you went to find your daughter after she was missing for 20 minutes and she was in line for the bathroom in the men's room was wide open. I mean that's something that we can all relate to, right?

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11

<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/e42fe5ce-8902-4efc-8cd9-799fd2f316d7/OUR0042-Parenting-and-Early-Years-AA.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf>

12

<https://slate.com/human-interest/2011/04/anxiety-gender-gap-are-women-really-more-anxious-than-men.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://metoomvmt.org/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://time.com/3653871/womens-bathroom-lines-sexist-potty-parity/>

Soraya: But it is amazing how much resistance there is to changing that. I mean in the United States, their response to welcoming women at the public space was to mainly build same size bathrooms. Right? But that actually isn't a solution because women in general have many, many more reasons to be in a public bathroom and having the same size bathrooms is not useful because they'll always be excess demand for women in those situations. And so there are differences between equality and equity and representation. And the case I'm thinking of as a stadium, maybe in [Chicago](#)<sup>15</sup> or Seattle where the bathrooms for women were made bigger because you can't go to a sporting event without women being in line. Right. And men complained because all of a sudden they had to stand in lines too and when they complain the bathrooms reverted into equal sized spaces so the men wouldn't have to stand in line. Yeah. And you just think, are you serious? This is absurd

Emily: Right, no, for me, there's almost like an undertone of like you're lucky to be here. So don't complain.

Soraya: That's exactly right. Don't complain, don't complain. How can you possibly expect the society consider your way of moving through life as normal, as a standard.

Emily: Right. And I feel like the only remedy that you know, seems to be groundbreaking at all is that the more, you know, women get into say architecture or positions of power where they could redesign stadiums or bathrooms or you know, the institutions from the inside out. That seems to be pretty profound. But I think one of the other things that you talk about and write about is the sort of idea of self-control, which I think is children. Yes. Well, uh, yeah, and across the board, I mean I think that's in everything, right? So, I mean, I even had an interesting conversation with my husband. We were talking about date rape and you know, just [rape in general on college campuses](#).<sup>16</sup> And he basically said, you know, Emily, if these statistics are true, right, which is questioning credibility, right? Then there is no way that our daughter is going to college. Like why would we ever put her in that situation? And I immediately, you know, I married to him, I think he's an enlightened man. And I was like, wait a minute, if these statistics are true, let's-

Soraya: We wouldn't go anywhere.

Emily: Um, actually no, it's our son who shouldn't go to college. That's right. Because he's more likely to be the perpetrator. And it was like this mind-blowing conversation. And I had a, there was a followup conversation with somebody else that I had after. I can't remember. It was like, you know, [Matt Lauer or one of these big named guys](#)<sup>17</sup>, you know, sort of came tumbling down and they said, you know, women have to be a little careful because when you start pushing like this, it's going to be much harder for women to get jobs and to get higher up. And I said, what the fuck? It should be the opposite, right? It should be much harder for men to get jobs because they're the ones doing this. There's no liability issue with women.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2003-08-28-0308280275-story.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.vox.com/a/sexual-harassment-assault-allegations-list/matt-lauer>

Soraya: Right. But that's the fact of fear power. Right?

Emily: So talk to me about that because I feel like you have a handle on this that I don't.

Soraya: Well, I mean I, I think, think about language and the way it reflects power dynamics of dominance and subservience. Right? And who has the benefit of the doubt. And so if you just described a very reasonable response to the assessment of risk, you're like, in fact, the issue is not women in the workplace. It's men in the workplace. Right? And so the fact that we're having the conversations we're having, which is that men won't go to lunch with women and they won't mentor women and they, you know, it is as we keep hearing a really dangerous time to be a man that's an excessive sympathy that, you know, [Kate Manne has dubbed it him-pathy](#)<sup>18</sup>, which I love that expression, right? An excessive sympathy for men who might lose their reputations or their wage-earning capacity. And that is still more important than women's reputations, wage-earning capacity, financial security or physical safety. And I think that's just a reflection of hierarchy that we live with. And we don't talk about much. I mean, I've had this experience of writing the sentence, for example, that says implicit bias studies show that teachers tend to [disproportionately discriminate against boys of color and all girls in stem classes](#)<sup>19</sup>. And people are like, oh yeah, okay. So there's bias against those kids. And I wrote the sentence like that once in the editor came back to me and said, you know, [this article](#)<sup>20</sup> is too long, can you cut it down? So I took the same sentence and I said, biases disproportionately favor young white boys. And I cited the exact same studies and submitted the same piece back and it came back heavily red lined with exclamation points and the question, how do you know this? Uh, you know, and, and I, and I wrote back and I said, this is the same study, the exact same sentiment. It's just you don't like this language because it feels to you like I'm blaming young white boys for something that's out of their control. But in fact, this is a statement of fact. This is what the study shows, you know, and just that inversion of language that highlights privilege and power is policed and discouraged.

