

## How to successfully navigate the treacherous path of multiple male identities: A conversation with Dr. Thomas Keith (#57)

Jean 0:05

Hello, Dr. Thomas Keith. So delighted to have you here.

Tom 0:10

Great to be here.

Jean 0:11

Dr. Thomas Keith is an American filmmaker, educator, and anti-sexist activist. He received a PhD in philosophy from Claremont Graduate University, and is Professor of Philosophy at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, and Gender Studies at the Graduate University. I wanted you here because I saw your book, *The Bro Code*. And one of the things that I have often thought is there's not enough said about how men are raised, and how that creates the problems that we're experiencing today. And so, I want you to first tell us about what your work is, who you are. I gave this introduction from Wikipedia. But I want to hear from you. And what are your current projects?

Tom 3:11

Okay sure. Beyond the book that you mentioned, *The Bro Code*, that came out this spring, my first book was *Masculinities in Contemporary American Culture*, which is used mainly as a textbook all around the world right now on issues of men and masculinities. I have released four films, three of them through Media Education Foundation: *Generation M*, which was back in 2008, and *The Bro Code* film, 2011, and then *The Empathy Gap: Masculinity and the Courage to Change*, which was a film basically inspired by the work of bell hooks. And my latest film last year was *Bullied*, about the phenomenon of bullying here in the United States around the country. My new film is coming out next month, very excited about that. It is entitled, *How does it feel to be a problem*, which is of course the famous question by W. E. B. Dubois, in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, and that's coming out next month. So that's sort of a rundown of some of the things I've been publishing and releasing and thinking about and working on.

Jean 4:24

I hope that people will understand why I'm inviting you here, because you are obviously very well versed in maleness -- shall I call it that? -- masculinity, and also have an awareness of race and social justice. And the fact that you're even citing bell hooks and W. E. B. Du Bois in your intro speaks volumes to me. So my first question is you're addressing men; who do you mean by men? Men come in all kinds of sizes, shapes, races, economic backgrounds, and so forth.

Dr. Tom Keith Transcript

This is Pride Month, and I also need to add gender identities and sexual orientations, all of that. So when you talk about men, who are you talking about?

Tom 5:28

Absolutely, and that's why my first book was pluralized. It's masculinities. Plural. In contemporary American culture, there are intersectional identities, when we're talking about issues of masculinity, as you mentioned, we do have race, ethnicity, we have a socioeconomic background, we have gender identity, we have sexual orientation. And these identities play a role in the way that some boys are raised to be men, what they think are the norms of masculine culture, the way that we're taught to think about girls and women, for instance, the way that we view one another, and how we treat one another. So all of those identities are extremely important. In talking about this kind of category of masculinities, it's not a one size fits all, you know, exegesis of masculinity, there's so many different ways to look at this. And those different identities need to be respected and evaluated on their own terms.

Jean 6:38

Just give us one example of a difference. In different masculinities. Just one example.

Tom 6:53

Well, I mean, there are some obvious ones like wealth privilege, if someone is born into wealth, the way they view what is normal for them might be very different than those people who are not born into wealth. I'll give you an example, because I was just interviewing a professor at USC just two days ago. And she was talking about voter suppression in America, and how some people can't even conceive of the idea of someone not having a photo ID. It's inconceivable to them, right? Because their norm is, well, everyone has a driver's license or something that they can use, because they're flying planes. And they're driving cars. But that's not true. There are a significant number of people that don't have a photo ID, many of them are Native Americans, they live in reservations, many of them are living in poverty. And so when we're talking about differences, how are people viewing the world? What is their normal, right? Because normal is socially constructed, but it's also constructed through your economic backgrounds, your cultural backgrounds, and that can separate people in the way they view things as being normal, right, wrong, etc.

Jean 8:11

Okay, give a concrete example. What's the common denominator of men?

Tom 8:27

See, the book *The Bro Code* is named *The Bro Code* because I think there is a common denominator among a lot of men. I don't want to over generalize it. But I think that we can

generalize it to some extent. And that is that too many boys, not just in America, but all around the world, are raised to view girls and women as less important, as mainly objectified beings, as beings that are subordinate or should be subordinate to men. And the statistics on this tell the story, whether we're talking about injury to women, whether we're talking about workplace inequalities, whether we're talking about harassment and the #MeToo movement. When I ask audiences, what do you think the number one cause of injury to men in the world is, and they throw out, you know, a number of different guesses. And I say the answer is car accidents are the number one way that men suffer an injury of some kind. Then I ask, what do you think the number one cause of injury to women all around the world is, and they throw out some guesses. And the answer is intimate partner violence.

