

Tanya Domi: Hi. This is Tanya Domi. Welcome to the Thought Project, recorded at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York. Fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences, and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting edge research. Informing New Yorkers and the world.

Tanya Domi: Jean Halley is a professor of sociology who teaches at The College of Staten Island and The Graduate Center of The City University of New York. She earned her doctorate in sociology at The Graduate Center, and her Master's Degree in theology at Harvard University. Among her recent publications include Seeing Straight, an Introduction to Gender and Sexual Privilege, published in 2017, and Seeing White, An Introduction to White Privilege and Race, published in 2011.

Tanya Domi: Welcome, Professor Halley, to the Thought Project Podcast.

Jean Halley: Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here.

Tanya Domi: Great. So, when you and I made our date for today's podcast, I had been intrigued by your published remarks about the comedian, Louis. C.K., who seemed feminist-leaning always during his career.

Jean Halley: Yes, he did.

Tanya Domi: But after he ... But after the New York Times reported last November about Harvey Weinstein's decades of abuse of women in Hollywood, he came out and admitted that he had been abusive towards women. And then he's disappeared from performing. You have said you were ... You might be uncomfortable if this returned depending on the circumstances, but have called for space to have a more nuanced conversation about being disrespectful to women but not necessarily raping them or becoming violent, therefore doing away with a career.

Jean Halley: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: So, can you share some thoughts with us on that?

Jean Halley: Yeah, and I've had a lot of arguments with feminist friends about this, so I'm coming into my own thinking as I speak. But I believe that there is such an incredible extent, there's so much male violence in our society that if we were to make everyone step down from their work or the things that they do because they had such a history, we would end up making an enormous number of people step down.

Jean Halley: So it seems to me that what Louis C.K. did was wrong and abusive; an abuse of power that he had, clearly. And he didn't come forward right away. It took a little bit. The news stories sort of kept happening and then he stepped forward

and he apologized. He said he was gonna take time to think, and that's what he seems to be doing.

Jean Halley: It seems to me that we do need to have space for conversations about a culture that really breeds male violence and male abuse of power. That that's the deeper issue, because without that we can continue to expose people, which is a good thing because it validates women's experiences that have been long denied. But something needs to be done beyond the exposing to actually change the culture that allows for and breeds and makes happen all kinds of abuses of power.

Tanya Domi: That's really interesting and I, sort of on reflection and retrospectively, I sort of put Al Franken in that camp, but he was a politician after being a comedian. And from what I understand from people who have lived in Minnesota and people I've talked to, he was known for telling ... He had engaged in behavior, like telling rape jokes, like on the USO tour, and groping people. And so I think politics is very different then for Louis C.K., who's a comedian performs and satirizes the culture.

Tanya Domi: Some of my friends have also said to me that if Al Franken was going to run for office this year for the first time, he probably would not be nominated, nor probably would he be elected. So there's a lot angst among Democrats and even some feminists about Franken. What do you think about that?

Jean Halley: I share the angst. I feel worried about it. I think that, you know, again we just are gonna keep coming up again and again and again with these kinds of stories, and so I think we really need to stop and have a broader conversation. And I think what's happening right now with the Women's Movement ... Women's Movements ... is a feeding of that conversation and it kind of ... igniting it. But it still hasn't taken hold in the way I'd like to see. I think that for the first time in my classes I have students who, you know, hither before had never called themselves feminists. This ... women and men-

Tanya Domi: Right.

Jean Halley: ... across the racial spectrum, across the class spectrum, queer, straight, lots and lots of people are taking on the idea of feminism, which means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. So I think that there are things happening, but each time we expose someone else- Schneiderman, etc.- that I think we need to be thinking about what this means in our culture around questions of power.