Emily: Well, it's almost like we are, we're comfortable with victims, but we're not with perpetrators.

Soraya: Right? And we favor perpetrators, right? By masking the power that comes with institutional tolerance. We favor the perspective of perpetrators. We favor the perspective of perpetrators when we prioritize. In the case that you described men's right to go to school or work, even though it's a much greater risk that they perpetrate a crime as opposed to being victims of a crime. You know, and sometimes when I talk to people and I say, you know, it's much more likely that [your son is actually sexually assaulted than falsely accused](#).<sup>21</sup> Right. That's just a fact. And that blows people over because they're like, oh, his chances of being sexually assaulted or just not that great. And then like, well that would be the point.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/opinion/brett-kavanaugh-hearing-himpathy.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.nber.org/papers/w20909>

<sup>20</sup> <http://time.com/3705454/teachers-biases-girls-education/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-life-false-rape-allegations-20181011-story.html>

Emily: Yeah. You're like, I'm going to just let you sit on that for a second and figure it out, know. Right, right, right. Absolutely. I guess just sort of to carry the point a step further, I feel like there is something inherent in the way that we think about sexuality that like feels to me like this is a part of it. Right? And it's like the idea that boys can't control themselves but girls can and therefore the onus is on women to be chaste and prudish and all that stuff because men can't. And so if they get any kind of inclination that you're trying to sexually attract them, they become helpless. And I, you know, I'm really curious about that because I think that's embedded in our laws in some ways..

Soraya: That is embedded in our laws. That's right. And so you know is it starts off in early childhood. There are a lot of [studies](#)<sup>22</sup> on preschool preparedness and you know a lot of them are trying to figure out why young American boys aren't as prepared as boys and other cultures for school when they enter school even as early as preschool. And so in one cross-cultural study that was quite extensive, it was four countries, one of them being the United States, the researchers found that there is this self-regulation gap in parental and adult expectation and that in the United States in particular people think boys cannot control themselves and they expect girls to be able to and so they hold them to different standards and then that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, right? And the girls learn what's expected of them and then behave with more self-regulation, which actually makes them better prepared for school. And that's not the case in these other countries that were studied.

Emily: And that's assumed to be a biological, not-

Soraya: That's right. And it's clearly not biological because boys and other countries are expected to control themselves and therefore do perform better earlier in school. And so that idea though we see it from preschool on, I mean how many women politicians have we seen who are literally held responsible for the bad behavior of their spouses as though somehow they were supposed to intervene and stop them or manage them. You know? And so yeah, I think it's really deep, deep in the culture.

Emily: I have a curiosity about the religious component of that also because it seems to me at some point Eve became blamed as a sort of sexual temptress whereas earlier, like if you look in the Middle Ages, she's blamed for sort of being curious and it has to do with knowledge and Adam is also punished. And I sort of feel like there is this sort of undertone of like, you know, blaming women that has these sort of, I dunno, religious connections. I haven't figured it. I mean, I haven't, I'm not articulating this very well, but,

Soraya: No, no, I agree with you. And I think it's really always infused with this [Madonna/Whore](#) framing, right? Like either you're a quote unquote good woman, which means you're maternal and you don't have your own sexual desires or you know, lascivious behaviors, or you're a quote unquote bad woman. And that whole framing, which is also part of a sort of chivalric

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<sup>22</sup> <https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/articles/f1881m698?locale=en>

approach to teaching children how to be proper ladies and gentlemen, that whole framing is, to me just a way of saying certain women deserve what they get. And so if you put women on a pedestal, there's only really one way for them to go. They can stand on that pedestal or they can fall off of it, you know? And so I always kind of laugh because at least where I live, all of this sort of strip clubs have names like gentleman's room, you know? And, and that's a really, I think, insightful thing because it means, you know, if you have ladies, then you have women who aren't ladies and women who aren't ladies deserve no protection.