Jean 9:43

I knew that.

Tom 9:45

It is domestic violence. And that means that issues of violence against women is ultimately a men's issue. Because when we talk about men, I'm sorry, when we talk about violence against women, what we should always say is men's violence against women. Overwhelmingly, it is men who are perpetrating this violence. And so that means we have to rethink fundamentally the way we are raising our boys to think about girls and young men to think about women. And that's gonna take a lot of men stepping up and modeling it and talking about it and correcting young guys to say, "No, we can't talk about girls and women that way. We have to respect their autonomy. We have to respect their personhood." And that sounds to me like it couldn't be more of a platitude, who could be against that? But I do get a lot of pushback, I get quite a bit of pushback, when you talk about treating girls and women with the same equality, respect, and autonomy as men.

Jean 10:52

Pushback from who? What do they say?

Tom 10:55

Pushback comes overwhelmingly from men, that shouldn't be surprising. And I have also found since I've been doing this work a long time, and I speak around this country to groups every year, the pushback comes from men primarily, and primarily White men. And their pushback is that I'm trying to, and others like me are trying to blur gender. So there we have a genderless world, and women and men are the same, and we don't respect differences. And men are good at some things. And women at others. All have this sort of thing that they think there are fundamental differences. This is called gender essentialism for your audience, they think men are essentially one way, women are essentially different. And that we have to

respect those differences. So that's the beginning of the pushback. That's the beginning of the pushback, but it gets a lot more sinister than that. You have men that will say, especially after the #MeToo movement, they'll say, "Well, a lot of women are just making this stuff up," you know, or "they're exaggerating," or "they're angry at some relationship problem that they're having." And so they're falsely accusing men of these things, that kind of pushback, which by the way, is the history of the world as men not believing women, when women say that this happened, I had an incident or sexual harassment or assault. What's the first thing a defense attorney does in a court of law? Well, she's making it up. It's a lie. And this is where a lot of men... and by the way these groups have names, so I'd like to name them. These are men's rights activists. They're a very powerful lobby in America, they tend to be politically conservative. They're made up overwhelmingly of men. And they believe that men are under attack today, not women, but men are under attack through false allegations and false accusations. And they're angry. And they think that we need to restore traditional manhood to America. And they think that that's where everything is going wrong. And that people like me are the ambassadors of messing everything up by trying to talk about equality.

Jean 13:13

Is there an overlap? Because everything you just said about restore malehood is equivalent to restore White people as dominant forces in this country, and that there is a biological essential difference between the races, and one race was meant to rule? Is there overlap between those two groups of people?

Tom 13:40

Absolutely. You hit it right on the head. You have lots of White people, I think your audience understands, that feel a very same way that White people are under attack, they're losing their power with the ascension of people of color, and not just people of color, but women of color. We don't talk about nearly as much, or as we talked about before, LGBT communities and how people from various diverse backgrounds are beginning to slowly ascend, and White people. This is why the slogan was Make America Great Again, because they think there's some mythical point in the past when things were great. And the truth of the matter is, I'm sure your audience would agree, the further you go back in the past, the less equality there is.

Jean 14:30

Got that right.

Tom 14:32

So if you want to pick the 1950s, or 1930s, or whatever you think is that mythical time when America was great, it was not great for millions and millions of people. People who had to live through Jim Crow segregation, gay people who had to live in the closet out of fear for their

lives. Women were not allowed to go to college. In many cases, the Ivy League schools didn't even allow women until the 1970s for the most part. So the further back you go into time, the more inequality there is. And if that's what they're heralding as the great times of America, well, then what they're heralding is a time of great inequality. When Whites, especially White men, more than any other group, had a stranglehold on the power of America, and they see their power today in 2021 as being in jeopardy, and that's what they're angry about. And men are part of that overlap, what you were talking about, the overlap there.

Jean 15:33

Right?