Tanya Domi: Well it's really interesting too because I would say, when I was ... about 30 years ago, feminism and the word feminist had become a dirty word. And so you're right, there is a reclaiming going on, which is pretty, pretty remarkable to see. I mean, I haven't seen events like these really since the launch of second-wave feminism in the '70s. But also since we first communicated, you and I ... Since then, Bill Cosby was convicted. And he was convicted on three counts of relating

to indecency, who had apparently carried out the drugging and rapes of many women over the years. Many women came forward, the statute of limitations had run out, and advocates have remarked that the Cosby conviction really marks a turning point in that for the first time in American history, a once-powerful man has been convicted and is expected to do jail time. Can you ... Can we talk about that for a moment? It does seem like a seminal event.

Jean Halley: I agree. I think it's a seminal event. And that, you know, for people who study rape and sexual violence, one of the strange gaps is the gap between a lot of research showing that things like rape happen a lot. It's very common. And then there's this other side which is a thinking that breeds both a denial of the rape, but also, when it's acknowledged, to blame the victim for it. So I think what happened with the Cosby case is his ... Obviously his ... He was a sexual predator and his history was really extreme. And yet, we saw this person who was a ... you know, really on the brink of gonna, he was gonna go free. And I think through the courage of the victims that came forward and kept pressing, he now is hopefully going to spend some time in prison.

Jean Halley: What I'm hoping will happen is that that will ignite women's ... and to the extent that men experience sexual violence ... those who've experienced it, their belief that there's possibly ... there will be justice. That that's a real possibility in a way that hasn't been the case. The vast majority of rapes go unreported, and I think a lot of the reason is because women blame themselves or they don't want to go through a process where they're gonna be essentially assaulted again. So I'm hoping that having someone like Bill Cosby really have to face at least a tiny part of the justice that he should have to face is an opening for women to step forward. And I think the more we have women speaking out about their experiences of sexual assault, and the more that women begin to see justice done, the more likelihood that ... I mean, I'm hoping that will also be one more way in which the culture, the rape culture we live in, will be challenged and to some extent, curbed.

Tanya Domi: And just as you've said, you know rape has been going on forever. And most recently ... and this has generated a lot of discussion and articles ... and recently there was an op-ed in the New York Times, a really powerful one, right? Take note of your work on race, white privilege and race, where this scholar recounted the work of Ida Bell in documenting not only the rape of slave women in the history of our country, but they were often raped before they were hung, and before they were killed by mass uprisings in local communities. And that just sorta has been erased. So there's this effort now to really document and recover the work of Ida Bell, for example, where women were lynched and raped, but generally they were always raped before they were lynched. And that is really an unbelievable fact of history that's been more or less erased.

Jean Halley: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: And I think recalled in this period because of all the attention, we are now giving to the subject.

Jean Halley: Yeah, I think that's right. And I mean, it's interesting because I think we are finally ... and I think there's links between our beginning to really reckon with the rape culture we live in, but also beginning to reckon with the history of violence against African-Americans in this country, and how profound and how deep that violence has been. And like with rape culture, there's been a real denial by white people of the violence. So on the one hand you have, you know, these profound levels of violence, including today. Young men, unarmed, walking away, getting shot dead in the street and nothing happening to the people who shot them. That even today this violence continues in all kinds of ways, and there continues to be a profound denial of it. So I think this sort of a recognition with Ida Wells' work ... and other ways too, of the violence against black people and black bodies, is a real turning point. I feel-

Tanya Domi: Yes, there is ... there's ... I agree, and I think there's real intersections here, and there's just so much violence that's been directed at black people and black bodies, that to see this sort of intersection and recognition of the intersection, I think is really powerful from a scholarly standpoint. But now that it's also breaking into popular culture and recognition is also a moment ... I mean, there's some videos out right now that just are so stunning about the violence and the way people have to live and cope with it.

Tanya Domi: Speaking of violence, also since the first time we spoke was a terrible, terrible event that took place in Toronto claimed to have been carried out by a terrorist group call Incel. Men who are involuntarily celibate, involuntarily, who claim to be involuntarily celibate, carried out a terrorist attack last month in Toronto, motivated by misogyny, and killing 10 people- 8 women and 2 men- and injuring several people requiring hospitalization. That is not only shocking, but in my conversations with women and even friends, male friends, and remarks online that you can see about this, is like, "My God, that is really scary."

