

# Emily Donahoe: Theater, sexism & working memory

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## SPEAKERS

Katy Weber, Emily Donahoe



Katy Weber 00:00

Cool. So well welcome to the women and ADHD podcast. I'm so excited to finally be interviewing you. I've been paying. I feel like I've been pestering you for a while.



Emily Donahoe 00:09

I am so happy to be here. And I've been such a fan of the podcast for so long that this is like especially awesome for me because it's I adore it so much. So thanks for having



Katy Weber 00:18

Well, I have to Okay, first of all, we have to get this story out of the way because I just get such a kick out of like, picturing you discovering this podcast. So okay, so Emily and I, for you, listeners, Emily and I, our kids go to the same school, or at least they did in elementary school, we live in the same neighborhood. And so when Emily son was at the elementary school, I was the PTA president. And so I've talked about this in previous episodes about what a disaster it was for me to be this PTA president and chronic volunteerism and all this stuff. And so I like, Here you are, somebody had recommended this podcast you right?



Emily Donahoe 00:55

No, actually how it happened was I was on Twitter, searching for information, and I came across your Twitter. And I saw the really small profile picture. And I was like, I know her. I know her. And then when I opened and saw your picture, I was like, this cannot be the head of the PTA at Marvel, say like, what are the chances of that? You know, right. And so then I started Googling around and then asked around, and then I found out from a friend of a friend that we have in common that in fact, it was you I was like, that's what I thought. But it's so funny, because I have been studiously avoiding the PTA and those types of obligations, knowing that I don't do well with things like that. So I feel like a lot of times, I would see you from afar. And I'd be like, I hope she doesn't ask you something. Because like, I know that I'm so bad at that, like executive function skills are not the best. Anyway, I was delighted when I found out that we were connected and that we knew each other and I just could not believe What a small world it was. I know, right? I found you on Twitter, and you're my neighbor. I just think it's wild.



Katy Weber 02:02

I know. And I was like, I have real life ADHD friends, because this has been such this like, big deal for me in terms of figuring out like, Who are the people I'm most sort of attracted to and connected to. And you know, I feel such connection to women with ADHD. And I'm like, sorting out, you know, this whole long sordid history of like, why have I had issues with female friendships and all of the expectations and all that and so yeah, it was so exciting when we went out for coffee or for breakfast was like a real life watch.



Emily Donahoe 02:30

I know, I felt the same way. It's really, really true. And I know it's been the same for me. But like, all these light bulbs have gone off when I've reconnected with my diagnosis during the pandemic. So,



Katy Weber 02:41

yeah. Okay, so let's talk about that. So you so when you said, reconnected with your diagnosis, so when were you first you're first diagnosed back in college, right?



Emily Donahoe 02:50

I was diagnosed in college, I was a double major in college, which is also like such an ADHD thing, right? Like, looking back, I would not have done that. But I did it. And I one of

my majors was I was a psych major. And I had a professor who said to me, based on my performance in class, and what she had watched, what she'd seen in my papers and things like that, and discussions that I'd had with her private, she's like, you know, have you ever been evaluated for ADHD? And I said, No, I mean, like, no, and it was my last semester of college. So it wasn't particularly interested in it. But the more I thought about what she said, I realized, and you know, it was the late 90s. So it was kind of around the time that we were getting our heads wrapped around the fact that this was not just a condition that little boys had. And so I think there was this kind of resurgence. And there's this awareness that like women can have it. And so I was the beneficiary of a lot of literature and research and interest in the fact that like, women could have it too. It just happen to line up that way. And so at first, when she suggested that I was pretty resistant to it, because I like everybody was like, I'm not like a five year old boy bouncing off the walls. And then I started researching, I was like, Oh, my gosh, like, this is me. And I went and was officially diagnosed. And they suggested putting me on Ritalin. But college was almost over. And I knew I'm a professional actor. And I knew that I was going to pursue acting. And I knew that my days of sitting down and writing papers and all the struggles that I'd had as a college student that those days were coming to an end. And I wasn't particularly interested in that. And frankly, I would say that even though it was starting to become like a much more developed idea, like what ADHD was, and how it manifested in women, it was nowhere near what it is now. And so even though I was lucky that you know, I was noticed, I guess you can say and diagnosed, I kind of looked at the symptom list and talk to the doctor and I was like, Yeah, but you know, I'm not gonna write papers, I don't need religion. So I did some behavior modification stuff and talk to a therapist, and things like that, and I kind of found my way and like many with this diagnosis, my professional life suits it well, you know, so I just kind of, I'm novelty seeking, I'm hyperactive, I hyper focus. And those are all really good qualities if you're an actor or in a creative field. So the things that have been liabilities in a traditional academic setting actually began to serve me. And then I was able to do some behavioral modification stuff around my memory issues, like losing keys and things like that. Yeah, I muddled along that way. And then when the pandemic hits, and I think there are a lot of women that have had this experience, I really forgot about ADHD, because I felt like I'd solved for it, and it was fine. And then the pandemic hit, and my work life completely came to a stop, you know, like, all production stopped, all theater stopped. I also have the consultancy, which specializes in public speaking, that stops, like everything I did professionally was essentially a super spreader event. So like, they all stopped, and everything that I had automated or delegated, because I have ADHD, also stops being helpful. So you know, like having someone able to come over and help clean or a babysitter, or, you know, those kind of things. Like, all of a sudden, they were meaningless, you know, so, and things like shopping required an extra step of at the beginning, I was one of those people that like, washed down the groceries and quarantine them in the car, you know, so everything

changed. And I realized that I needed help that I you know, I was inattentive, my energy was really dysregulated my, my memory was terrible. And I call the doctor and I called my doctor, you know, he's lovely. He's like, let's just try Ritalin. You know, if you have this diagnosis, I was like, I was diagnosed with ADHD, but it doesn't mean too much to me, really. It's been so many years.



Katy Weber 06:46

And I wait, this was a gap.