Tom 15:34

When you look at who voted for Donald Trump, everyone knows, look at any poll out there, it was overwhelmingly White people. But when you go inside the numbers, it was more men than women, it was overwhelmingly White men. And that's the group that is angry the most, I would say in America today, and the ones that are causing the most havoc when you're looking at domestic terrorism. And this is documented by the Department of Justice, by the CDC, these aren't feminist websites. And they're saying the vast majority of the anger that has been provoking the insurgency on January 6, the cameras tell the story, is overwhelmingly White men that rushed the Capitol building with Confederate flags, yelling and screaming, and people's lives were lost.

Jean 16:25

So this is fascinating.

Tom 16:28

Yes, there's a strong overlap between what you were talking about, race and masculinity.

Jean 16:33

They go together. So this is fascinating. What in the world... now I'm looking at you, saying, where did this man come from? How did you grow up? How did you get interested and aware of this topic? How did this even happen?

Tom 16:57

You know, it's a good question. It's a question I always get, because honestly, a lot of men, and particularly White men, are not interested in these topics. So it's an excellent question. You know, things happen over a person's life. I'm a believer that if you want to change, you want to improve and become a better person, you can. And a number of things happened in my own life. First and foremost, I became a dad.

Jean 17:23

Wait, let's go way back before you became a dad, your childhood.

Tom 17:27

Oh, before I was a dad. I wouldn't say that there was anything about my childhood that was progressive at all. My family were very conservative, Southern Baptist, White. And so I was raised around racist thinking, sexist thinking, homophobic, all of that. That was just how I was raised. Now, I have to say, even by the time I became a teenager, a lot of that didn't connect with me. My friends, I was in a neighborhood that was a diverse neighborhood. My school, the schools I went to were diverse. And so that old fashioned segregation way of thinking really didn't connect with me even when I was young. But I was raised in a very conservative, hyper religious background. So it was later in my life, maybe my 20s, where I really started to question, you know, the things that were told to me as a boy, and as a young man.

Jean 18:27

Was there a light bulb moment?

Tom 18:30

I think there were light bulb moments plural. I played baseball for Long Beach State here in Southern California, and sports culture and a lot of folks who played in sports know this can be very toxic. It was toxic in terms of its homophobia. It was toxic in terms of its sexism, and misogyny. And so my late teens, early 20s, in sports culture, was not a time when I was very progressive at all, the light bulbs were not really coming on. I'm in locker room environments where other guys my age, and my coaches who were older than me, would say things that were horribly misogynistic or homophobic. And we went along, you know, we went along with that, they became the templates for our behavior.

Jean 19:18

In our diversity training, we sometimes talk about the locker room culture as the beginning of what we now experiencing today.

Tom 19:26

Absolutely. My coaches, who we looked up to as father figures when I was young, were the ones that were modeling some of this really dysfunctional behavior. And so they validated those behaviors to us. And we did that I'm sure. When I was 19, 20, 21, I was saying things that were completely inappropriate. And my thinking was not where it is today by any means, because that's what I was surrounded with. It wasn't until I got older, I started getting an education. I began reading books by people like bell hooks has been, I think, authors out

there, she's one of the most important authors in my life. When she wrote her book about masculinity, *The will to change*, if anyone has not read that I recommended highly. It was illuminating. To me, that book was just like a wow moment for me. Because not only did bell hooks break down some issues that I think a lot of men can relate to, and women too, she did it with compassion, which is surprising if anyone knows bell hooks's background, she was abused. And so she has every right to be angry. But that book is filled with this compassion, this loving attitude toward gender and men. And it opened the door for me, it taught me so many other ways. So that in my own work, when I go out to young men now and they're looking at me, and they're sitting in the audience, I temper my talks, as much as I can consciously, in a loving way, in a compassionate way. Because that opens the door, instead of coming at them in an angry way, which causes them to a lot of times shut the door.

Jean 21:14

People have to feel accepted to want to change.

Tom 21:16

Absolutely.

Jean 21:17

And that's the irony of it because we want to reject them for what we want to see change. But that doesn't work.

Tom 21:28

Doesn't work. And I get angry, because another light bulb moment for me, my students, I've been teaching gender studies now for over 15 years. And the testimonies my students have shared with me, things that have happened to them. Mind blowing, I mean, things that I couldn't even imagine, mainly with women, but also young LGBT students as well. Horrible things, and they anger me.

Jean 21:58

Say more about that. This is Pride Month. Give an example.

