‘They’ve never been taught what feminism is’: the case for teaching feminism, gender issues, and related topics in school.

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Introduction

Laura: you’ve already, I’ve just kind of wanted to start by getting a sense of your interests and you’ve already started to answer the first question but I was wondering what you’re studying at university and if you could tell me why why you went in to engineering

Erin: Um yeah so I’m studying civil engineering and I did that because I wanted to be involved in building constructions in more of a um managerial or like technical consultant role and civil engineering was kind of the easiest way to go about that um yeah

L: ok great, and yeah if you could tell me if there’s anything you’re particularly passionate about

E: um [pause] I mean I like learning about construction [shrug]. Um and buildings, I think it’s fun. Um I have a particular interest in um project management so how you coordinate the construction of a project, who’s gonna work on what, when is it going to be worked on in what schedule and in what order are you gonna do stuff, how do you manage the different people that are involved in a construction project that that’s that’s kind of what I’m interested in uh within this topic that I’m studying um yeah [shrug]

L: can you tell me how you kind of got in to that or kind of what sparked your interest in construction

E: um [pause] I don’t know I’ve always kind of been interested in it [shrug]

L: yeah okay great, well thanks for sharing. I’m going to move on to the the next kind of set of questions um to start off I’m wondering what comes to mind when you hear the word feminism

E: um [pause 4.3] it’s kind of like a loaded topic because like I feel like some people don’t take it seriously and don’t respect that feminism is uh activism for equality for all genders but then I feel like there are lots of people who take feminism like way way too seriously or way too far and kind of give it a bad name in a a sense where they it’s not that they’re saying bad things as a feminist but more they’re just alienating other people who don’t feel as strongly about the topic and then by doing that kind of make it a topic for only people who are a little bit obsessed with it um. I personally don’t have a lot of uh like feminism or activism roles that I take on in my life um I feel like I’m a little bit more low-key about it but uh yeah that’s that’s kind of what comes to mind

L: okay great thank you um to just kind of keep on the the sort of broad topic, what more can you tell me about feminism?

E: um [pause 5.24] I don’t know I, like I said {shrug} I think it’s activism for equality for both genders and I think that’s what it should be and I think it doesn’t need to be anything more than that

L: m ok um can you tell me what you would say are maybe some key feminist issues or key gender issues?

E: um I feel like that will probably depend on who you talk to because it’s always depending on what is affecting each person individually um for me what I notice is that there’s not a lot of representation in construction because guys can just, they tend to be stronger, physically, um and it’s hard to argue with that [laughter] and there’s also this kind of uh there’s this history of guys working in construction and to be a girl working in construction it’s really hard to get started because you would be the only girl working on that construction site and just because of that you kind of lose that comradery with your um with your colleagues that you’d normally have if it’s a more diverse or just only female group of people, it’s it’s a lot you know like you’re you’re the girl on site is [shrug] they they may not treat you or they may not say that but everybody treats you a little bit differently and I’m not saying that they shouldn’t but it kind of makes you feel a part of the group – uh - separated from the group even if they’re not treating you badly um and that’s that’s more on like uh gender representation in the workplace but I think that that’s the more um prevalent issue that I see um in my life and then where feminism comes in to that, I think that there’s not a lot of uh acknowledgement of this kind of gender divide um by other men in the workplace like they don’t they don’t seem to understand what the problem is or even any issue at all and I think that the first step to solving problems is to first recognize them and there’s not really that recognition um and it’s it’s always harder to recognize and issue or something going on when it’s not affecting you. Like I don’t think when a girl walks in to a room full of other girls they think ‘huh we should get some guys in here to make it equal’ like people don’t, you don’t think like that. But if a guy walks in to a room and it’s only girls, ]they’re like wait a minute [laughter] where where are my peers? [looking around] And that’s not to say they won’t get along that’s not to say it won’t be a great group of people working together but it does make you feel that little bit separated. So that’s kind of what I notice and that’s that uh lack of gender representation throughout construction and engineering fields is something that I think is uh recognized by women in engineering and construction uh and that’s something that I think people are trying to work on right now

L: m I was gonna kind of follow up with that, just wondering if you think that that is starting to change or really not still?

E: I think it’s one of those things that just going to take time. I um like when you come in to an engineering classroom and the prof is a guy and he’s super good at his job, he’s got lots of experience in the field, he’s very charismatic, he’s done all this work across in everywhere and the only people that you get to interact with that have a lot of experience in the field are guys because traditionally those are the people who are in that field, even though a quarter or a third of my class might be women, the only experts that we meet are guys because that’s just those where the people who studied fifty years ago and those were the people that are in the field now, um and I think it’s just gonna take another couple generations for there to be real equality just because it takes that long for so many people to go through education, to work in the job and then to come back and represent their industry to all of the young people coming up through uh the education system. So I think it’s recognized um and I think people are working on it; we’ve got um women in women in engineering or some kind of organization in in ah in BC, {city}, uh and they’re doing they’re representing themselves at uh industry nights at {university}, they’re coming out to um events on campus and they’re you know like we have uh we have a presence, but I think it’s, I think there’s something to be said about just a subtle representation of women just everywhere you go, you see them. And I don’t think that will happen until, for another 30-50 years when we are actually represented everywhere.