Emily Donahoe 06:49

No, this was a psychiatry,



Katy Weber 06:52

very progressive for a male, to be just like, trusting your diagnose somebody stories of like, you know, having to convince men over and over and over again.



Emily Donahoe 07:06

I have a lot of opinions about that. But I would say I agree with that. But I'm lucky to have a wonderful male. So okay, he's, I took me years to find him. He's wonderful. And I take Prozac because I have anxiety. And I'm a phobic flier, which is so which always frustrates me so much. But so I had someone that was seeing to get a prescription for Xanax to fly. And when I was talking to him, I said, I got this diagnosis A while ago, and I'm having a really hard time with energy and memory and focusing on like, the paperwork that I needed to do. And he said, you know, suggested Ritalin and I am one of those people who when I took Ritalin, it was like putting on a pair of glasses. Like it was 45 minutes later, I was really like, Whoa, is this what it's like for everybody else? Like it was such a day and night difference. And I know that people have loved there's such a lot of different experiences with meds. But I was lucky that that was my experience. And so then I started going back into what he was, and God, the science has come so far, since I was first diagnosed, and the community has grown so much. And there's terminology that wasn't available to me. And so, so I'm happy to be back in this community, finally getting proper treatment, and learning about like, you know, how it's been a great year. I mean, it's really been a, you know, I know, people probably have mixed feelings about Ned Halliwell saying it's a good news diagnosis. But in my case, that was true, because I was really, really struggling. And then I got meds. And I was able to find resources, like your excellent

community, which I'm on all the time, like a crazy obsessed person, connecting with other women and getting good advice about like symptom management, and also celebrating the diagnosis and the things that are really good about it. So I realized that was a lot that was a very hyperactive answer. But this is kind of how I am I just go go go.



Katy Weber 08:59

I know. Well, and and i think so much of the experience with the diagnosis is, is what am I trying to say? I think so much of the treatment is the shared experience, you know, and the almost like the allegory of other people's lives, and how it relates to our lives and these shared stories. And I think, you know, like, just reading articles about symptoms, like, you know, the term executive function, when you sort of know what it means you can kind of use it as shorthand, but for when you're first learning about what ADHD is, terms, like executive function, don't mean anything, right? Or even RSD. And like, all of these terms, that you're sort of like, I don't really know what that means, or if I have it, but then when you hear people talking about, like, the inability to, you know, to come up with structures of their own to help with symptom or, you know, when you start like talking about what actually executive function is in your life and what it means and how it applies to you, and then you're like, Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I really struggle. Yeah, so so much of my own journey has been, like, hearing other people talk about the kind of practical side of ADHD and how it relates to them in their lives as opposed to like going online and reading medical journals. You know, so there seems to be like such this distance between the the lived experience and the medical world in terms of ADHD and why I think why so many of us are having such a hard time translating our experience to medical professionals who really have only, you know, learn have only read about it in their in schooling or journals and that kind of thing. And,



Emily Donahoe 10:41

yes, absolutely. And I even when I, even when I hear about experience that is totally different than my own, I still find that illuminating, because it helps me differentiate, like what parts, you know, how it's expressed in me verse it, you know, so it's like, okay, so I have less this and more this. So, to your point, like, even when there's somebody is experienced is really different than mine, it's still so helpful. In my own journey, you know, to be like, wow, you know, like, okay, so it's manifesting like that for that person. And this is how it is for me, and, you know, kind of like, What a crazy spectrum this thing is, right? Like, yeah,



Katy Weber 11:16

oh, yeah, absolutely. And it has, I mean, it has been so transformational for me in terms of my own inner narrative and how I talk to myself and how I view myself in the world like it has absolutely I know, it is a problematic term, but has been like an absolute good news diagnosis for me as well. But then again, like it's been so difficult to talk about it to people who have no idea what ADHD is, I've stopped talking about, you know, I've stopped really, yeah, it's been such a great experience for me. And it's been such a great experience to talk about with other women who are going through the same experience. But it's also been very isolating in terms of some of the people who were in my life that I have, you know, it's made it even more difficult to communicate with so many other people in my life.



Emily Donahoe 11:56

I totally get that. And I wonder if like, their experience, in a way mirrors my own, which is, you know, when I first got the diagnosis, I was like, huh, yeah, okay, I get it. And it wasn't until I myself was dismissive. And I don't think the name necessarily helps. You know, so I know we're gonna probably talk about that later. But, so, but you know, and then it wasn't until I did a lot of research and a lot of connecting with people that I really understood what it was. So I know that I too, have not really figured out how to talk to people about it in the name brings with it a lot of baggage, you know, so people think they know, but they don't know, that's often been my experience talking writers.



Katy Weber 12:33

Yeah. So okay, so you have you know, an accomplished actor, you've been acting for more than 20 years, right at this point. So my biggest questions about acting and ADHD, like because it was blow your mind thinking about some of the executive function issues, but like, my biggest questions are, how do you memorize anything? Has it changed over the years? Is it something because my memory has gone off a cliff? And so I'm kind of trying to figure out is this estrogen you know, is this perimenopause is a co related to you what's caused it like I do definitely feel like my working memory is worse than it was maybe a couple of years ago. But like, what have what have you noticed about memory and memorization with ADHD as an actor? And then I also want to ask you about like rejection, because that's another thing I've thought about, like, what how do you deal with rejection as an actor? Because it's something we struggle with so much?