Tom 22:03

I'm here in Southern California, and a lot of my students are LGB and T as well, I have trans students. And what they have had to go through sometimes in their own families, being rejected by their own families, disowned, thrown out onto the streets, horrible things, or within their culture, their neighborhoods, where they've actually been physically assaulted by people in their neighborhoods. And so they have been suicidal sometimes, they're open about that. They sometimes were bullied all the way down into middle school and high school

routinely, by classmates and others, so their whole life has been one challenge after another with people harming them physically, verbally, psychologically. And yet, what inspires me is how many of them to this day are strong, powerful allies now, they'd become voices and activists, instead of just withdrawing, which I can't imagine what they've gone through. Instead of that they become activists, and now they want to work with other young people, and help those people come through the storm.

Jean 23:25

As concretely as you can, talk about the change of attitude that you yourself have gone through, you've witnessed your students gone through, what does it take? You know, this is the question that everybody's asking, what does it take to get men to see the harm and devastation they're bringing, not only to others, but to themselves? How they stifle their own growth and their own sense of well-being? Talk about the change.

Tom 24:02

That is the million dollar question, you nailed it. And here's what I have learned. There are a couple things that cause men to start reflecting and taking seriously the things that we're talking about, one of those things...

Jean 24:19

Wait, I want to say a thing, I want to emphasize you said to start reflecting so you're saying the first step is reflection.

Tom 24:25

Yeah, I think so. If I'm being honest, we have to be honest with ourselves. And that that's kind of a first step with lots of change. Lots of change starts with self-honesty. So you're honest with yourself, you begin to reflect on your life. The first group of men that usually start to that change is one of the things that started me on that change, which was parenthood. I want to be clear, this doesn't happen for all men. This isn't some universal light bulb that comes on that they have a son or a daughter and they change. Lots of people don't change. But for a lot of the men that I have met, that have really started rethinking the way they were, they became parents, and they had a son or a daughter, or both. And they started looking around the world and saying, is this the world I want my child to be raised in? And when their answer was no, that's kind of scary. That's when they started thinking we need to make some change. And maybe part of that change is me, that I have to start thinking differently about the way I see women, girls, if they're White, people of color, if they're heterosexual, how I look at LGBT individuals. And so that's where some of the journey started. Here's my second answer. This one's probably less inspirational to your audience. But I have found this to be what works. And that is appealing to self-interest. You have to tell men how change benefits their lives.



Right now, as we were talking earlier about White people feeling like maybe their power is being challenged right now.

Jean 26:09

Right.

Tom 26:11

That's how a lot of men are feeling, that their power is being challenged right now by people like me. And so you have to reframe that. So they understand no, no, no, what we're trying to do is help people's lives. And this helps men's lives, just as you mentioned, just as much. And so you have to appeal to self-interest, and show them that a different life is a better life for them.

Jean 26:39

Break that down. What is it? What do men have to do? I'm gonna be real clear here. What do men have to do? What's the advantage of them giving up power?

Tom 26:54

Yep. I love the question. And I've been asked it so many times, I am ready. All right.

Jean 27:01

I knew you were.

Tom 27:04

One of the things I like to say early on when I'm giving a talk somewhere is that nothing that I'm saying is male bashing. I'm not here to bash men. All right? In fact, if I really wanted to bash men, if I really want to say something toxic to men, I would start with this: "Don't do anything, keep everything exactly as it is, don't change at all." That's the most toxic thing I can tell men. Why? The numbers speak for themselves, folks, buckle your seatbelt. Here we go. Look at incarceration rates, men are incarcerated 11 times more than women. Look at suicide rates. Men commit suicide at four times the rate of women.

Jean 27:54

Whoa, I didn't know that.

Tom 27:56

And in some regions, that's over 10 times, alright, nationally, four times. And this is the CDC, this is the National Institutes of Health. Look at, especially if they've been in military service, the suicide rates for men who've been in military service are off the charts. And part of the

reason for this, I've spoken to lots of military personnel, is that when a man goes into the military, women too, but especially men, they are taught, you don't reach out for help. If you've got a problem, you fix it, you fix it on your own, you take charge and you don't ask others for help. That's a feminine thing to do that, that women can ask for help but not men, that you're supposed to be a man and man up and be tough. And that's killing us, literally killing us. That guys are taught that they can't emote, that they can't have the human emotions of fear, of anxiety, of loneliness, of self-doubt, that we have to constantly put on this front. Which is like an armor that we put on ourselves that we're tough and invulnerable, and aren't, you know, afraid of anything. And it's killing us. We're developing heart disease at greater rates, always have, we die earlier than most women, statistically. And when you put in the crime rates and the statistics of incarceration, who wants that? Nobody wants that for themselves, nor do they want it for their sons. Nobody wants to think that I'm going to raise some boys who might be trotting off to prison someday for some misdeeds. Nobody wants that.