L: ok um you kind of mentioned already but just to ask, in your classes how how many um like is it still a majority of males in engineering would you say or

E: um I definitely think they’re a majority in the sense that they’re more than half uhm [laughter] but I don’t think it’s like a jarring majority, it’s kind of like if you went in to a high school classroom and you got so many guys and so many girls and you wouldn’t think anything of it because it’s just like luck of the draw, you just sort of had that many guys and that many girls in the classroom and even though it’s like consistently a majority of guys in every class because it’s all the same students in every class it’s um it’s not like there are only three girls, you know, like we have a significant portion of the class is women uh yeah I’m not too concerned about the lack of representation in the students

L: ok ok and in in like classroom dynamics for example, would you say kind of males take up more more space, maybe monopolizing like talking time or do you not really notice a a difference?

E: um I would s– I would say that that has less to do with the fact that they are guys and more to do with who happens to be in class [laughter]

L: [laughter] ok well that sounds really, really interesting. I think even in my day at {university} there were really very few women in the engineering program so I’m glad to hear that that’s starting to change but sounds like not totally there yet [laughter]. Um you’ve already also touched on this but I was kind of interested in if you’re aware of different um strands within feminism or schools of thought within feminism or maybe differing viewpoints about either a specific issue or maybe generally um if you could just talk a little bit more about that

E: um [pause] ok. Feminism isn’t really something that I follow because I feel like a lot of the stuff that you see on the internet is really aggressive feminism and that’s not what I’m about um because I find it that it really alienates a lot of people, especially because a lot of my friends are guys um and if I talk about feminism in an aggressive manner, I’ve completely lost their attention, you know. It has to be presented in a way that doesn’t alienate people who come from a traditionally ‘guys do this’ kind of background, you know. So if um if I have a friend who grew up in like one of those stereotypical like small town, out in the forest kind of places, and they grew up in a way where the girls did this and the guys did this and they’re really in to hunting and they love sports and they’ve worked in construction their whole life, I need to be able to talk about feminism without completely losing them. And so I don’t really follow a lot of the feminism that I see on the internet because it’s just not, like there’s no point. It makes you angry, it makes you feel like tryina search for activism but the arguments and the way that they present their arguments alienates the audience that you’re trying to convince, or at least that’s that’s my experience with it. So, in terms of strands of feminism that I follow I would say I don’t really follow anything, um. I can only speak to my experiences that I’ve had with feminist organizations in industry and in education um. When I was in high school I did uh it was this event that they had in {city} um. I was on student council and a whole bunch of my friends were as well so we all got to come in to {city} for a trip and we got to come to this conference, this women and industry from business, from engineering, from science, they came in and they had a whole panel of speakers and they did a bunch of different uh educational uh panels and uh activities that we could do, and the whole idea was to educate us on our rights as women and um what we can do in the workplace to ensure that there’s equality, and it was kind of this weird experience where they were talking from their perspective of having gone through education like thirty years ago and us coming through it now and so they had this really kind of aggressive, the world is ending kind of perspective, in the sense that ‘this is an issue and it must be addressed right now, because if we don’t address it right now, everyone is gonna like AH’ [laughter] like and that was kind of their perspective. And then we came in with like 16, 17-year old girls, um we had never really experienced gender discrimination before because I think high schools tend to be quite sheltering places [laughter] um but also like there had been like significant change in the past thirty years and like we have them to thank because they were so aggressive with activism, but at the same time, them expressing that activism in such and aggressive manner was really off putting because we were like ‘woah [raises hands in surrender] you’ve got to calm down here, like it’s changed, it’s changed, calm down’. So it was kind of this weird, like I understand it’s important but I also think you’re taking it a little too far, you know.

L: so not really taking in the audience, maybe kind of uh targeting their message?

E: yeah, and I mean maybe that was just me, maybe that was just myself and the friends that I was talking to about it after, um maybe some other people in a at that event really identified with the speakers and what they were going through and what they had to say, um [shrug] but yeah I I don’t know, that’s just kind of been my experience with feminist uh events and uh groups that I’ve interacted with, kinda, they’re taking it super seriously and that’s why they’re in that group and I understand that’s the intention of the group is to bring uh to advocate for our rights and if you really kinda bring the conversation to the table, but at the same time I think it might be a better idea to take it a bit more low-key

L: mm okay, I have two uh two follow up questions on that. One – you mentioned, so it was through kind of the student council um that you went to this um conference um, so was it just part of something that like the school kind of suggested for you to go to, or did you specifically sign up for it, or how did that come about?