Emily Donahoe 13:30

Yeah. Well, I would say that. So the way that the kind of like, manifestation for me is that my long term memory is excellent, but my short term memory is not good. And this has always been true. And it got worse during puberty, and then kind of like really crusted in college, which I guess is the hormonal journey, right. And I think that you know, one of the things about women and ADHD is there's so many potentially confounding variables like perimenopause, or menopause, or hormones or even babies, you know, babies infrastructural bias against, you know, the fact that we don't have infrastructural supports in this country. And so perhaps even neurotypical women are having problems with their memories these days, you know, and that women as a group have been neglected in terms of research. And so there's so many, it's like a bowl of fish hooks, you know, you pick up one and 15 seem to come up with it. But for acting, I would say happily, the line memorization thing is not the issue for me. I would say that what the issue is for me more is, there's the first rehearsal that you have when you're off book, and that I don't get stage fright as an actor, which I think is the novelty seeking part. A lot of people will get nervous, very experienced, wonderful genius actors even get stage fright, but for me, I get very focused, and I think that's a totally chemical thing. But the first rehearsal off book is a nightmare for me. And the real issue I have I mostly work in the theater is Losing props, like I lose props. And that is a problem. And it's a problem on a film set too, because you have to have continuity, you know. So if they give you a briefcase that has the papers for your scene in it, and in between setups, you set it down, and they're 500 people on a set, and they're ready to call you to start, you're like, I can't find my briefcase. That's a major problem. So I have learned to ask for the accommodation of having a proper angler. And it's really embarrassing still, because it feels especially as a mother, I think I'm very much like, we've got to teach responsibility and accountability. And I certainly don't want to infantilize myself as a woman, a professional space. But I know if I don't ask for help, I will lose them. And when, you know, I think a lot of people with ADHD had this experience, often when they're found no memory of how it got there, you know, no memory at all. So the lines aren't as much of an issue as the prop thing is. And that might sound like a small deal. But it actually can be a real inconvenience to a group that's moving very quickly, and needs you to have your shit together.



Katy Weber 16:06

You know? Yeah, I mean, just from my own experience as stage managing in high school, I understand the importance of that. But I also feel like, you know, I caught you because I feel like something that we tend to misconstrue a lot of the time is this idea that asking for help is somehow not equal to accountability and responsibility, you know, that your first instinct is like, I felt like it was irresponsible of me to require this help. And I'm like, No, that's the problem is that like the, we need to flip that script. And we need to really think about like, that level of accountability, that level of responsibility is, you know, asking for

that help and making sure that you do have these safeguards in place that is responsible. You are right,

E

Emily Donahoe 16:51

that you are right. And that is an important point. And I will try to think of it that way. I would say that sometimes my self talk can be pretty dismal about this, too. And that's like, old?



Katy Weber 17:01

Well, I don't know, I that's what I mean. Like, if we can catch it in each other, and help each other, as I do it all the time. I mean, I feel like we have grown up. And I feel like that's definitely the being the female experience, which is just like somewhere along the line, whether or not it's you know, living in a mass in a society or whether it's the the homemaker mentality, or whatever it is, but just like we have been bred to believe that asking for help is a deficiency. And that's why Wham o now is to totally change that. And I love that.

E

Emily Donahoe 17:34

Yeah, we're taught that it's a character flaw. Yeah. Right, that it's like a character flaw, you know, and I feel like that was definitely my experience growing up as an undiagnosed person with it. And even in adulthood, too, it's like, you know, Emily, it's like really time to grow up, or you really got to get it together. And it didn't matter that I could be. And I think this is also not an exceptional experience with people with ADHD, but a pretty common one, I could be overperforming and other areas of my life. But somehow it was like, an indicator of like, my refusal to grow up or like it was somehow pathologize in terms of my character, rather than my brain. Yeah. And I even have I have mixed feelings about pathologizing, the type of ADHD that I seem to have, I don't necessarily think all of it is even, in fact, a pathology, you know, but, um, that will I think, in general, we like to make women feel that differences are a problem, a disease, a, you know, or a failing, of failing. And so, I think this is a really important point, this idea that is a form of accountability, and we have to correct each other and I'm happy to be caught by you, Katie. And then the other thing, what did you ask him about rejection rejection? So RSD, rejection sensitivity, sensitivity, dysphoria, right? So I don't think I don't not sure that I have that. And that's a really new idea to me, I would have been the best. I have other many, many other issues. Do not get me wrong, be like opening your trench coat. They don't say on this side, they're on the side. But I feel I'm not sure I could be an actor if I had very



strong RSD. And I think that you've pointed that out in a way and asking the question, I have really thick skin about rejection. And, and I also some of the mood dysregulation stuff I feel like doesn't apply for how ADHD manifests in me as much as the attention dysregulation, the energy dysregulation and the memory issues. So, but I have had my mind blown so many times by what I've learned about ADHD in this past year alone, that I'm really interested in rejection sensitivities, or I'm really interested in that idea and what it might be, but I don't it seems like it is such a real how do you how would you say like painful experience for the people that have it, that I'm really taking that at face value and being like You know what, maybe that's not in my symptom picture because I'm not sure that I could constantly throw myself up to being rejected and humiliated and criticized, I just don't think I could do it. Because I'm a sensitive person. I have other activities and so, but I wouldn't do, I think it'd be really interesting to talk to other artists, particularly actors that do have RSD. Because I imagine that journey like how they found their way, Missy must be really incredible.



Katy Weber 20:25

Yeah, I haven't interviewed very many actors. I've interviewed quite a few illustrators and painters who, you know, that crossover with imposter syndrome and RSD is really a fascinating topic, just in terms of being so incredibly talented, and yet having the self esteem of an I don't know what a terrible office, but you're just not having a you know, having that that dichotomy between the their talent and their self esteem. And I guess that's what I sort of related to just because that was really, for me, I was never, I didn't come to my ADHD diagnosis for my child, like a lot of women do, or I didn't, you know, for me, it was my therapist who saw how poorly I thought of myself. And she was like, you come in here, and you talk about all of these things that you are doing and accomplishing. And yet, you feel like you are trash. And she was like, that was sort of the, that was the indicator for me. It wasn't hyperactivity or anything. It was just that that inverse relationship seemingly between how much I was accomplishing and how I thought of myself that tipped her off to ADHD with I think it's interesting, because we don't talk about that as much.



Emily Donahoe 21:39

Well, and to be clear, I don't think I have RSD. At least I haven't yet come to that conclusion, but I definitely have self esteem damage.



Katy Weber 21:47

So shooters, as I call it, 88.