Emily: Right, Yeah, no, when looking into some of this sort of stuff about women as property and the provenance in our laws, I was struck when I found out that something like 1998 I don't want to get the date wrong, but it was in the nineties [Mississippi was the last state that changed this](#)<sup>23</sup>, but it used to be that [you couldn't claim statutory rape if you weren't a virgin.](#)<sup>24</sup>

Soraya: Well, in California had [a case](#)<sup>25</sup> as late as 2013 I think where a woman who wasn't married was raped in her own apartment by a man that she thought was her boyfriend. And the statute on the books said that she actually couldn't claim to be raped because she was basically giving it away.

Emily: Oh my God.

Soraya: And marital, I mean in the U.S. the last marital rape laws were [passed in 1992](#)<sup>26</sup>

Emily: Right, right.

Soraya: Which is really late.

Emily: I mean that doesn't feel that long ago. Right. So when we're talking about, you know, men controlling themselves or not, I feel like there is this inherent thing that sort of the idea of due process hasn't actually considered us to be equal in the eyes of the law as of, you know, what, 25 years ago, I mean probably even more recently, there are cases that we could find.

Soraya: Yeah. And I think a lot of the law reflects an idea of, well first of all, rape as sex and sex as a transaction. And first of all, there were many people who couldn't be raped because they didn't enjoy full citizenship. Right? So [black women for most of our history were 'unrapeable'](#)<sup>27</sup> because they were property, you know, there was no rape law against raping a slave. And if you were [a married white woman, you were considered your husband's property.](#)<sup>28</sup> You really didn't

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<sup>23</sup> <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/1998/SB/2001-2099/SB2022IN.htm>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.sunypress.edu/pdf/60840.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://cases.justia.com/california/court-of-appeal/b233796.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-10-22-mn-163-story.html>

<sup>27</sup> [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2702861](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2702861)

<sup>28</sup> [https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awlaw3/property\\_law.html](https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awlaw3/property_law.html)

have your own rights, certainly not to bodily integrity. And so marital rape was just a-okay, if you were a single woman, as you just described, you were also fair game.

Emily: Or you were the property of your father, in that case.

Soraya: Or you were the property of your father. Right. And so this idea that [rape was really a property violation against a man](#)<sup>29</sup> as opposed to a human rights violation perpetrated against a victim is really immortalized in the law.

Emily: So how do we see that playing out today? I certainly, you know, I think the Brett Kavanaugh, all that, you know, the call for [due process for him](#)<sup>30</sup> rallied me in a way because I sort of felt like, wait a minute, we don't really have due process for women completely. So, this is bringing up a really interesting point.

Soraya: Well, I mean, I think most people are either unaware or unwilling to consider what it means that our law has been shaped by the experiences of elite men for a very, very long time and their perspectives infuse the law. Right? And so if you even think about due process and let's say adversarial courtroom proceedings, right? We know that the structure of courtroom proceedings actually is [particularly bad if you have been traumatized](#)<sup>31</sup> by violent crime or an assault because the adversarial system of questioning someone ignores the [neurobiological effects on a victim](#)<sup>32</sup> and actually means that a woman, for example, testifying, can never without interruption give her testimony. Right. And, and so they're all of these kind of linguistic and cognitive biases that are amplified by the structure of the courtroom itself, by the structure of courtroom proceedings. So a lot of people have been suggesting a very long time that there'd be sort of [reforms to that](#)<sup>34</sup>. And that knowing what we know about the science of trauma, that we need other kinds of procedures in order to get fair hearings for rape victims, most of whom are women. Right. And you see the same thing. Yeah. Women or children. And you see the same thing in colleges that are looking at [restorative justice processes](#) or [kaleidoscopic justice processes](#)<sup>35</sup> and trying to find new and alternate ways of structuring due process so that it's fair.