E: yeah so it was it’s um I think it’s something that they just offer to high schools, so they would go through whoever their contact is in the high school and then um that person would say okay we want girls from these grades and they have to be the kind of people that we think would appreciate a uh a huge event on activism and uh also just women in industry. So then naturally they go to the student council and they’re like ‘hey you guys are all girls, wanna come to this even we have?’ We’re like ‘okay [shrug], I’d love to go to {city} for a day.’

L: ok [laughter]. So it was all girls on the student council, would you say?

E: um, we had a couple guys. It was basically uh my entire friend group, you know

L: ah ok, that sounds like fun

E: I feel like people only join student council because their friends join, and so that’s kind of what happened.

L: yeah, that, same with me I guess [laughter]. I was on the, I don’t know if this still exists. I was on the {committee at high school}… no longer?

E: um nope, no longer [laughter]

L: oh that makes me sad [laughter] aw. Um and my second question, I was just wondering if you had an example of kind of this aggressive feminism that you’ve maybe come across in the internet, is there kind of maybe something that you could sort of yeah, give an example of

E: hm [pause] it’s not really something that people say, I don’t–no, I don’t have a specific example. It’s just more the tone that people take, where it’s like ‘you said this and I think that was feminist–or I think that wasn’t very **feminist** of you’, you know, like ‘you said this and you said it in a way that really hurt me as a woman’, you know. And it’s taking this kind of victimized perspective on it, which, once like once you tell someone that they hurt you, they’re immediately going on the defensive saying ‘no I didn’t [raises hands in surrender]’ and that’s not, that’s not a way to approach a conversation in my opinion

L: mm ok mhm

E: and so and that’s kind of and once they say ‘no I didn’t’ and they’re like ‘well yes you did, you really said this and it really hurt me and I don’t think that’s very feminist of you’ and that’s like and it’s like ok, it’s not working [puts hands up in surrender]. Um so I mean aggressive in the sense that it’s just accusing people of being uh anti-feminist, or accusing people of doing things that in the “feminist eye” [air quotes] I guess is not okay um so it’s it’s a lot more of a kind of outraged reaction to stuff then it is like just education, or like gentle subtleties in uh in events, you know like it’s a very aggressive kind of way of I mean, I guess activism is aggressive, where it’s like ‘hey pay attention to me, I’m happening, you need to understand what’s going on right now, listen’, and I I find that particularly aggressive. I guess I find all kind of activism aggressive but um. Yeah I don’t have a specific example, it’s been a long time since I’ve actually watched specific uh internet videos on the topic

L: ok, that’s ok [laughter]. Um you mentioned sort of the women that have come before um, I’m just wondering maybe what you can tell me about the history of feminism

E: um I can’t tell you anything specific. I know that women didn’t have a lot of rights and then they decided that wasn’t fair and then they uh fully being gaining rights through activism and uh you know fighting for representation. I’m not a huge history buff, I can’t tell you anything specific about anything, I just know that it happened [laughter]

L: ok [laughter] um this might be a bit of a hard question but I’m wondering um why do you think it was that women were denied equality

E: um [pause] like just over the course of history?

L: mm [nodding] knowing that you’re not a history buff, but just wondering if you had anything thoughts on that [laughter]

E: [laughter] um I think it’s just something that women I mean ok I don’t I don’t really know how it got to the place where women didn’t have any like rights or representation or at what point, you know like if we’re starting from the very very beginning where it’s like tribes of people trekking through the wilderness looking for and like following the animals, you know like I don’t know at what point the women became the followers and the guys was the leader or if that was or if that even started that way. But once it got into the point where women didn’t have a say in in whatever group that they were in, I think it’s really hard to get out of that. You know like once you give the power away, it’s really hard to say oh no, I changed my mind, give it back um and I think that because you have so many years of history of guys in power and women uh under-represented and uh without any power, it’s just what people are used to. So if anyone comes up and says ‘hey no, I want I want women to be recognized and I want to have this right and this power in this society’, you have to be like a really aggressive, potentially unlikeable person because I think that the people who really can get along with anyone are the people who go with the flow, you know. If you can imagine the person that everybody just likes [shrugs] just wants to be around, it’s always the person who doesn’t make any trouble, who doesn’t have aggressive opinions, just because you don’t have anything to fight about. And so because of that, you have to be, like, to fight for your rights you have to be the kind of person that’s going to alienate a bunch of people and you know make—cause a lot of uh controversy, just because that’s that’s the kind of person that [shrug] fights for rights, you know that’s the kind of person that changes stuff in society. You don’t, you don’t hear about activists who kinda went with the flow. That’s just like [laughter] it doesn’t make any sense. So, I think that – sorry what was the question again? I’ve completely lost track