E

Emily Donahoe 21:51

I yeah, I mean, for me, I'm just like, What is wrong with you? You know, what I mean? Like, I just constantly and I still have a lot of that self talk. And, you know, I suppose it's some of it is part of a healthy psyche, right? Like we self correct, you know, otherwise, we'd be narcissist if we never like critically looked at what we did and examined it and work to change it, but in excess. And with the content that I've had for myself, you know, and some of myself talk about, like, not being able to motivate or not being able to focus or, and that's one thing that meditation helps me with a lot. And I know that you've talked about that with other people on the podcast to this idea of meditation, which is, by the way, not for everybody. And I think that's another thing we have to say to each other really plainly, like, it's awesome if it's your thing, but there's a million other ways to thread that needle, you know, so, but for me, the first thing I identified when I sat down and really got serious about it was I was like, What is this voice? What is this? What is this critical voice about? That's not constructive criticism that's rampant and cruel. And so you know, and in a version of so many different people who were cruel to me in my life, that didn't understand, nor did I, you know, that it was a learning difference that I had. So, no, I don't have RSD, that self esteem stuff, I definitely can identify with that. And I think a lot of the people that I've talked to, particularly women with ADHD, are encouraged, in fact, to internalize that rather than make systemic changes that can heal us all, and not just heal us all, but like, take good advantage of the very special skills that neurodivergent people tend to bring to situations, you know, so. Yeah. Yeah, I'm sorry that you went through that, though. I mean, I feel like we have a lot of like, what's what's good about your community, you know, is that we have a chance to all connect and say to each other, like, that sucks, right? Yeah. I mean, yeah, we need those voices to replace the bad



Katy Weber 23:45

ones, you know? Yeah. And I think that that's why it's so helpful to talk to other people with shared experiences, because a lot of the time, like, once you're ready to talk about it, you're kind of over the hump, you know. And so, that's why unsolicited advice can be really annoying to like, usually, by the time I'm expressing and talking about this, I'm kind of over it or, but it's behind me, or I've, you know, I'm at peace with it. Whereas, like, when I was really struggling with it, I wasn't talking about it. And so. So, I think, you know, it can be so difficult to talk about it with people who don't understand what you're going through, because then they're immediately like, Oh, I'm so sorry. What can I do to help you? And you're like, Yeah, I don't need your help. Don't



Emily Donahoe 24:32

help. I mean, yeah, I mean, it's, it's so true. It's so true.



Katy Weber 24:37

Yeah. And that's why I feel like I love in the neuro diverse community where like, there is that that response, which is like, Okay, what would you like me to do now? Are you would you like, just bent wood? Are you looking for, you know, brainstorming advice, like the fact that we can know like, Okay, what response Are you looking for right now, I feel like that's a very nd response. I love it.



Emily Donahoe 24:58

I feel like I need that kind of key. myself sometimes because I'm tend to be the friend and I really worked on this over the years, but to be like, here's what you should do. People would be like, we don't need that. We don't need your big ideas with that. Thank you though. But no, no.



Katy Weber 29:00

Okay, so let's backtrack a little bit then, you know, in terms of growing up, and did you have siblings? Did you was anyone else diagnosed? when you were growing up and kind of what did your parents seem to think of your diagnosis?



Emily Donahoe 29:17

I think you know, so I have a younger brother. He's almost seven years younger than I am. He doesn't have it. My father certainly has it. My father also has Parkinson's. And so I've actually talked to and we have some very specific types of mental illness on that side of the family involving dopamine. So I've had some kind of interesting theoretical discussions with doctors on Reddit just as a kind of aside about like, what the future is like maybe my dopamine is just a little wonky. You know what I mean? Like maybe I just kind of have some wonky to me, but um, anyway, so my mom is a licensed professional counselor. She has a master's in special ed. She has almost a master's in marriage and family therapy. She's incredibly educated and has worked with Different types of learners her whole life, you know. And you know, whenever I've talked to her about it, she's like in the 70s in the 80s, like we just didn't know. You know, I think also because I had other interests. As a very young child, I was really interested in acting and playwriting and stuff like that even as a really young kid. I think they thought I was just kind of a spass like a creative. So you know,

and I basically they were just like, she's just all over the place. And I talked all the time, all my report cards were like, Emily's very talkative, she needs to stop being talkative when I was in kindergarten, the week I went to this kind of Montessori kindergarten, apparently, and they had different PlayStations set up, and there were 10 different PlayStations. And you were supposed to play in one, so that by the end of the week, you would have played in at least in each station, at least one time, by the end of the week. And according to my parents, I would sit in the reading station until Thursday night, I wouldn't play in any other stations. And then I would come home sob have a nervous breakdown that I wasn't gonna get my certificate, and then Friday, I would run around and play and all the other night like a frantic, like, Man, that's like so you know, that has not changed at all. So I think I had problems with separation, I think I had problems with hyper hyper focus, and hyper xe all those things, you know, even in kindergarten, and a lot of complaints about my talking too much and disrupting others. And they were like, you know, she's not aggressive. She's just persist, like, so like, persistent and not like, nevertheless, she persisted, like, I don't like annoying, persistent, you know. So, but then once I got swept into creative activities, I seem to really thrive. And I was a good student. And even when I struggled in some classes, I could kind of con my way, you know, like, and to finding ways to kind of, I don't know, do well enough. And so, you know, so because of that the deficiencies I had been memory or an energy were often labeled even by people who cared about me very much as being like character faults. And I think that was really, really painful. And I think they literally none, no one had the equipment to understand that, like, I wasn't being inconsiderate. I literally couldn't remember. You know, and so there was a lot of like, trying to correct me back towards, like, happy to put me in a place where I could use my energy and thrive and be sucks, you know, define success. I think my parents were happy to find that, but I think there's a lot of confusion in my teenage and college years about why I just couldn't get my act together. And a lot of like, you know, you have so much potential and you're very bright and your teachers say this and that but like, I could not write a paper in college to save my life. Like I could go to the library and read you know, I took an amazing seminar about psychopathy when I was a senior and sociopathy and psychopathy. I was like, it's such a cool topic. I like meds to myself as like Jodie Foster and science and all this kind of stuff. Now we go to the library, and I'd read about sociopathy and psychopathy for like eight hours. And then it'd be like time to write the paper. And I'd be like, No, thanks. So I would have done well in a system that had like oral exams, you know, or something like that, probably. So that was my experience growing up, you know, that I that I was lucky that I had parents that we're kind of knew that I needed to be pointed in a direction that seemed to suit what I think they would have probably called my temperament. And, you know, some pain, you know, that we've done a lot of really great conversing around, even in the past year about like misunderstanding, and my mom, even as a profession, I think it's important to, for people to hear my mother who loves me more than anything, and is a professional and was during that time did not have