Emily: I mean I feel like to circle back to the book for a minute, do you have any kinds of ideas about not just where this is so prevalent but also like sort of I guess action items for men? I mean for men as much as for women, I feel like in terms of how do we recognize this stuff in a, you know, good faith kind of

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<sup>29</sup> <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/collsp30&div=21&id=&page=>

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<https://www.bostonherald.com/2018/09/27/legal-experts-stress-due-process-as-brett-kavanaugh-accuser-set-to-testify/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15564880903048529>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28689071>

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<sup>34</sup> <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/9257247.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0964663918761200>

Soraya: I don't want this to sound snide, but a very important thing that should be happening right now is that men stop talking and listen. A lot of times men will come up to me and say, well what can I do? What can I do? And I say to them, what you can do actually is listen, which in fact is doing something like we just don't really teach boys and men that listening is an action. That it's an active thing that you do, right? Because I think for them, listening is passive and we socialize people to think of masculinity as tightly bound up with activity, right? And action. And what we need men to do is just listen and then to believe us. I mean, one of the things that keeps coming up in these massive global outpourings of women's trauma where they're saying, me too, me too, me Too. Yes. All women, not okay. I mean, women are telling some of their stories of threat and violence and abuse for the first time and they're experiencing pain and trauma when they do it or they're very angry when they do it. One of the things that's happening is that it's very clear that there's this credibility gap. And women believe other women much more than men believing women. Men who have been assaulted also believe women, but there's a double-digit, sometimes 30 or 40 point difference between [men believing and women believing](#).<sup>36</sup> And so there are lots of reasons why men wouldn't believe women. Mainly a lot of them have to do with identity threat because if women are saying, we're not safe, you know, this is not reasonable. That means the men around them are not doing the job of protecting them. Well, you know, if women are saying we can't work fairly, we want to be paid fairly, that's also threatening because what if men aren't needed to provide for women? Where does that leave men as providers, you know, so there's a lot of reason why men would deny it, but we need men not to deny it. We need them to really understand how different our experiences are and to recognize why the differences matter.

Emily: Yeah, and I think there is a lot of push back. I would actually say from women and men. That's right. I actually was struck there of seems to be this generational divide. I went on a local talk show to talk about one of the me two cases and the host of the show who I get along with really well had sort of, we had this off camera conversation before it was a live segment and she said something to me about how it was the [Aziz Ansari case](#)<sup>37</sup>. And she was like, you know, if you get naked with a guy like, you know, what are you? And I was like, Whoa, wait a minute. And you know, live TV, you got to kind of prep what you're allowed to say. But I was thinking about it and I realized, you know, I came of age during [the aids crisis and we were told over and over get naked](#)<sup>38</sup>, do all kinds of things, don't have sex, you'll die. And so there was this idea that almost like life triumphs men's ability to control themselves. Right? Like so if men don't have the ability, well they do if they think you have aids, right?

Soraya: Right. They stop themselves then.

Emily: Right. And so, you know, there was a huge amount of sex ed that we all got and a lot of what we talked about in high school was all the things you can do, right? And that are safe. And the idea of like, how do you exchange fluids? I mean like we literally got a ton of information that

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.npr.org/about-npr/662519588/poll-reveals-divided-understanding-of-metoo>

<sup>37</sup> <https://babe.net/2018/01/13/aziz-ansari-28355>

<sup>38</sup> <http://time.com/3578597/aids-sex-ed-history/>

informed and about how to be naked together and not have sex. And it blew my mind that she was basically saying like, if you're naked, that's consent. I was like, that's the opposite of what I learned growing up. But I mean almost like favoring the man by saying like, what do you expect? Like if you're naked in front of him, he can't control himself.

Soraya: Yeah, I feel pretty skeptical given a lot of research that I've seen of any suggestion that the younger you are, the more progressive you are. I mean, we know from a lot of studies that [millennials hold more gender conservative attitudes than GenX-ers](#)<sup>39</sup> or for example, and that's not just about men's and women's roles as parents or spouses. That spills over into everything and it's not really hard to understand why because in fact, that's a generation that I think of as a backlash generation because they literally were born into and grew up during a period of profound social and political backlash in the country. And so it's not hard to understand why that might be the case.

Emily: Talk a little bit more about that.