L: oh [laughter] um why do you think it sort of we are came to a situation where women were denied equality

E: ok yeah so that’s yeah that’s what I think that’s my opinion on it is that I think we, I don’t know how we got there, but we were there, we’ve gotten there, and to regain our rights, we have to be the kind of people that people don’t like, and that’s why it’s hard to regain it and that’s all I have to say about this topic [laughter] I’ve run out of ideas

L: [laughter] sorry what’s the last thing that you said

E: I’ve run out of ideas [laughter]

L: [laughter] ok no that’s great, that’s interesting, thank you. Um and then uh, I keep asking feminist uh, feminist-y questions, but I’m wondering if there are kind of any feminist figures that come to mind

E: um you know I don’t know anyone’s name

L: no?

E: um I mean the first thing that comes to mind was the uh women’s US national soccer team, because they had their whole thing recently about uh pay equality, which I thought was really interesting because like in one instance you want them to be paid as much as the men but at the same time like not the same amount of people watch, and that’s the whole basis behind how much you get paid in entertainment is how much people pay to see you, so it’s kind of like, you want them to be paid the same amount but also you kind of feel like there’s reason behind not paying them as much, because they don’t generate as much income so it’s like this weird, and the thing is, I don’t want women to be just helped out, you know, but at the same time, you have to help them get there. You know if you don’t put enough money investing into their program, then people aren’t going to want to watch it because they’re not good enough, you know. So maybe this is that initial investment and, not to say that the women’s team isn’t fun to watch, I love watching them, but um just like in general, you need you might need to give a program investment to get it to the point where people wanna watch it, but also you don’t want to pay them more than what they’re generating, because that would give women kind of a bad name because it’s more of a charity case. And uh I don’t think I don’t think we want that as a as feminists, we don’t wanna be a charity case, we are, yeah. So uh that’s the first one that comes to mind. I’ll be interested to see how that one develops over time. Um yeah

L: if I can just ask a follow up on that, um how how do you feel about then like positive discrimination, for example quotas in government or something, what do you think about those that kind of approach

E: um I don’t I don’t know what you’re talking about I’m sorry

L: oh that’s ok um so like a quota like in government say there’s very few um women represented, and then one kind of method to maybe change that is to say ok let’s reserve X number of seats for women, so that’s sort of like positive discrimination, versus like an overtly negative discriminatory practice. What what do you think about that approach

E: ok, that’s a really interesting question. Um I don’t think there’s I don’t think there’s one best way to do it. I think, you have to try and commit to trying a method and just see how it works out. Um because I think that people are often surprised by how wrong their predictions are. Um I think that uh yeah I mean I’m so torn about this topic I don’t really have a I don’t want to advocate for one or the other because I don’t think that one is necessarily better than the other. I think again this is an instance where if you reserved a certain amount of seats for women, I think it would probably speed up the process of getting to where you have gender equality in uh and representation in politics. But at the same time, you don’t want that to become the standard because after a certain amount of time, you want it to be so that it just ends up being half and half, you know, like you want people to be voting equally and you just want like around half of the people that are elected to be women and that’s ideal. So I think that maybe if you said well half the people have to be women then it might help, but at the same time I don’t think that’s the goal.

L: can you just explain what you mean by that, you don’t think that’s the goal?

E: I think that the goal is to have women just as desirable in leadership positions as men and I think that if we just put the women there, it will create resentment and kind of like this weird unfairness in a sense where it’s like politicians are there to represent us, the people, and if that’s not who we want to represent us even though it’s a girl instead of a guy then maybe I’m now resentful for her being in power instead of the person that I wanted. So I think that however we can get to a point where we want women in power just as much as we want men I think that will be the true ideal outcome and whatever gets us there fastest I think is the best method [laughter]

L: [laughter] ok. Um I’m wondering um do you kind of remember how you kind of came to hear about feminism

E: um no. [laughter]

L: that’s ok [laughter]. Um do you remember learning about it in high school at all

E: um I mean sort of not really. It was it was one of those like my history teacher and the history teacher that was like the most popular at the time that I was in high school {information redacted}