the tools to see it. Because I know and she said, if she had, you know, she would have gotten me somehow. Yeah, I mean, I think it's like, really, so that's my only point, you know, it's just that like, you know, this is this is a lot of I think this about this last generation of women with ADHD and i don't know that i don't know how i don't know if i feel like I'm in that or not, but I do know that I had every reason to be diagnosed. But that, you know, the building just hadn't been built yet.



Katy Weber 34:11

Right? I know, that definitely helps me a lot when it comes to you know, a lot of that that kind of regret or you know, looking back over my childhood and saying being like, the signs were there all along, and nobody did anything, but nobody knew. But my parents had no idea and it's something I think a lot about when it comes to you know how I had to like straight A Ivy League older brothers, and then I came along and, and my mother was always like, very supportive and very loving and was just sort of like well, not everybody gets A's in school like she always like made a point of being like that's totally fine and you are good at other things. And she always would say things about like my street smarts versus my book smarts and, and how college isn't for everybody and And I look back now and I was like, Wow, that was really damaging to my psyche. Like, that really made me feel terrible about myself. But I also like, as a parent, I'm like, Well, what would have been the correct way to respond to a child who wasn't doing well, like, it never occurred to her that I had a learning disorder, it never occurred to them that like, maybe I needed a tutor, you know, or maybe I was lying when I said I would didn't have homework or like, like, there was so many ways in which it could have been handled better. But now as like, with my son, like, during the pandemic, and he was he was sort of the same way, which is like, my daughter does really, really well in school. And then my son came along, and he does, he hasn't, I mean, he's young, but he's, he never did well, in school. He always did, okay, and so my mentality was always like, well, not everybody is going to get straight A's, and that's fine. And I support him and whatever he wants to do. But then with the pandemic, and remote learning, he had me helping him in ways like I could type for him, you know, like, I was basically like his administrative assistant. And so when I saw like, the kind of help he needed, he did really, really well. And I was terrified to send it back to school because I felt like okay, well, now I've set him up for failure, you know, now I've set him up with a sense that this false sense of security that he's thinks he's in straight A student, but he isn't really, and without my help, and then I was like, wait a minute, like, I'm getting this all wrong, no, all I have seen is how much help he now needs in order to become a straight A student. So now we can get him the tutor, we can get him the typing, like, you know, all of these things that I was able to help him with, and the structures I was able to give him this year, I'm like, Okay, now we just need to replicate that in the classroom. And so, but at the same time, like, I just think a lot about like, what, you know how, as parents, we, we

tend to kind of have that labeling of our child of like, you're good at this, and you're good at this, and you're not good at this. And, and it, it's really difficult to stop that, like, I'm aware of the fact that I'm doing it, and I'm aware of the fact that it's potentially damaging, but I'm also kind of like, I find it really difficult to to step back and assess, you know, it's almost like an, um, what's the word I'm looking for? Like? Just, you know, an overall love without demands. What's the word?



Emily Donahoe 37:25

unconditional love? unconditional? Thank



Katy Weber 37:26

you. Yeah. Yeah, the unconditional love of a parent is is comforting and supportive. But it's also kind of like, worthless, you know, in a way when it comes to motivation. And so I'm, like, very fascinated by like, what, you know, what damage Am I going to be inadvertently doing to my child that I



Emily Donahoe 37:45

think so much of it is about intention, you know, what I mean? Like, and so I, at least I got, I hope so. But I also think, too, it's like, you essentially discovered an accommodation. You know what I mean? Like, that's, it sounds like, that's what you discovered for your son is like, the necessary accommodations? And like, I wish I'd had, I wish I'd had that, you know,



Katy Weber 38:05

I am so grateful. I mean, I realize how privileged it is to even be able to be in that situation. Right. But yeah, it has been, it's been really eye opening just in terms of like, the way that we kind of say things like, not everybody can get straight A's, as opposed to like, what do you need to get? Your a?



Emily Donahoe 38:27

Yes, yes, yes. Yes. And is that a meaningful metric? And like, also, though, I think it does make sense as a parent, when you have only so much bandwidth to a lot to each one. I mean, you have this you start coming up with your shortcuts, you know, where you're like, Okay, you're the, you're the funny when you're this, like, you start trying to be like, because you're moving so fast, you know, it totally makes sense to me. I only have one son, you

know, and he does not seem to have ADHD, but I'm very glad that he doesn't. But he seems to have some of the hyperfocus I don't know if that's a developmental thing, because he's eight, but uh, you know,



Katy Weber 39:04

yeah, it would be it'll be interesting because like, my son's My son has never been disruptive. He's never gotten in trouble. And he is absolutely inattentive. ADHD. He is a daydreamer. He doesn't listen, he has terrible working memory, all of the things that I had. So I'm like, he would never be he would never be pulled out by a teacher and say, and you know, a teacher would never say he has ADHD because he's not a typical boy with ADHD. But he's a typical girl with ADHD. I mean, and I see how much anxiety he brings on himself because he wants to do well and he can't, you know, and so his, his, his lack of executive function to be able to like, do simple things like Remember, you know, with test taking and that kind of thing. It's like, Oh, yeah, he's absolutely inattentive. ADHD is



Emily Donahoe 39:56

fascinating. I mean, also because, like, I suppose a way that we're visualizing boys and girls is hopefully evolving, you know, so this idea that like, he might have the symptom picture that looks more like a girl with ADHD before a lot of the really meaningful conversations around gender expectation and things like it's really fascinating. I wonder if that's going to become more common? Right? Yeah, if we, if we allow more sensitive boys to develop, we stop pestering them to be, you know, tough guys, you know, we just let them bloom you know, if we're gonna see more and attentive and as we allow girls to be more extroverted and rockets if we're gonna be like, Oh, wonderful. See the other side? It'll be really interesting journey, you know?