Soraya: Well, some studies really show that for people who are between the ages of like 18 and 36 right? 18 and 40, they tend to be more neotraditional in their expectations of the roles that men and women should play in society. And so things like, whether women should work, who should take care of children, who should be the primary breadwinner are not as egalitarian as I think some people might like to think. There was one really [interesting study](#)<sup>40</sup> that showed, I think it was roughly 36 or 38% of men in that cohort said that, you know, once they had children, they would coparent as an ideal. But in fact, once the first child had been born, that number was more like 8% for men. The number didn't, however, dropped for women, which I think doesn't bode well for a lot of relationships, right? Women tended to have the child and still believe that they would coparent with their spouse if they were in a heterosexual relationship. Whereas men's attitudes radically shifted. They felt a lot more pressure to be breadwinners and they felt that women should sacrifice their professional lives to be primary parent. That's not very egalitarian because in fact in that cohort, women report higher levels of professional ambition than men do. And so you end up with a belief system that seems to be tied closely to protecting certain ideals of masculinity at the sacrifice of women's professional and public lives.

Emily: And is that a step back from the generation prior?

Soraya: Well these studies and Pew's done a couple of them there. There are others that you know, you can easily find them online and I cite some of them in my book. These studies seem to indicate that those attitudes [are more conservative than](#)<sup>41</sup> GenX attitudes or even baby boomer attitudes when it comes to gender roles. Some of that comes from a [rapid growth in the](#)

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<sup>39</sup> <https://hbr.org/2016/06/are-u-s-millennial-men-just-as-sexist-as-their-dads>

<sup>40</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0003122414564008>

<sup>41</sup>

<https://www.pershing.com/perspectives/americans-crave-a-new-kind-of-leader-and-women-are-ready-to-deliver>

[Hispanic segment of the population](#)<sup>42</sup>, which also tends to be [more Catholic](#)<sup>43</sup> often and so more gender-traditional.

Emily: Well, and I feel like it will be interesting to see how that plays out too because I think assuming that the systematic sort of structures are evolving and it makes it easier for women to work and have children say in twenty years-

Soraya: Well, it would be nice if that were true.

Emily: Right, right.

Soraya: We're so far behind the rest of the developed quote unquote world. Right.

Emily: You know, I think there is this sort of pendulum, we've certainly seen this with, you know, the presidency and other aspects of politics, right, where you go from one extreme to another. And I wonder whether that's the same with generations. I don't know enough about the past.

Soraya: I don't either. Yeah. I mean I think very clearly women have more freedoms today than they did a hundred years ago, but that hasn't really translated into any form of institutional and public parity. So we're all very happy that the midterms, for example, brought more women into congress, but we're still talking about [roughly 20%](#) that's not much more than it was in 1921 right. As a matter of fact, [I think it was 20% in 1921](#)<sup>44</sup>

Emily: Yeah. No. And I, and I feel like you look at the Senate and it's like abominable how low the percentage is.

Soraya: Well, yeah, and I mean, I don't know if you saw that graphic that was zipping around yesterday. It was [MSNBC screen grab and it had I think 12 men who were undeclared but potential Democratic candidates](#)<sup>45</sup> and they were all sort of the same age range, white democrats, so much so that they had two pictures of Sherrod Brown featured on screen. It was just funny. You're like, Oh wow, this is unbelievable,

Emily: Right. Nothing's changed. And I feel that way a little bit. I mean, I think with the me too stuff. What's interesting is that everybody, you know, this idea of sort of coming out with these stories is so powerful, but unless something really changes in the laws, right. Or in the approach to the problem, I mean I'm still struck by the fact that universities get to sort of hold court, right?

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/18/how-the-u-s-hispanic-population-is-changing/>

<sup>43</sup>

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/05/04/hispanic-catholic-church-us-growing-survey-confirms>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.senate.gov/CRSpubs/bee42bd4-0624-492c-a3b0-a5436cb9e9a2.pdf> \*Four women were brought into the 67th Congress out of 33 successors- approximately 10% women in house, and 10% women in the senate.

<sup>45</sup>

<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/2/14/18225182/msnbc-graphic-candidates-for-2020-presidential-election-list>

So like somebody claims they've been raped and all of a sudden it's up to the university to like supersede the actual law enforcement agencies to investigate. That's crazy to me. You know, whether it's a deciding whether the person stays or not, it seems like this is a criminal offense.