L: got it

E: so um [laughter] {information redacted} we’re all like [laughter] ‘what are you gonna teach us today?’ um and he would always kind of make a joke about history in the sense that he was like ‘**and then they had slaves’** and he just said it in such like a you know hindsight is 20/20 kind of perspective of like ‘can you believe them? They thought this and they thought this and they thought this and they treated women **this way**’ and we’re all like ‘ugh can you imagine if women were treated that way?’ like [laughter] and so that was kind of the feminism education that I got in high school, where it was more just like, you know ‘this is how it used to be and thank goodness things are better, because can you imagine how bad it would be if we lived in that time. Um and so thank goodness this person came along and did this and thank goodness this person came along and did this you know like thank goodness we had this activism because otherwise we would be in such a bad place right now.’ Um and so that was kind of my education on the history of feminism was more just like Canadian history and anything feminism that happened, and how that had a role, I don’t know [shrug]. We just had general Canadian history. I don’t think it was in any way geared towards teaching feminism um. But those uh those feminist events that I went to for industry, those were through the high school um and actually my mom did a lot of stuff with me, she really likes to read and uh do a lot of research on random topics, and so she would always be reading stuff to my brother and I. Man sometimes it got so dry uh and I distinctly remember one of her things was getting movies out from the library, and we would watch these movies as a family on um on female activism, on uh we watch one that I remember distinctly on abortion, and I think it was this uh European group that went sailing around to different countries to administer abortion pills to people who couldn’t access them in their own countries, and what they would do is they would sail in and then the person that they were trying to help would come on and get in to the sailboat and they would sail back out into neutral waters [laughter]

L: mm yes I’ve heard of that yeah [laughter]

E: [laughter] [inaudible] um which uh, that one that one was a really interesting movie um but yeah that’s, that’s kind of my background, I didn’t, yeah that’s, I don’t think feminism was something that they uh specifically address in high school. I don’t think it’s something they avoid addressing. I think it, like most topics, it’s really dependent on who’s your teacher and what they’re opinion is.

L: mm would you have wanted your experience to be any different, or or not

E: in regards to my education on feminism?

L: yes [laughter]

E: um [laughter] um I dunno. I don’t know what it could have been. I think that uh, you know like I’ve already expressed my uh perhaps lack of appreciation for aggressive feminism and aggressive like uh kind of advocacy for feminism, but uh yeah I I I feel like [shrug] if we had been taught about it a lot, I probably would have been like ‘oh we’re learning about this again’ [sigh] so [shrugs] I don’t know. People only find information important when it actually helps them in their day to day life and so because I grew up in such a like relatively privileged lifestyle, I didn’t have anything in my life to be comparing my experiences to these experiences that would be described in talking about feminism activism. You know like I wasn’t bullied because I was a girl, I didn’t, I wasn’t treated differently because I was a girl so it’s not something that I personally had identified with um and high school was a very gender eq- gender equal experience, you know like it’s not and most of the teachers are women so it’s not it’s not something that I felt like I needed.

L: Um I’m gonna switch gears just a little bit and I’m wondering if you’ve heard of the MeToo movement, and if yes, what you can tell me about it

E: no

L: no?

E: mhm [shakes head]

L: it was um it kind of uh um erupted on social media on a wide scale in in 2017 uh the hashtag MeToo um and it was an actress who posted um kind of about the harassment er sexual harassment and assault in Hollywood, and kind of calling on women who have maybe experienced something similar to write MeToo to kind of show the world kind of how prevalent this is and then it kind of erupted but it dates back to–

E: that does sound familiar

L: sorry?

E: that does sound familiar

L: yeah?

E: but I don’t follow social media so I wouldn’t know anything other than that [laughter]

L: ok ok and I’m wondering then did they I think you would have been still in high school at the time

E: yup

L: do you remember if they brought it up in class at all, or if like a teacher commented on it or

E: [shrug] you know that sounds like something that a teacher might comment on because you know teachers are really hip [sarcasm?] but uh I don’t I don’t specifically remember anything. I can’t say that they didn’t, I can’t say that they did. If they did, I might not have known what they were talking about because again I don’t follow social media, so it wouldn’t have had any significance, or impact on me, I wouldn’t remember it.

L: ok um then my next question might not be so relevant to you either but I was wondering if there are other um hashtags, or movements offline um that come to mind

E: um nope [laughter]

L: that’s ok. What do you think about activism on social media? I can imagine what you might say but [laughter]