Katy Weber 40:36

Yeah, absolutely. Well, and also, the, the, my husband, I've been talking about this a lot with therapy too, because we want to get him we want to get him involved with a therapist, just to because we're sort of like, rather than wait until you're in crisis mode, I'd rather you have like as many tools as possible to kind of bring Usher you into your teenage years. And with girls, it's much easier to find kind of social, emotional, developmental courses and groups and stuff. There's nothing for boys, there's nothing for boys. I know. And I was like, are you No wonder they're all emotionally stunted, immature adults, and we and are completely, you know, devoid of responsibility? Because we don't there's no social and emotional development out there. I can't believe it, you know, like the

Oh, my God, our coaches, coaches.

E

Emily Donahoe 41:25

And that's a that can be a real crapshoot, you know, because you can either get it, you know, one of the things that we've done for our son along those lines is we have we go to a church here, that's an Episcopalian church that's run by women. And, you know, it's like, I that's really meaningful for my family. You know, it's so funny, because we're actually a family of Zen practitioners, but I was like, I want him to have, I wanted to kind of know, the cultural that he's from, you know, we're, you know, very Irish, you know, bam, I was like, I wanted to know that stuff. And, but I also want ethics. I mean, what I like about this church is they used to run the food pantry in town, they do a lot of social justice work, you know. And so for me, or for us, I was like, I really just take him over there as much as anything to learn the value, his spiritual life will be his own, like, whatever he wants to do, but I do feel like I've got to fill in that void. That's not available for a lot of little boys to see, like women in meaningful positions of authority to see strong participation in social justice to understand ideas about privilege, you know, like I, cuz I feel and I feel like that's the only place I could find it. You know, it's like, where do you find that gap in the curriculum for little boys. It's a really tough thing right now. Yeah. I love that. I mean, I know the other side of that that kind of makes me think of ADHD too is, you know, because of the consulting work I do. I, my company is called Women speak training. And we do a lot of what we look to do is provide women with public speaking training, because the research is so clear that many women haven't been socialized to speak in public the way that men have been, but also to help organizations evolve spaces of speaking and listening to be more inclusive. And so I'm very interested in this work and always have been, but through the lens of ADHD, I do wonder about things like girls being too chatty, and things like that, like, I'm like, are we pathologizing? Something in girls that like, do we already have a resistance about the public voice of women or the public voice of girls, and we're making it into a symptom in some cases, when really, we are not evolved to accept bright women and the bandwidth that they will take up in public? If we give them the chance, you know, are we labeling and I think there is a pretty proven history that we label that a problem in the classroom more quickly with little girls than we do with little boys. And so sometimes when I look back at those report cards, and this is not to toot my own horn, it's some kind of like genius or something. But I was a good student, you know. And I do wonder with some of the teachers if, if the thing about my talkativeness was also like, I was brightened, engaged, but girls, like, shouldn't talk that much. You know, and so I do want, I just wonder, and I really hope that like the research, and the experts move to investigate that corner of all this as well, like, because I feel like the type of student I have, I'm not sure that there was often room for me to just be the kind of student I was, you know, which was, I needed discussion I needed to talk that helps



me process the information. Know, that the ground is shifting so quickly, the conversation changes so quickly, you know, but I know these are things I'm interested in.



Katy Weber 47:52

Yeah, I remember having that conversation with my mother with about Hillary Clinton, where she was like, I'm not against having a woman president. She's, I just don't want that woman as President. And I'm like, okay, they don't come any more qualified. So what exactly are you looking for in a woman? You know, like, we had very, like, theoretical conversation about like, what is it about her that you find offensive? And like, what does that say about you?



Emily Donahoe 48:16

You know, it's really fascinating. There's a talk by a woman named Mary Beard, who's like, I guess, like one of most famous classes system in the world. But she was, and she did this. She did an interview, she did a series for the BBC years ago about Rome, which is her expertise, you know, and she was bullied horribly for appearing there, people were like, you're not pretty enough to be on TV, bla bla bla, bla bla. So she became interested, as a classicist, and like, where does this stereotype about women in public come from? You know, and she traced it back to like ancient Rome. And she has some really interesting points to say like, it's not just that men were encouraged to learn public speaking or to participate in rituals and public speaking as a rite of passage into adulthood. It's that the ideal woman is quiet. So silence is a virtue, if you're female, and we still have remnants of that when we're assessing a woman's credibility in a public space. And so for Hillary Clinton, I feel like, you know, it's really hard when you're that competent, you know, there's something called the double bind dilemma, which is that women in positions of leadership can either be seen as likable or competent, but they have a hard time being seen as both. And that's really useful tool for me, because I think through you know, like, okay, so Hillary Clinton competent, not likable, right, like, you're easy to go through and be like, this was the issue, you know, so this idea of, I know, of women of like, it's like, what is the problem? Well, the problem might be that we all have a deeply embedded bias. You know, that women are violating a really strongly held social norms about how they're supposed to be performing gender when they speak too much in public and we might be seeing that everywhere from report cards to presidential elections, you know,



Katy Weber 49:55

yeah, absolutely. And, you know, and the numbers in terms of just confidence, self

confidence just going off a cliff, in middle school in high school in in STEM topics and basically, any subject of performance.