Soraya: Right. And honestly, it's too late by them. I mean we have to be educating children basically from birth, right, like differently so that they understand respect for other people's bodies and rights. And we just don't do that. I mean, something like some [scary percentage of boys in college don't know how to define rape](#).<sup>46</sup>

Emily: Yeah, that's nuts.

Soraya: That's nuts. It's like almost 40% right,

Emily: Right. And what is that? Is that just like parents not talking to their kids? Is it like, it's just such a taboo subject? I mean, I feel like I don't understand that.

Soraya: Well parents don't. Something like [72% of parents never talked to their children about intimate partner violence or sexual violence](#).<sup>47</sup> And we have [really high rates of violence in teen](#)<sup>48</sup> dating and we have a real reluctance to address anything that can even remotely be associated with sex in early childhood education. And I mean, you really don't have to talk to kids about sex to teach them about consent, you know, in age-appropriate ways. And yet there's a lot of resistance to that. And we just have this wholesale reinvestment in the idea of abstinence-only sex ed. But if you don't start like in kindergarten, teaching people mutual dignity and respect, no abstinence only, or even comprehensive sex ed class, that's a one-off in like 10th grade is going to solve this problem.

Emily: Right, right. Well, and the idea of consent I think is such a, somebody just sent me a video, which I haven't had time to watch it, but they told me about it sounded hysterical. We'll link to it on the website. It basically [talks about serving tea or coffee](#).<sup>49</sup>

Soraya: Oh yeah, the tea. Yeah. It's actually really good.

Emily: I was like, that is such a clever idea

Soraya: There's one that's filled with obscene language and one that they scrubbed. It was really funny that they made two versions.

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<sup>46</sup> <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/pdf/10.1089/vio.2014.0022>

<sup>47</sup> <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/reports/the-talk>

<sup>48</sup>

[https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teendatingviolence/fastfact.html?CDC\\_ArefVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Fintimatepartnerviolence%2Fteen-dating-violence.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teendatingviolence/fastfact.html?CDC_ArefVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Fintimatepartnerviolence%2Fteen-dating-violence.html)

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrXVavnQ>

Emily: Yeah. But I mean I think that's a great way to talk about it, right? Like, Hey, it is, do you want coffee in the middle of the night? No, maybe.

Soraya: Yeah. Maybe you don't. Just because you said you wanted tea once doesn't mean you want more tea again.

Emily: Right, right. Yeah. Right. No, and I mean it doesn't have to be complicated. I just, that's the part that's sort of strange to me. There's a woman who I have a ton of respect for who's a child psychiatrist who gives this talk that she called [the private parts talk](#)<sup>50</sup>, which we can also link to. And one of her, you know, sort of big is that when kids are tickling or like you're tickling, that you just stop when they say stop and you can start up again. But like you're teaching them at a very young age that like the word stop means stop. Even if you're laughing and having a great time. The word holds more power than any interpretation of body language. And I think that's so interesting cause I watch people tickle my kids all the time, you know, and they're like saying stop and the grownup isn't listening and that there's so much being communicated in that simple interaction. Right?

Soraya: Right. That's why I focus a lot on dress codes and their enforcement. I grew up going to catholic schools and after Harvey Weinstein started, the story started spilling out. I wrote a [piece for the Washington Post](#)<sup>51</sup> about what dress codes had to do with Harvey Weinstein because so often what's happening is an older person who is bigger and has more power is telling a girl, first of all, they're objectifying her sexually objectifying her simply by reviewing the way she looks up and down constantly. Right. And then telling her what to do with her body in a way that is often inappropriate and damaging. And then sometimes physically appropriating her body. I mean, there was one case in my kids' school where a girl was taken up on a stage to show the other girls where their skirt lengths should be, and so first they segregated the boys and girls-

Emily: Oh my god.