E: yeah I mean I just think that, especially on social media, it’s so, you think that because you’re on the internet, you’re exposed to the entire world, but I think that what really happens is that you get surrounded by this group of people on on the internet where it’s like if you’re on Facebook you’re you’re only posting for your friends, you know, so it’s still like this kind of isolated community that reads your stuff, that follows what you’re doing on social media, and so I think it gives this sort of false sense of globality globality to um to whatever you’re doing, even though you’re still kind of isolated in this group of similarly-thinking people. Um I think that a lot of - so I I was actually really involved in environmental activism in high school and I think that’s because where I was there were a lot of people that I knew that were really in to environmental activism and I was like yeah, this is normal to be like ‘hey, you gotta put your recycling in the right place’ kind of thing, you know, um but the more you the more people that you meet outside of your little bubble, the more people that you interact with, you learn that you have to take a different approach to actually make an impact on people who don’t share your similar values. And if you’re super aggressive about it, if it’s all you talk about with them, if it’s kind of every time they do something you point it out, then they become resentful or they become annoyed, and that’s what they think about when they see activism, is they remember ‘ugh yeah, can you can you stand it when people point this out to you, or can you stand it when everybody’s talking about this and like I just really don’t care.’ So I I think there’s like I think the same happens on the internet where you get surrounded in your little bubble and you think that everyone thinks the same way you do and so you kind of like talk each other up in a sense where I care about this activism and you care about the same one so let’s be activists activists together and you get super like flamboyant about it in a sense [laughter], like it’s your entire social media, it’s all you share and everybody’s liking it, because you have your bubble of friends, and then you meet someone who disagrees and you’re like ‘what? I can’t believe you disagree with my opinion, how dare you, look at all this stuff that I know and all of these opinions that I have’ and you just don’t have some way of communicating with someone who doesn’t immediately agree with you. So that’s kind of my opinion on social media with activism

L: kinda of like a like an echo chamber it sounds like you’re saying?

E: yeah, yeah I I think that and it’s, like you can’t, I don’t’ think people should criticize what other people are sharing on their social media, because that’s bullying, if it’s not nice um and I think that’s a really poor method of going about it because in social media and in written in written forms of communication, everything is up for interpretation. So no matter how you intend it to sound, it really depends on how they read it to say whether or not what you said was acceptable or mean or hurtful in any way um so I don’t think it’s a good, I personally don’t think it’s a great platform for communicating potentially controversial opinions cause I feel like it just increases conflict, and I think that it’s a good it’s a good thing that we still have um political debates and uh important communication events in person, I think that’s really important, or at least by uh video call or some form where you’re able to express your opinion in the way that you intend it to be expressed

L: um just to follow up from there and I think that you’ve already kind of touched on it um but as as someone who is um maybe an environmentalist or cares about the environment, how would you try and go about bringing someone on board who might be uh like a climate change denier or even more kind of smaller scale, maybe someone who doesn’t recycle

E: you know, I have yet to figure that one out um because I, I do have friends that really don’t care um and I think it has I think it’s gonna be less about making them care and more about figuring out a way for them to do it without needing to care [pause] so creating a system where you just or creating a society where you just have recycling bins next to every single garbage bin. And I won’t go into the difficulties in the logistics of that plan, because let me tell you it was a struggle to get enough composting bins in my high school, it took like a year um a year of struggle, it was, it’s really sad actually. But there are so many considerations that go into it, like who’s going to clean out all of the additional bins now, do you space them out further apart and now have a problem with littering, because for every area that you used to have two garbage bins, now you only have one and a recycling bin, means that people have to walk further to each garbage bin, you know like it’s there’s so many different considerations that go in to making a plan like this actually feasible, but I think that that is the challenge – how do we get to a point where you don’t have to care about the environment to be able to be environmentally friendly. It shouldn’t have to be a choice, it should just be how we how we live as a group of people um because the fact of the matter is I don’t think I’m going to be able to convince some of my friends that they should take the extra 5 minutes to sort their recycling, like I can barely convince myself to get out of bed to make lunch like [laughter] in all fairness they just don’t care, and there’s not much you can say other than well, in 50 years your house is gonna burn down because of something happening like this and then in 50 years maybe they’ll care, but right now [shrugs] they don’t care and I don’t think there’s anything that you can say to make them change their mind. Maybe if they’re more open-minded, but I think there are a lot of people in the world who aren’t.

L: mm and to kind of bring that back round to feminism or to gender equality, how again a tough question, but how how might that be achieved um if it hasn’t been already