Tanya Domi: And they apparently live in ... They sort of situate themselves in reddit, in online communities, and use a completely different parallel vocabulary and definitions and identities. This was pre ... This was carried out in the United States couple of years ago by a man named Elliot Rogers, who also carried out an attack in Santa Barbara. And I think it sort of evaporated. It's re-emerged and somehow now it's gotten our attention. Well, what do you have to say about these events?

Jean Halley: Well, this is linked to a broader social movement called Men's Rights Activism, the MRA, and that movement has many arms. But it's a movement that's happening in the culture we're discussing, right? A rape culture where there's sort of an allowing and a supporting of incredible amounts of violence against women. So this is just one arm of that culture, but men's rights activists tend to be conservative politically when it comes to gender. They believe that there are essential roles for men and women, and that those roles have been broken,

largely, by people like feminists. And that women are stepping out of their essential jobs in society and doing things that they shouldn't be doing. That and then ... And in that competing with men, taking jobs from men, and in that having their own sort of sexual destiny and making choices about their own sexuality.

Jean Halley: And so the MRA and these men's right activists, including the Incel movement, see women as harming men by taking steps to increase the span of their lives, and to do more things in their lives, and to have more power and more say. Not all MRA are terrorists, and not all of the involuntary celibates, the Incel are terrorists. But they do share a belief that's misogynist. They think that women belong in a particular place, and if they're not there, that women are to be blamed for that.

Tanya Domi: One of the more popular- or the more important within the movement- thinkers is a man named Paul Elam, and he's basically spoken very loudly about rape, for example. And he has said, "Do women ask for rape through the ways they dress, the places they go?" And "Yes," he's answered his question. They're ... he uses profanity, but essentially, "They're begging for it," he says. So I think on the one hand, there's a belief in essential roles around gender, and those roles around gender being linked to biology, so, you know, linking genitals to gender and sexuality, and a belief in that naturalness. And on the other hand, seeing violence as a legitimate to respond to women's increasing power.

Jean Halley: It sort of reminds me too of, when you start talking about sexual orientation and gender identity, and the effort, the social movement, and the civil rights aspect of people advancing their rights, and it's always two steps forward, one step back. There's always backlash involved, and I sort of see this in the men's right movement; it's backlash to women actually claiming, claiming their own power, exercising their agency, and their bodily integrity and saying, "We want to be treated with respect and dignity. Enough of the abuse." So they're sort of like ... it's a matter of psychics, you know? Somebody claims something, somebody pushes back. But the push back in this instance is violence, and that's very scary. And I know that the Southern Poverty Law Center includes Incel among the hate groups that they do track, and they call it part of a trend of male radicalization online. And so they're living in these, sort of inhabiting online communities. And it's a parallel universe anyway on the internet, which is kind of virtual and weird.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, yeah. I ... Yeah, I mean I ... On the I ... Yes, they are. They're a terrorist group, and it's scary, and they're willing as we've just seen in Toronto and as we've seen in the past, they're willing to be incredibly violent, to put forth their beliefs in society. But I think it's also important to notice the ways in which male violence is ... and against women and girls ... is linked to larger patterns. So for example, gun culture. The one thing that really ties all of the mass shooters together. Not all of them have this history, but a variable that spreads across many of them is that they have histories of violence against women and girls and in families. So that's a link, right? That-

Jean Halley: Right.

Tanya Domi: ... Violence against women becomes expressed in this way. And I think another thing that's important to note is that whereas Incel seems out there, crazy, on the fringe, their thinking is linked to more mainstream conservative thought. So it's not ... It's maybe an extreme version of that though, but it's actually an extension of something that's considered legitimate. And in that in particular, legitimate to think about women and sex, and sexuality and gender as things that are very much bound up with nature. And in a way, in the framework, the conservative framework that one might argue greatly ... The thinking greatly end ups benefiting men.