Jean 29:42

So how do you connect the culture to the outcome that you've encountered, all of those disasters happening now?

Tom 29:53

The culture itself is toxic because we teach men that to be a man is not just to be tough and strong, and invulnerable. And when it comes to your family, you're supposed to be a provider and protector, overwhelmingly. But you were also taught behind this toughness, you can't do anything or feel anything or behave in any way that could be considered feminine. And so what they're doing, what our culture does, is it takes human traits like empathy, love, compassion, generosity, and we call those things feminine. And then we call other things like ambition, competition, strength, and we call those things masculine. So we're literally, from the time we are little boys, being taught never be feminine, never do anything that's considered feminine, and always do these things that are masculine. The culture is teaching us this. Then the next thing we teach boys, when they get a little bit older, is to be a man is to be successful. And we're talking about money. In a capitalist society like America, you were taught a successful man is a man with resources. Why do people love Trump? The people that love Trump, they may have a number of things they say, but listen to one of the things you'll always hear from a Trump supporter, when the rubber hits the road, you want to say, what do you like about this guy? And one of the things they'll say is, look how rich he is, look how successful he's been. That somehow the fact that he's made all this money, or at least he inherited it, and so that he's made all this money is a measurement of his manhood, a measurement of his masculine strength. We are told this, boys are taught this from the time we are young, that we should strive, that women are commodities, that money is something

that we should have. And we should show that in lots of ways with our fancy cars. And you know, the way we talk. And so all of this is culture driven. This is driven. By the way, I want to say that that particular point I'm making now is something that transcends race and ethnicity, right? You find this throughout different cultures, it's not just White masculinity we're talking about here that are taught that being successful, having lots of women at your disposal, having money so you can have fast cars, that's been taught to boys forever. There's nothing new about any of this. And it transcends race and ethnicity. So yes, American culture itself, and you find this around the world too, so I don't want to just say this is an American phenomenon. It's certainly not. But American culture in particular is a pressure cooker to men to conform to hyper capitalistic, hyper sexist, women as commodities message.

Jean 32:53

So if I grew up thinking that I'm not supposed to feel anything, and I think feelings are dangerous. Why on earth would I want to do that? What would be the advantage to me for doing that?

Tom 33:18

You know, a lot of times boys are taught. And I'm not saying that, by the way, that no girls act like this. I don't want to make it sound like...

Jean 33:26

Yeah, we're talking about trends. And I'm a trained researcher, we're talking about statistical trends. And so we may use generalized language, I was just giving my disclaimer speech, we might use a generalized language. But we're not talking about everybody, and everyone we know has a cousin Joe, who's an exception.

Tom 33:48

It's like Denzel Washington says in one of his movies *Training Day*, it's not what you did, it's what can be proven. And so a lot of men are taught, you can cross lines, right? Whether it's stealing, whether it's taking advantage of a woman who might be intoxicated. You can cross lines, as long as you don't get caught.

Jean 34:11

Oh, my word, I think I heard that before.

Tom 34:15

Think how many celebrities in our culture are living proof of that. That only till very recently, very recently, have high profile male celebrities been held accountable for their misdeeds. It's like the Harvey Weinsteins of the world or the Bill Cosbys, it's a very, very new phenomenon.

In the past boys thought, well, who's gonna know? And let me tell you something else. I want to connect the dots to college culture to any of you in college or your college teachers. This is a big part of frat culture as well. for turning around America. Why do you think they pledge a fraternity? What's the pledging part? The pledging is that you're swearing that whatever happens in this house stays in this house. The worst thing a bro can do is rat out another bro. Notice it's not don't do bad things, it's don't get caught. And don't rat out anyone that you know did something bad. That's a huge part of male culture.