Soraya: Yeah, they segregated the boys and girls. They put the girls in one room. They took this girl up on stage and then they drew on her leg with a pen, sort of where the skirt should be. And everybody kind of laughed and you know, one of my kids was like, wait a minute, why are we in here without the boys we're not- like you're telling us, we're distracting them and were unprofessional words that were used and yet this is kind of a form of harassment what you're doing. Right? And so in that,

Emily: But also they're teaching them how to draw, I mean they're drawing attention to them-

Soraya: And they're teaching them that an older person with power can take a person's body, use it as a prop and make everyone laugh at it. I mean, the fact was it was really uncomfortable and kids were laughing, right? Because they were treating it like a joke that the administrators

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<sup>50</sup> <https://norashine.wixsite.com/theprivatesrule/my-work/the-privates-rule>

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[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/10/20/what-school-dress-codes-have-to-do-with-harvey-weinstein/?utm\\_term=.afbc3d9a00f6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/10/20/what-school-dress-codes-have-to-do-with-harvey-weinstein/?utm_term=.afbc3d9a00f6)

were teaching it as a joke and the kids were kind of tittering. And so you do that 20 times over the course of six years. And what do you end up with? You end up with two people in a room, one of them's much bigger and stronger and has more status. But like a football player, let's say. And then, a person who was frozen and not saying anything because they've both been socialized to think that this is an acceptable thing.

Emily: Absolutely. Well, and also that you don't have any say in it. Right? Like when she got up and got dressed that morning, she wasn't expecting that. I don't think. Right. You don't have any control-

Soraya: You have no control over it, who people will perceive you and treat you. And you know, I remember saying to the school, my 13 year old didn't think about, you know, who she was going to turn on until you told her to.

Emily: Right. And also what about the conversation with the boys that basically says like, hey, you're at school, you need to be concentrating on math. You can think about that later. I mean I feel like this is another one of these, that's another great example you have. I feel like you're full of great examples. How did you get into this? But I mean I feel like, there is something about the bathroom example that really resonated with me because it was so, you know, it's so clear. Every woman has had that experience of waiting in line

Soraya: And once you perceive it, you think, this is what happened to me. I was like, well my God, how low were my expectations? Of course. You know? How did I come to this.. I came to this really early, like at eight or nine. Like I just remember my dad asking me to clear the table to help my mother and my brother who I was really close to sitting there. And I was like, uh-uh, not doing it, not doing it unless he gets up with me, you know? And I was lucky. My father loved me. He wasn't going to physically hurt me, so I could be stubborn about it, you know? I just sat there and wouldn't move until he said both of us had to do it. But it was that childhood sense of fairness being violated. And somehow along the line we lose that sense and we just expect it to be normal, that we're treated differently. And the standards by which we live are not going to actually be relevant to the way we experience the world.

Emily: Yeah, it's interesting cause I feel like I had sort of a weird upbringing. I joke that I was like raised by a pack of wolves that were boys that were a little bit older than me. And one of the things that I've struggled with is the idea that women who I'm friends with will sometimes say, Emily, you're being too aggressive. Oh yeah. And I'm like, Oh, I'm so sorry. I don't, you know, I feel like maybe we're having an intellectual argument or a discussion about something and I'm really excited to hear from them and learn from them, but I'm also going to defend my side and points and I've never had a guy say that to me in my life. Right. Yeah.

Soraya: Right. Well, I mean I think, yeah, we, we all experienced that. It's really frustrating.

Emily: Yeah, it is. But it also is, it's unsettling because it's not how I want to come across, right? Like I don't want my friends to feel like I'm an aggressor with them when we're arguing about something. And, and I recognize that that's sort of different in me. But the other difference that I sort of recognize in female friends is that sometimes people want to avoid conflict altogether, women. And so they just, it's almost like a ghosting, right? Which I guess now everybody's doing when they're in the dating phase of life. But like that's interesting to me to this idea of like, women shouldn't be involved in conflict. And so just ignore it, which we all know doesn't resolve the problem. It just sort of infuriates people because you're denying them their voice. Right.

Soraya: All right. And then you end up with a passive aggressive behavior that gets all tied up neatly in the mean girls package, right? Absolutely. Yes. Right. Yeah. So it's funny because of course girls and women have aggression. They just do, they're human beings. Right? And that's really different from being assertive or as I say in the book, you know, there's, there's distinctions between being assertive and being aggressive and being angry. And for girls and women, those distinctions are not made. You know, we make those distinctions for boys and men because we see them play a lot more sports and we understand that they can behave in different ways, in different contexts. But the path for girls and women is just much narrower and those things get conflated and pretty much all discouraged, right? Like an assertive girl in school. Um, if she's, you know, a girl of color or black, she risks really being disciplined for behavior that in a young boy would be seen as leadership potential. Right? Even firmly stating her opinion without aggression, she's perceived as aggressive. And so, you know, the angry black woman stereotype that starts in kindergarten, like [girls who are black are suspended or disciplined at five times the rate of their white peers in 10 times in some places](#)<sup>52</sup>, you know? And so I think what you're describing through adulthood is pretty common. And it's often the case that women are and girls are the ones checking other women and girls and trying to keep them in line.