Emily Donahoe 50:14

Well, and I think you know, the other thing to keep in mind too about that like, and I think this is part of the conversation about building community and all of us connecting with each other, I think as women, and that we have to be really straightforward with each other, that women can sometimes be terrible to each other in policing, but like some of the worst gender policing can come from other women. And that certain that begins in middle school. It's kind of you know, that's the Mean Girls phenomenon, right? That was that great line where she was like you, she says to her, you're really pretty. And she says, Thank you. And then she goes, Oh, so you agree? Yeah. Like, you're constantly caught in these like traps. So I think that it's like, I know that I even have to check my own bias. Sometimes if I start to like, not, I feel like it's half of my career to encourage women to speak in public and to build visibility. But even I have somebody who like works in that space. Sometimes we'll see somebody on the news, I'll be like, Why is she wearing that? You know, I definitely have to be like, Emily, this is a bias. You know, it's a bias. It's, in our culture more than 2000 years old, you know, and so we have to accept, it's really hard to overcome even for those of us that really want to, and



Katy Weber 51:19

even with my daughter, I mean, my daughter is 14 and I make a point of like, you know, like, I don't talk about her pretty dresses, and I don't talk I don't make a fuss over her hair. And I don't talk about like I make a point of complimenting her on her social, emotional, intellectual development. Like I really go out of my way to not comment on her physical appearance. And yet at the same time, I'm like, she's gonna think I don't think she's pretty and then what you know, because I'm like, like, you can't win. It's it I obsess over the fact that I haven't told her enough that she's pretty and what is that going to do to her self esteem? And



Emily Donahoe 51:56

it's, it's, you know, the conversation has been made so complicated by so many bad actors in a way but this idea to that, like feminism is not divorced from the idea of sexuality or wanting to be a vibrant sexual person. You know, it's really not about taking options away from women. You know, it's not about like, you can't be a man I want to be really clear that I know you're not saying this, but I feel like I myself have had to be like, it's not that

you that you can be smart and pretty. It's not just pretty are not just smart, right? Like smart. And and and, you know, so



Katy Weber 52:28

it's tricky though, but there are Yeah, there are like sometimes I feel like I've I've raised this daughter who could not give a flying fuck about makeup or even if her hair is brushed and like I love that about her. But then every once a while, I'm like, you look like a Sasquatch like I've created a monster. Oh, man, that's awesome. Oh, I love it. I love having a girl. Oh my god and for every person who says Oh, just wait till they're a teenager drives me crazy because I'm just like, you know, just like you said like it's I think it's we set ourselves up to with this narrative that that teenagers are oppositional and they're terrible. And, oh, we got to roll our eyes and I've had the exact opposite experience so far. So Oh, that's awesome. So So tell me about women speak How did you first started and?



Emily Donahoe 58:11

Yeah, yeah, so I also think it's a really ADHD thing, but I have like two professional existences. At least right I know. Right, right. Yeah. So. So you know, I'm a professional actor, but I also had this company that I started years ago called Women speak training. And it was because, you know, mostly, like I said, before I work in the theater. And so, you know, like most theatre actors, you have to find a way to subsidize your life in the theater. Because you're essentially working for nonprofits irregularly, which is fine, but it is what it is. So I used to make commercials, you know, I had a commercial agent, I would make commercials. And that was kind of my money gig. But that was really hard actually, to do for a lot of reasons, some of which were very feminist reasons. So anyway, I noticed that I was auditioning, for example, when I was making commercials for a lot of cleaning products. I was like, Huh, no, this feels rude to me. And so I also, I don't know about this. So I also, when I was a graduate student, I taught public speaking to undergrads and I noticed when I was teaching my undergrads that the homework was always you know, you go work on a speech and you come back and you deliver it in class. That's essentially what it was. And whenever I would say, okay, who wants to do their homework first, there was a podium in the mental in the middle of the classroom that would go up to the front podium. In my experience in that class, the women in the class never volunteered to go first. So the men in the class would always felt really mean tended to feel really good about their speeches. They always went up first. Their speeches were longer. They engaged in like less ritualized apology and things like that, right? And so I was like, What is the deal? Like, am I imagining this or is this like, actually thing, and I got really curious in it, and I knew I wanted to coach and public speaking when, you know, I knew that that was something I wanted to pursue, and I started researching it and you know, the research

bears it out that public spaces, even in public spaces that are like 50% men, 50% women, women typically take up about 25 to 35% of the bandwidth of what's being said. And they get interrupted more often their ideas are stolen, you know, so all this stuff, right that I think now, a lot of us know this. But when I started the business, it wasn't as well known. And it was also something that was referred to as the confidence gap and a lot of literature about women speaking in public or engaging in leadership behaviors, and I got really curious too, about that term, I was like, Is it a competency gap? Or is it an MA, excuse me, is that a competence gap or an experience gap? Because I know, like my own experience, I grew up, you know, in the very conservative south in the Bible Belt, you know, and then, you know, move went to high school in a different culture, totally, but like, I was, like, I wasn't really ever encouraged to speak in public. So by the time I would have gotten to a professional space, where that was required between after going through junior high, and, you know, all that I already was behind experientially, you know, I didn't have the experience. And so, you know, maybe I wouldn't be a hand raiser for those types of things. So I wanted to start a company that addresses that experience gap, but also helped women identify and push back against bias, about, you know, how people feel about them exhibiting leadership behaviors, including taking up consequential space in public, you know, speaking, you know, demonstrating leadership, enacting leadership, who do we let do that? Why do we let them do it? Why do we not let them do it? And many, many clients that were referred to me, they were like, you know, she's a really good leader, but she's a little abrasive. And I was never, and I see a lot of men too. I work like a lot of consultants through a lot of referral. 50% of my clients are men, I've never had anybody tell me that a man's abrasive, you know, so part of is about like, helping, you know, identify, like, is this bias. So that's what women speak, does we work individually with women, but also, and I always want to be really clear about this, it is not a fixed the woman company. because traditionally, public speaking companies for women have been about like, here's how we're going to teach you how to communicate like a straight white man, like you're the problem, right? But what we're really looking to do more is to say to organizations, exclusivity is the problem. And by not allowing space for different types of voices to flourish, and be heard, you're missing out on the big ideas from your talent, you know, so it's actually a driver of innovation, diversity drives innovation, inclusion drives innovation. So this idea of like building the female share voice, or the non binary Share of Voice or female, identifying share voice, and you know, my expertise is with women, I'm sure that these things, this lack of equal voice has to be true along other intersections of like race and sexual identity and things like class as well. So so but what I know about is women and that's what I'm always really hot to talk about, and always looking to amplify female voices, you know. So that's what women speak does. And it's really, really fun work. And I've led, I've met so many amazing women doing it won't even believe I've been doing it for 15 years. Hundreds of amazing women.