Jean 35:22

So if I'm raised not to feel, if I'm raised not to -- I won't even say me, if John... No I'll say me because I think if I'm raised not to feel, I'm raised I have to be tough. I'm raised I have to be successful, and I'm raised that I can do anything I want as long as I don't get caught, then I'm setting myself up to go to prison, I'm setting myself up for bankruptcy, am setting myself up for all the things that you were saying that men die for.

Tom 35:57

Absolutely. And that's why...

Jean 35:59

Oh my goodness. I have never seen an issue like that before.

Tom 36:05

Hear this. There's a professor at the University of Nebraska, her name is escaping me, but it'll come to me if I don't think about it. She did research on men and women who have been incarcerated for violent crimes, her research team went to prisons around the country, and asked, just asked the questions, explain what happened that got you in this situation, right? And here's what they learned, that when you talk to the majority of women who've been incarcerated, and again, this is for violent crimes now, they will quickly take blame for mistakes they made. They will say something about I did this, and I did that. And, you know, when you ask men who did very similar crimes, the same question, they deflect blame externally. They don't take it, someone did this. He made me do that. She made me do this. They take the blame, and they externalize it. And that's how we're taught as boys. You don't, you aren't culpable. Find others. They're the problem. They're the reason that you lashed out and hit that person, or did something violently, it wasn't your fault.

Jean 37:20

Connect the dots between a don't get caught ideology, and someone else made me do it. What's the connection there?

Tom 37:36

Don't get caught, but if you do, blame someone else, you're not culpable. It's someone else's fault. Well, the way she spoke to you was disrespectful. "Well, she said something that crossed the line." "He looked at me in a disrespectful way, you know, he had no business getting into my personal space," things like that. Crazy stuff. And those of you who are guys watching the show, you were raised in largely the same culture I was, you know exactly what I'm talking about, that it can go from zero to 60 really quick with guys, because he was looking at me in a disrespectful way. What, and suddenly, that turns into some physical confrontation. I go to a gym and I see this. I see it happen at my gym, what are you looking at? And before you know it, there's something happening in the gym. But what was going on there? You don't see women behaving like this, or at least you don't as much, it's rare. But you see guys, any of you that have experienced road rage, right? Some guy's revving his car and flipping you off. Take a look at the gender as they're going by. It's overwhelmingly likely... do you know that according to the Department of Justice 90% of road rage is men, and that doesn't surprise anybody. You know, when I say these things in public, you know what people will say? And this is a horrible thing. They'll say, well, boys will be boys. That's the way men are.

Jean 39:04

Yeah, that's it.

Tom 39:06

That somehow it's endemic. It's like it's built into our neurology.

Jean 39:11

Snakes and snails and puppy dog tails.

Tom 39:13

And that's it. There's nothing we can do about guys will be guys. And I will say to them, that's male bashing. That's really bad male bashing, and there is no science to back that up. The first two chapters of my book are devoted to the biology of violence. And they have been looking -- researchers for 70 years have been looking -- at testosterone, they've been looking at different sections of the brain neurology, they've been looking at genetics to try to find out if there something in the way men are wired that causes men to be more aggressive, more hostile, more violent, and to date they failed. Whether it was double Y chromosomes, whether it was this enzyme producing, whether it was a section of the brain, that said we're more geared toward hostility. None of it has panned out. But you still go to, well, boys will be boys, there's really nothing we can do about it. And if they're right, what a terrible indictment. If they're right, that there's nothing we can do about it, then brace yourself for more wars and

build more prisons, because there's just nothing we can do about it. Now, if there is something we can do about it, which is let's raise our boys differently, to be more empathic, to care and show love and that there's nothing wrong with that, that doesn't threaten your manhood in some way to be a sensitive and compassionate human being. Maybe we start to see difference. And there's a lot of research to back that up. There's a lot of research that the way one is raised has an impact on the way they behave.

Jean 40:59

Yes. All I'm thinking of is men don't ask for directions. And that's part of the not seeking help, I'm sure.

Tom 41:12

That's right, you can't even get men to go to the doctor, I swear, my own doctor says to me that a lot of his patients when it's time for them to have the digital exam for prostate cancer, they refuse. They'll just refuse. You know that I'm not having that. Nope, nope, nope. This is what I mean, when I said earlier, that we're literally dying from this, prostate cancer is one of the leading causes of death in men, all of you know that. But there are millions of men who won't even get tested. They won't even get tested because of the homophobic connotation of their male doctor perhaps having to touch them, you know, so they won't get down to it. And I say to them, we're doing things that are killing us, literally, that we can change just like that.