E: yeah so I I really think that it’s not about having completely equal numbers of men and women in each field, I really I don’t think that’s, I don’t think that should be the goal, in terms of like industry, feminism and industry. Um I think that it should be more about you know equal opportunities and, especially in politics, what I already talked about, it’s not about having the same about of men and women in politics, it’s about wanting men just as much as you want women in politics, it should be about having uh women in politics that are just as desirable to have in a position of power as men, and however we get there, that’s the best way towards true equality. It can’t be about having the same amount of women as men, it has to be about putting women in a position where they are just as desirable as men in that position um because that way nobody can argue with whether or not it’s fair and that way you just naturally have a more equal representation, it doesn’t like I don’t think it’s the end of the world if you have six guys and three girls in a group, because next year it might change. The problem is when there’s no opportunity to change, because people just don’t want any of the women in those positions, and so however that I think that that’s the goal, is to have it in a position where women are just as desirable as men. Um now going back to [inaudible] in general, not in politics, I think it’s more a matter of time, because I think we’ve gotten to the point where a lot of at least in like a more privileged like middle class society, I think a lot of girls going through high school feel like they could do any job that they wanted, I don’t think that’s you know I don’t I don’t think that that’s something they’re thinking about when um when they’re trying to decide what kind of field they want to go in to but I do think that the fact that there aren’t a lot of girls in specific industries does make an impact on what you want to study. Not not because you feel like you’re going to be bullied or something but because it just feels like you’re isolated. For example, I was I took woodshop in high school and a lot of my friends stopped taking woodshop because like none of us were taking it, it was only me and normally you take the classes that your friends are taking, you know, so I was the only I think I was one of two girls in a in that class. Maybe I was the only girl, I can’t really remember [pause] yeah I think I think over my last couple years I was one of two or the only girl in that in that program and guys would just take woodshop because it was fun and their friends were taking it. And girls wouldn’t because you would be surrounded by a bunch of guys like [shrug] and that’s like that’s the impact of having a majority gender in a class, especially when it’s an overwhelming majority. That that is the true impact. It’s not because we dislike guys, it’s not because we’re scared we’re gonna get bullied, it’s not because they’re intentionally excluding us in anyway, it’s just because you feel isolated. And it has nothing to do with the way they’re treating you, it just has everything to do with the lack of girls in that class. And so I think that over time there will be a change, or at least in certain industries – I don’t know about woodshop but uh and construction, I don’t know if those will change all that much but um I think that in the uh in many other industries over time there will be an increase, I think you’ll see that the increase of women in these roles will be almost I don’t want to say exponential because that makes it sound super like math-y and technical and I don’t wanna [laughter] I don’t wanna claim to have thought about this anymore uh than I have but um it’s just that the more women you see in a specific industry, the more appealing it will be for women to get into that industry. Just because you feel like you’re surrounded by peers. So yeah. I kind of forget what the original question was.

L: no, that uh that’s great I uh just kind of wanted your thoughts on how we might get to a place where there’s gender uh equality um and just to kind of maybe probe one more uh one more thing that you said, kind of coming back to, it’s not necessarily about having half men and half women, it’s more coming to a place where that let’s say the women candidate is desirable um, any, any thoughts on how we get there, it it sounds like it’s a matter of time, but any other thoughts about that

E: um I mean [pause] I guess there are two there are two women in politics that I am really aware of. Um there’s Elizabeth May, the leader or is she still the leader of the green party? I don’t even know

L: I I think that she’s on her way out but I think she’s been for a very long time yeah

{exchange redacted to protect location}

E: But um anyways, the two women that I’m actually kind of aware of in politics is Elizabeth May, and then there’s this girl um in the States, I’ve just been watching her YouTube video interviews because I think she’s very articulate um and I think she presents ideas in a in a really in a manner that’s really easy to understand and hard to argue with um I can’t even say her name though. I think she goes by like AOC or something like Alexandria-Ocasio Cortez or something.

L: Alexandria-Ocasio Cortez, yeah

E: Yeah. I think she’s very articulate and uh really fun to listen to, much like much like Obama was you know you listen to his speeches and you’re just like ‘yeah! I like listening to you talk, you could say anything and I would listen to you talk’ [laughter] um I think she

L: [laughter] charisma

E: yeah the charisma and just a really just speaking in a way that’s really nice to listen to and I think that like I don’t [pause] I don’t want to like talk down on Elizabeth May because I think she’s done great things for the Green Party and just for women in politics, just being a woman in politics is huge um but I also think that the way she represents the environment is quite aggressive and I think a lot of the reason people don’t vote for the Green Party is because it often feels like the Green Party is only focusing on the environment which isn’t the case, but that’s kind of how it’s represented, um at least that’s how I’ve seen it represented, um and I think that you know she’s, when I watch Elizabeth May speak she’s very quick to say ‘that was unacceptable’ or ‘now you’re putting down women’ and stuff like that and it’s said in a really it’s said in a manner that really alienates a lot of people I think um in a way that’s not particularly charismatic and you know like sometimes you just listen to it and you’re like ‘ah and now we’ve lost voters ahhhh eeeeeh uuuhh [hands to face in dismay]’, whereas with um you can help me out with her name but