Jean Halley: It's really interesting about when you were talking about the gun culture, and the intersection of the gun culture and how maybe even the violence that is public facing begins domestically within families of origin, for example, and domestic abuse at home. And then gets out-pictured. We know that the cycle of violence can be intergenerational unless it's interdicted. We know that about the escalation of domestic violence; unless it's interdicted, it'll continue to accelerate. It really does call into question for me, and I mean not just me, but what is going on with the raising of boys, socially, that results in this radical violence? And obviously, the proliferation and availability of guns is a big problem.

Tanya Domi: Yes indeed.

Jean Halley: It's like that's a ... $1 + 2 = 3$. But there's also this notion that the way you resolve issues is through violence. Not through talking, not through working through problems, people sitting down together, but actually using guns and weapons to relieve one's anxiety or one's disappointment.

Tanya Domi: Yes, I think that's absolutely right. I guess I'm hesitant to see it as something that's really happening right now. I think we're in our moment where our awareness is being raised. But actually, as high as rape rates are, there's some research that indicates they're going down. So they're high still, they're really high, but since 1993, some ... particularly Justice Department research indicates it's less than it was. So, I see these levels as something really grounded historically, and in particular, you know, I mean when you think about guns, one can't help but consider Frontier-tyteness that come with mainstream ideas about what it is to be American.

Tanya Domi: And so, for example, Frederick Jackson Turner had this famous speech he gave, in I think 1893, which was about the Frontier. And that the Frontier was the place that was quintessentially American, and what he say as the thing that made Americans, American. And by "American," he meant "white men," right? But the thing that made them American was this conquering of that which was savage and then transforming it into civilization. So his very idea about American-ness was something that was born out of violence. So I think that the

violence we've discussed today against women and girls, against women and girls of color, against all people of color, all of these things are interlinked-

Jean Halley: LGBT people, obviously.

Tanya Domi: And LGBT. Yes, absolutely.

Jean Halley: Well since you seem that you bring up the West, because I was just having a conversation recently, and it's to be noted that Wyoming was the first state to offer franchise for women, extend franchise to women. And it's because women weren't there. And they wanted them there, so they gave them the vote. So, there's some logic that's actually a very constructive thing to do when I look back on history. Maybe men should think about some things like that: paid family leave, and you know-

Tanya Domi: Here, here. Yes.

Jean Halley: Yeah, yeah, let's ... Hilary Clinton just called for, the FEC should approve funds for childcare while you're campaigning, which I think is completely legitimate-

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Jean Halley: ... as an example. So maybe we can become more constructive on these kinds of ideas. In the United States, it's always been, "Well of course you're going to have children, but we're not going to help you, or we're not going to provide for you. But of course. But of course." And truly is America is exceptional in that regard compared to our neighbors to the north, and our European colleagues. And, you know, Social Welfare includes like one year off!

Tanya Domi: Exactly. We're off the charts when it comes to this.

Jean Halley: Yes we are.

Tanya Domi: Yeah.

Jean Halley: Yes we are, unfortunately. New York state has now extended paid family leave. It started in California. You know, it's ... It has made movement despite the current federal government. But now, not only... we were talking about these things that had happened ... Not only that, but just two days ago the Attorney General, the former Attorney General of the State of New York was reported by The New Yorker to have engaged in violent, non-consensual activity with four women he was intimately involved in, and he promptly resigned on Tuesday night.

Jean Halley: Eric Schneiderman was considered one of the top advocates in the country in terms of Attorney Generals, most seen as a real supporter of women's rights in the #MeToo movement. And of course all of us were in shock on Tuesday night.

Now there's an interim acting AG that is a woman. And a woman, Tish James, is seeming to make a play to become appointed by the State Legislature. What do you think about these events?

Tanya Domi: Well, to quote what you said on our way down here in the elevator, you said, I guess a friend of yours said, "Well, he's just a man ultimately." And I think that's it, right? I mean, he's a male part of our culture like all other men. You had asked the question about what's happening in people's families that children, boys are raised to see violence as a legitimate way to express themselves and get what they want. And I think, yeah. Yeah. It's linked to ways we understand and think about masculinity in our culture. And so, I don't think anybody ends up being exempt from that to some extent.