Jean 41:58

You said appeal to their self-interest, you've laid out the case for what the self-interest is. I'm talking to Joe Blow, who doesn't want a digital exam and won't ask for directions. What's the self into? What would I even say to that person?

Tom 42:20

I will first of all say that's a tough sell, grab Joe Blow off the street, it might not go well, he might not.

Jean 42:27

Okay. Thank you for that. Who would listen? Describe the person who's ready and ripe for the right appeal.

Tom 42:39

First of all, I teach. And I should say, I speak on a lot of university campuses. And so that's a rarified environment. And I'm aware of that. So my audiences, a lot of them have education or they're students there. So they're already reading things, they're already maybe immersed in

some of these conversations. They're already kind of halfway there, you know, and that's not a hard sell. The folks in the military that I spoke of before, a whole bunch of them came up to me, and they're in their uniforms, they have the camouflage gear after one of my talks, and I didn't know what was going to happen, whether this is going to be good or bad. And some of them hugged me...

Jean 43:15

Whoa!

Tom 43:17

...and said, we've lost our brothers in arms to suicide, we have friends of ours that have died, and instead of us seeking help, we self-medicate with alcohol and drugs, because we're taught never to reach out for help. They've already witnessed friends of theirs or family members die. They've already had that experience. And so they're ready for these conversations.

Jean 43:41

Ah, so part of it then is helping them identify those they care about, who have literally suffered or died from this.

Tom 43:52

Absolutely. That's one of the things I've noticed. I mean, I tried this one. I was speaking in New York, and I tried this tactic, and I don't use this tactic anymore. But I said, a lot of you young guys out there are going to be fathers someday, maybe sooner than later. And you would hope that if your daughter was going to college someday, and she was in a fraternity party, and maybe she'd been drinking too much, that the young men there are going to do the right thing, and not the wrong thing, that they're going to make sure that she's safe and no one's going to take advantage of that circumstance. And so you have a vested interest in thinking about how men behave. And I know this is horrible, but I'm going to tell you what a guy in the back of the auditorium yelled, and this is my challenge. It haunts me to this day. Yells from the back of the auditorium, "She's not my daughter, bro." And I am stunned and the audience groaned and I'm just, I was in silence for several seconds and when the audience died down, I said, "you know, that's one of the scariest things I've ever heard someone say." I said, "I expect -- I don't know, because I'm not a psychologist -- but expect that's the sort of thing a sociopath might say, that has no interest in anyone else's welfare but their own." It's a terribly sad, scary thought that there are men who think like that, how to get through to them? I don't know. I don't know.

Jean 45:30

Talk about the polarization going on now. That the people who are going to be listening to this are people who are dedicated to racial and social justice, and everyone I know who's participating is horrified by what's happening now. Do you have hope?

Tom 45:53

I have lots of hope. I'm very optimistic, and people sometimes go, really? Based on what? And look, my generation? I don't know. My hope comes from all of the young people that I meet all around this country. And I speak everywhere, including red states. And young people are not my generation by any means. They are far more progressive in their thinking. They are far more accepting, they are diverse, and they're interested in diversity. Look, it's not that you won't find young people who wear the Make America Great hat and they bought into that message. But I have to tell you, when it comes to young people, they are in the minority. The majority of people around this country when you're talking about young folks, they think differently. They want a diverse and pluralistic world. They want a world where people are accepted, they are overwhelmingly accepting of LGBT, they're overwhelmingly accepting of women's rights and women's equality. So the dinosaurs who want to take us back to the 1950s are first of all, a lot of them are older, but even the ones who are younger, they are small in numbers compared to the majority. I get my optimism from a lot of young people. Yeah.

Jean 47:16

The people who make the news are not the young people you're talking about?

Tom 47:21

No. And I speak in red states. I've spoken in Texas and Kentucky and lots of other places where they will tell me, now you're not in California anymore. And I go, I understand that, I appreciate that. But those young people as well are talking in terms of diversity and plurality. And I think I had coaches bring their entire basketball and football teams to my talks. So there's a bunch of guys...

Jean 47:45

Whoa, really?