Katy Weber 1:03:11

So do you go in to do you work with companies who bring you in to work with their employees or Yeah, okay.



Emily Donahoe 1:03:19

Yeah, yeah, I do a lot of individual coaching. And I also teach classes. So some of my clients have been like the Estee Lauder companies, Saatchi and Saatchi team when advertising, I've worked with the women's campaign school at Yale, which is something I especially love, no training women to speak for public office. That's a real passionate. That's a real passion project for me. I've worked in financial services for Willis towers, Watson and Willis and, and you know, the bias is different industry to industry, which is also something that's really interesting about it, you know, and so, and, you know, and I've worked with some trans women, interestingly, who have talked about the differences in their esteem and their experiences as public speakers or as leaders when they were men versus when they were perceived as women. And the research also aligns with that as well. And it's really, really fascinating, you know, that, you know, a lot of the trans women of color, like I knew, but I didn't know, I mean, at least the ones that I've talked to you in hell, I mean, it's really something to be interrupted and spoken over and explained to, and, you know, so it's exciting. It's really exciting work, you know, and I think that another thing that's happened in the, it's still some of the work still values, extraversion, which may be some of its weakness, one of the things that's been interesting to see in the pandemic because of zoom and the chat feature, like there have been a lot of introverted people and a lot of people from the neurodivergent community who feel more comfortable participating via chat. And I think a lot of companies are going to keep that which is really exciting, you know, to be like, you don't just have to learn how to be an extrovert. There are ways to include all types of temperaments and personalities in your divergence so that we can get, allow participation and encourage inclusivity and also like, get those big ideas and dialogue with them and be innovative. You know, so. So that's that's kind of it. classes and coaching on site and off. Awesome. It's fun.



Katy Weber 1:05:07

So if you could rename ADHD to something slightly less problematic, do you have any ideas? Do you want to throw anything in the ring?



Emily Donahoe 1:05:15

I will say two things that have resonated with me. And but I do do not feel like I have any

good nominations. But I can also I will say that what has been useful for me, is this idea of like a neuro type, or vast so those are my expression of whatever this thing is. Those feel like because like I said, mine are around dysregulation of attention, energy and my memory problems. I feel like vast What is it best attention? stimulus? No variable variable attention, stimulus traits? Yeah, that might be useful. I know that like a lot of people are like, boo. But for me like that actually might be a useful term. Or you're the one who talks about left handed scissors, right? Like, see, that's a really that is profoundly useful for me. Because I really feel like for what I have, and that the way it exhibits is a learning difference for me, is if it had been framed as like a neuro type that needed an account, that's not necessarily a pathology, but needs accommodation, like giving a left handed desk or left handed scissors, I feel like that would have been life altering for me. And the onus is not on the individual. Absolutely, yeah. And it's not necessarily a disorder. And I mean, I feel like I can recognize that like losing things that that's, you know, that's not good. But I also feel like attention in and of itself, it's such a weird name, because like, it's an symptom. It's not necessarily, you know, it's like nausea is a symptom, you know, but like many things cause nausea, not all of them are illness, like pregnancy, or the body getting rid of something during food poisoning, or you know what I mean, like there, or it could be a brain tumor, or anyone that, you know, it could be anything. And so this idea that, like attention, are somehow talking about the symptom, and not the cause right now, is interesting to me, because I wonder if like, a lot of things are kind of being swept into this diagnosis. And as research continues, and as the conversation evolves, it will, there'll be more differentiators underneath that, that allow for better treatment and symptom management, you know, so, in your tribe, it can be caused by trauma, physical trauma to the head or psychological trauma, it can be caused by but, um, so in order to appropriately allocate resources for that make room for those differences. I feel like the the I would feel comfortable myself and like an inner in the world of like, a neuro type so that I, and I do have that like, kind of guilty thing around. When I identify sometimes I'm like, I'm not gonna take away resources for somebody who might need it more. which I know is like, not it's like a little shame on me, because that's like, old stuff. But I do feel to like, it's good. I think it's good to hear from people like me, who do we have a more moderate expression? Because it's like we are trying, it's like, yes, you're not imagining it, you don't have to have the extreme version to have it and have it have a significant impact on your life. And to argue for more bespoke resources for the manifestation of it for you, is a good thing. And actually, if you really are interested in not taking resources from people who might, you know, need more immediate and types of interventions, then you actually should be talking about moderate disease expression and talking about neuro type and talking about, you know what I mean? Like, let's get that up there. So we can figure out how to align everybody with the best thing, you know.



Katy Weber 1:08:39

Awesome. All right. Well, thank you so much. This has been wonderful. We went on all sorts of fascinating little meandering, so I'm just curious what we're gonna end up talking about because I feel like with you, I could, it could have been literally anything.



Emily Donahoe 1:08:54

I know, I feel the same way. I'm like, there's no telling where we'll go like after our lunch to go talk about I know,



Katy Weber 1:09:01

right, I have like 12 other topics that I'm like, must follow up. I probably won't, but you know, I'm like, Oh,



Emily Donahoe 1:09:08

I will do it. Anytime. I love talking about all this stuff, even if it's just like on one of our walks or something, you know,