Jean Halley: Yeah. It sounds like that, unfortunately Mr. Schneiderman may have an alcohol problem, which also yields to doing things that ... you know, you lose your impulse control factor in your drinking. I became pretty familiar with this when I served in the military, 'cause alcohol is definitely an issue you had to deal with. It just is ... I think the juxtaposition of his public face, and his public reputation, and then to discover just really unbelievable private behavior, I think the Jekyll-Hyde kind of positioning is, was shocking to a lot of us. And it-

Tanya Domi: Yes. Absolutely.

Jean Halley: And a lot of us who really care about having public officials that support and advance these issues that we really care about. It's shocking to lose somebody like that.

Tanya Domi: Absolutely shocking. Yeah.

Jean Halley: So, I just think that we're in this moment. You're right, rape has happened forever, it goes back millennial, it goes back to the Greeks and the Romans. It's been around for a long time. But this #MeToo moment is definitely ... I consider it sort of like a real boost to third wave feminism, this emergence of #MeToo. And how that pictures, how it out-pictures, how it effects public policy. What does it mean in this moment when we have a President who's been accused of sexually harassing and even sexually assaulting many, many women, and despite that was elected.

Tanya Domi: What does it mean? Yeah. I mean, I think he was elected because we have a culture that diminishes and that doesn't take seriously the reality of violence against women. And I guess I'd like to note that yes, rape has clearly ... There's a lot of research indicating that rape has happened in a lot of places and a lot of time periods, but I don't think it's all equal. There are lots of societies that have relatively low rape rates. We've got one of the highest, probably the highest according to most research in the Western industrialized world. So it's not something that, you know ... I mean, I think that's what Conservatives like to argue is that ... Most Conservatives recognize rape, but they see it to some

extent as a natural impulse of men, and I think that's ... it's a cultural phenomena that produces a kind of masculinity where that's acceptable and okay.

Jean Halley: Well, full disclosure. I mean, I am a Balkan Scholar and so I've spent many, many years on the Balkan wars which, in where rape became an instrument of war. And so, I've sort of been swimming in the topic. But no, you're absolutely right. I'm not trying to say that's it relative, but it sure does seem to be when it manifests. I mean the ISIL, ISIL enslavement of Yazidi women is, without question, a genocide cannot be dismissed. And so ... And we also know that there is a correlation between detainment, captivity, and the escalation of sexual assault, be it men or women. So, I sort of, I'm sort of thinking out loud. I'm talking out loud about things that I know that you don't necessarily know about that part of my work. You wouldn't know that.

Tanya Domi: I mean, I know a little bit about how rape has been an instrument and continues to be a growing instrument of war right now. So that there's studies ... I was just reading a piece of Czechnyan women and how rape is a central part of their experience. And so one begins to wonder about terms like trauma, if it's, if we're talking about such large parts of the population 'cause the rape is so widespread. But I guess I want us to just remember that like Milgram in his studies found, there are situations where things like violence are gonna be more likely, and situations where they're gonna be less likely. War, it seems, is a situation where it's gonna be more likely. And the United States right now today, and for the past maybe 100, 200 years has been a place where rape rates have been very high compared to other places. So, I just like to remember that we can have an impact on this. It's not something that's just gonna happen for all times, everywhere. That it actually ... Some societies have succeeded relatively to make these kinds of violence be something that's abhorrent and recognized, and treated with justice, and lowered the rates.

Tanya Domi: Well Jean Halley, thank you for being with us today. Thanks for tuning in to the Thought Project, and thanks to our guest, professor Jean Halley.

Jean Halley: Thank you for very much.

Tanya Domi: The Thought Project was produced in partnership with CUNY TV, located at The Graduate Center in the heart of New York City. With production, engineering, and technical assistance by Sarah Fishman and Jack Horowitz. I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.