L: [nodding] AOC [laughter] that’s ok

E: yeah, AOC, when she speaks, it’s, like, she’s identifying herself with a lot of people and she is arguing in a way that appeals to people who wouldn’t necessarily vote for her you know like she’s presenting her ideas in a way that is saying ‘it’s actually cheaper to do this than to do this and I know you’re all about saving money and not paying taxes’, you know like it’s it’s not about it’s not about changing people’s minds, it’s about changing your plans so that they appeal to other people’s opinions and ideals you know. If somebody wants to not pay a lot of taxes you shouldn’t say oh well you’re wrong you should pay more taxes, you should say ok well I have this idea and here’s how this idea isn’t going to make you pay more taxes, in the log-run maybe, or just in the right now, you know like and so I feel like that’s that’s the kinda thing that um that I think women are getting better at in um in politics is just playing to other people’s um already formalized opinions and ideals, as opposed to trying to change them and I I don’t like I don’t follow guys in politics at all so I have no I idea but um because I don’t I don’t really follow politics, but I think that’s I think that’s something that’s gonna really work um for women, is just learning how to appeal to more than just your girlfriends

L: mm um so would you not use the word aggressive for for AOC, you wouldn’t describe her as aggressive, or?

E: um no, I would definitely describe her as aggressive [laughter] I mean you obviously know her um or at least have watched, I don’t mean personally, and I think that the way she speaks is kind of like aggressive but I think that that’s also according to the YouTube comments, that’s kind of the Bronx, New York kind of way to talk um and I don’t think it alienates people, because she’s speaking aggressively but she’s not accusing people of anything and I think that’s what you know like I think that when you identify an issue and you say this has to change, you can accuse someone of doing that issue and make it personal, or you can just identify the issue and kind of you can speak about that passionately or aggressively and not come off like you’re accusing people of anything. Because I think once you accuse people, they become defensive and they don’t want to work with you, they just want to explain about how they’re not actually an awful person that you’re painting them out to be, you know. Um but I I use the term aggressive to describe m kind of any it’s it’s any kind of activism that’s like in your face were it’s like the LGBTQ community – I’m gay – but I don’t go out of my way to be like hey you’re treating gay people badly because you do this you know like it’s not it’s not something I try to do because I don’t want to accuse someone of doing something that historically has been completely fine and then be like ‘how come you didn’t know not to do this cause it makes me feel bad’, like I don’t wanna, I’m not trying to alienate people because I’m doing something that was completely okay where there from. So in feminism you come out and so say ‘hey, you can’t do that, it makes me feel bad’, or ‘you can’t do that it’s disrespectful to me’, but for the past hundreds of years they’ve been completely fine doing it so it’s like you have to choose your tone when you address a topic and I think that a lot of the time activism in the moment, not in hindsight, but in the moment can be seen as kind of an aggressive form of communication because you’re pointing at people who are doing the exact same thing that’s been being done for so many years and saying ‘that is not okay’, and they’re like ‘what did I do wrong?’ um and of course in hindsight you know everybody praises the activists because it completely aligns with what we do now but in the moment it can be a little off putting and I don’t know where that balance is, um and I will not claim to know that point um but I personally find a lot of activism to be aggressive and off-putting um and I mean of course as it becomes more popular, it will become less aggressive and more just like passionate speaking because instead of trying to convince people that you’re right you’re just [shrugs] singing about how it’s great what your opinion is because everyone agrees now [laughter] um but yeah I I don’t know, I think that feminism is such a is such a tough topic because I think that we have gotten a lot better, so if you act like it’s the end of the world then it can be a little bit hard to identify with, but at the same time I think it’s a really important issue that we um that everyone is aware of. But I kinda feel like it could be on the back burner a little bit like it’s not it doesn’t have to be something that we’re always talking about, it can just be like if somebody says something that’s kind of uh mean towards women, you can just point that out and then move on, it doesn’t have to be a big deal because I don’t think it’s a super pressing issue right now

L: mm compared to other issues or generally, or?

E: in the sense that [pause] it’s not going to be the end of the world like some of our issues might be um and so because of that we have a lot of time. I think we’ve gotten to a point where we can take time to get to true equality and I don’t think it has to be forced um any more than it’s being forced right now. I think that if you devote your life to it and make it a lot bigger than a lot of people want to take it, then it can be hard for a lot of people to um agree with you and get along with you um and you might be doing the cause more of a disservice in a lot of communities but yeah [shrug] I don’t know

L: great well that’s really interesting, thank you um, that’s it from me in terms of questions just any do you have anything final to add or what to revisit or anything?

E: Um no I don’t think so [laughter] I have a I mean I have a lot of mixed opinions on it I don’t know like I think a lot of the time there kind of my opinions will be kind of conflicting or um kind of against what I would have said previously but I just feel like a lot of people take this really seriously and I think it’s important but I also just chill, like [pause] stay calm

L: mm well thank you, it’s been really interesting to hear your your views and speak with you

Debrief & concluding remarks

Erin is a pseudonym

Redactions indicated in {} to protect participant’s anonymity