Tom 47:47

...University of Connecticut, the coach brought his entire basketball team. And they were right in the middle of the conversation, raising their hands and making points and part of the dialogue. So I think our future is bright. We still have challenges. You know, we all know that, I don't have to sell anybody on that, we have a lot of polarization, we have a lot of challenges



that we have to meet. But at the same time, I am optimistic because the young people in this country make me optimistic. I am so emboldened by their messages, by their desire to change and make the world a better place. I'm just so inspired by young people. So that's where my optimism comes from.

Jean 48:31

Wonderful. My last question. Listening to you, I have to say just hear me out, so I felt a surge of hope. And I'm an optimistic person, but every now and then I just sink down, sink down, sink down. So I need infusions like you just gave. My last question to you: speak to the women, the women who are raising sons, the women -- and I know a bunch of the women who say everything is fine. I love my partner. He's wonderful, except... and the women who are estranged from their fathers, I know people in all three categories who are wondering what to do.

Tom 49:14

This is probably the most difficult question for me to field. I have seen my work overwhelmingly directed toward boys and men. Many of my friends who are women are feminists, and they will say things to me, like your work is primarily with boys and men. That our work as feminists is with girls and women. It's not that we don't overlap. We're human beings, we're partners. I don't usually give women advice, though, in terms of what they should do, or I don't think men should be policing women's choices at all, really, but I understand if a woman... You have sons and you're thinking, I don't want my sons to grow up like these guys that you're describing, that are on the way to a criminal justice record and all of that. Absolutely. I think every parent can relate to that. And trying to get your boys... and this takes Mom, Dad. But if there's just Mom, and there's just Dad, that's cool to try to get your boys to understand why it's important that we treat girls with the same equality, dignity, autonomy, as ourselves from the earliest ages, they have to get that message and then reinforced. And then as men and women, we have to model that, we can't just say it, we've got it, we've got to act it when we're around boys, and I'm a coach or I'm a dad, or I'm a Sunday school teacher, whatever I am, I've got to model this in the way I'm speaking, in the way I'm behaving. They're looking at me when I walk into a classroom, and I understand I'm a university professor, but this applies if you're a second grade teacher, right? You walk into the classroom, all eyes are on you. They are checking you out: the things you say, the way you conduct yourself are on display. And they're going to consume that. So I would say to moms and dads, we've got to model it all the time, we need more dads, that we really need more dads to step up and go. Absolutely. And be on board with this. We're both doing...

Jean 51:25

Like partners.

Tom 51:27

Partners. That's right.

Jean 51:31

What do you say to women who say, "My partner is great, except he is stuck, he won't get help. I can't get him to go to the doctor. He trashes people who are not like him. And I love him."

Tom 51:51

Yeah, those are big things, not little adjustment moments, those are big things. If someone feels that way, I mean, that's something that they first of all, should impress upon their partner, the man here, that that they feel serious and strongly about, they have to make sure that that their views and feelings are not simply dismissed. Men who feel like I'm good the way I am, I don't need any help. And then if someone comes to them and says, you know, I don't like this or that, and the way you say these things, and this bothers me, they might not be in a frame of mind to even hear that in a constructive way, and they'll just shut down on that. So, I mean, my recommendation to anyone is with your partner, whomever that is, is if you've got something serious that's bothering you, you love the person and you can, I would start the conversation out with I love you very much. But there are things that really bother me, and I'd like to have a frank and honest conversation with you about... and hope that they respect that and they should respect that, you would hope so. But that's the best I can say. It's not just any partner that's having a problem in their relationship. It starts from love. I can't think of a scholar who said this, if you know who he is. He's from the White privilege conference. He says, "My first step is always with love."

Jean 53:21

Whoa, that's a perfect ending. I thank you so much for this interview. It's been very informative. I'm still going to think hard about what you said, about not connecting the dots, which I had never done before, between not asking for help, and being raised to also not be wrong. So that's fascinating to me. I encourage everyone, say how they can find you, say the name of your book that's coming out again.

Tom 53:59

The book is called *The Bro Code*. And it can be purchased anywhere now, it's all over the markets. Just my name Thomas Keith. You can also go to my website, which is Tomkeith.com, TomKeith.com and that all that information is there as well as my films or anything else. They can also write, my email address is right there. If they want to write to me, that's cool, too.

Jean 54:28

Okay. And that's Keith, spelled K-E-I-T-H. All right, thank you very much. And it's been delightful.

Tom 54:38

Wonderful. Jean. Thank you very, very much.