Emily: Absolutely. I mean I feel like you see that with dress all the time, right? Where like women are knocking each other down for wearing something that's too revealing or you know, a news anchor who's, you know, wearing a spaghetti strap dress to a big event. And that's also fascinating cause I sorta feel like really like we're the ones that are, if anything, we're our own guard. And so when we start saying stuff like that, we're giving permission to men to agree. Right. And to back it up.

Soraya: Well, yeah, and I think there's this underlying assumption that women are a communal resource and should serve the community and not themselves as individuals who shine. Right? Like we know that, so [Hillary Clinton was the most loved woman in the world](#)<sup>53</sup>, in the, in the country for like 10 straight years until she stepped out and claimed power and ambition. And I

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[http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/54d23be0e4b0bb6a8002fb97/1423064032396/BlackGirlsMatter\\_Report.pdf](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/54d23be0e4b0bb6a8002fb97/1423064032396/BlackGirlsMatter_Report.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46697989>

think we see that over and over and over again. You know, it, it's strange how quickly she went from being the most respected woman to being the most hated. Right.

Emily: So where does that leave a future president? Female presidential candidate.

Soraya: Oh God, we're going to have a long two years.

Emily: Yeah. Any hope for that yet you think?

Soraya: Well, it's kind of frankly discouraging to see the kind of petty bullshit that people are engaging in right now. I mean, you know, Gillibrand, [her question about how to eat chicken](#)<sup>54</sup> seriously, that became a thing in our national news and of course with [Klobuchar](#)<sup>55</sup>, there are very few really nuanced conversations that are making the distinction between the double standards around a woman being demanding or having standards and people being cruel and demeaning bosses. Right? Those are two different things and that aren't being teased out in this conversation about her. And that's really problematic. And I mean, they're just so many stereotypes around these women that have already evolved.

Emily: Right? No. Yeah, and it's, I mean, I hate it with how everybody throws around the word narrative, but I feel like that's sort of what it is. It's like people are already starting to create a kind of narrative about you know, what's wrong or why they couldn't be taken seriously or, to your point, credibility.

Soraya: Right. And so instead of a lot of stories about the way bias works, which is so well documented, we're just seeing more examples of bias. Right?

Emily: It was so great to have Soraya on and I really do hope that we have her back again. But I feel like some of the takeaways for me were things like next time you go to the bathroom and there's a long line, think of Soraya and think of her research and the fact that like why do we just accept that part of being a woman is having to wait in line for the bathroom? The other thing I really liked that she said was talking about how what dads say and what men say really makes a big difference. That might be the biggest takeaway from this episode for me that we, you know, we talk a lot about how like we can't do it all on our own. Well that's actually true in terms of the stereotypes and the norms that we're creating for our kids. So just the way that she says that she was a kid and she refused to get up and help clear the table kind of as an act of rebellion maybe, but really setting the tone for like have your kids both help, right? So if you have a son and a daughter or if you have two sons, make sure they help with the laundry, help

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<https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/429345-gillibrand-becomes-latest-candidate-scrutinized-for-how-she-eats-on>

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[https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/02/08/does-it-matter-if-amy-klobuchar-is-mean-boss/?utm\\_term=.b684efeac280](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/02/08/does-it-matter-if-amy-klobuchar-is-mean-boss/?utm_term=.b684efeac280)

with the dishwasher, get them involved in the housework. I think that that makes a lot of sense and that's super tangible. That's something we can all do. I feel like it was so great to talk to her in part because I think we talked about Adam and Eve as well as like rape laws and what all these things have to do and how things are connected and I hope you enjoy the conversation as much as I did. Thanks for joining me. I'm Emily Kumler and that was empowered health. Thanks for joining us. Don't forget to check out our website at [empoweredhealthshow.com](http://empoweredhealthshow.com) for all the show notes, links to everything that was mentioned in the episode, as well as a chance to sign up for our newsletter and get some extra fun tidbits. See you next week.