**Ep2: Biases from**

**daycare to workplaces**

**INTRO**

**Kadie Ward (KW):** Today we'll be discussing the gender bias in general, but especially bias in education with Dr. Julie Cafley, Executive Director of Catalyst. Dr. Cafley is an accomplished academic with expertise in equity and inclusion, public policy, governance, and higher education and leadership. Broad, broad expertise here. She's also a committed advocate for women and leadership, and a constant ally for First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples. Thank you so much, Julie, for joining me today.

**Julie Cafley (JC):** Thank you, Kadie. Pleasure.

**KW:** Julie, you have had a very diverse career in many aspects of policy and especially social policy, which is why this is such an important topic to talk about with you. Season two of Level the Paying Field has been looking at the hidden biases that affect or enable the gender wage gap to persist. And today's topic is a really tough one because we're looking at the ways in which early-years education in children constructs sort of gender norms. And then the longer-term implication these have on women and girls. And so, you've probably seen this, you know, throughout your career. Parents with new babies and young children inadvertently reinforce gender stereotypes and then create a sort of gendered world through toys, through play, through language and environments. And there's a ton of research that shows how teachers differently reward boys’ and girls' behaviour and the way children are represented, boys and girls and stories and all that stuff. So, what impact have you seen, does early socialisation and gender construction have on children as they grow up and form ideas?

**JC:** Absolutely. What a great question and I love the discussion and I look forward to it and you know, with this question, I have so many fears and so many hopes all at once, and I think that's what's so fascinating. And also when I thought about the question, I thought about, do I answer, I'm actually a trained elementary school teacher as my initial training.

**KW:** I did not know that. Okay. This is perfect for you.

**JC:** Yeah. So as a teacher, as a parent, as a feminist, and as a leader of a non-profit organisation that promotes inclusive workplaces and frankly, perhaps the answer in all of those cases comes back to the same thing. And you know, at Catalyst, we don't frame gender as something that changes someone's leadership. You know, women leaders do not do this, and men leaders do not do that. And I think that's kind of at the core of this, whether you're talking about kids or leaders or whoever it could be in our society. And we really focus on the spectrum of gender and how it is so valuable for people to just express their full selves, whether that be at school, whether that be at work, and whether that be at home. We definitely have a lot of work to do in this area. I'd like to think that looking at my two boys who are 17 and 20, that gender plays a less important role in their lives than in mine, which I think is a sign of growth. I got a little bit excited when we were discussing it and preparing for this interview, and they said, well, we haven't come that far, mom. Whoa. Like it's, it's not that good. But I think that the importance put on that in terms of their friendships and in terms of how they interact with men and women young in their lives is different. And I see the importance as being less so I do see it more as on a spectrum. And yet, you know, if you have a brain, you have bias. And I think that's kind of the essential part of the discussion where we all need to start. And I actually said this in my interview when I joined Catalyst, I said, there's nothing I'm more passionate about than women in leadership, and yet I've had very few women leaders in my career path. So, if you were to officially test me, chances are I would have some unconscious bias towards women leaders because I haven't had many of them. And so, I think that when we start off with that understanding, no one is immune from bias. Every single parent falls into this trap and it's really, really difficult to undo that. So, what I like to think about is how can we redesign structures, redesign our ways of thinking to almost trick the brain, cause the brain naturally goes to that connection of unconscious bias. So how do you redesign structures to help get at that systemic unconscious bias? And of course, you know, awareness is so, so, so important, but how do you kind of unlearn and redesign? And one of my favourite authors in academics is Iris Bohnet at Harvard.

**KW:** Oh, great.

**JC:** Yeah. And she talks about specific things in terms of women in leadership and how you can kind of trick our ways in doing things like this. And so, I don't know as much in terms of from the parenting or from the child perspective, but there must be ways that we can explore for that as well. So, the typical example that I love is the Boston Symphony Orchestra. When they realised that so many of their musicians were white men, and they didn't see a way through that. And they actually did, of course, the blind auditions. And when they did those blind auditions, they all of a sudden saw they had amazing talent and their diversity was transformed within a very, very short period of time because people had that stereotype of this white male musician. And all of a sudden when they heard the beautiful music being made by so many other people, the diversity of their orchestra changed nearly overnight through this blind orchestra audition. And so, there's so many examples like that where how can we actually just be fully aware of that and say, how do we reinvent our systems to account for that? And I think it's just so important.

**KW:** Yeah. You made a really good point. Especially - it's everywhere - but in parenthood, parents are trying their best, but they may not recognize that it's just part of the unconscious bias. And the unconscious bias creates stereotypes, and the stereotypes reinforce the bias. So, it's one of these circular things. And maybe it's helpful to maybe define gender stereotypes in this context. Right. And I'm going to use the Fawcett Society's report under the United Kingdom that says a gender stereotype is a generalised preconception about the attributes or characteristics that are, or ought to be possessed by men and women, or about the roles that are or should be performed by men and women separate to biological sex differences. So, gender is very complex. Feminists have sought to understand, you know, gender in many ways, including social construct, power construct, you've talked a little bit about this, but also performance. You've already started to hit on this, but in what ways can society sort of dismantle the elements of gender that perpetuate the stereotypical social constructs or the power structures that you mentioned, or the harmful sort of performative practices that cause ongoing stagnation and actually try to achieve gender equality. That's a big question. I'm sorry, Julie, but you can take it on.

**JC:** Absolutely. That's a great question. And of course, even just the idea of stereotypes is these cognitive shortcuts that are frankly unaware to so many of us. And what I find when I think about your question, what it immediately makes me think of is kind of this double bind that women face and specifically as leaders. So, the idea that there's contradictory demands that are being made on individuals, and we do this with kids, we do this with adults, we do this all throughout life and it's almost this situation where a person has to choose between equally unsatisfactory alternatives. And we see this happening all of the time with women in leadership. And we wrote a report on this back in 2007 and I reread it this morning in preparing for the interview and I kind of felt a little bit upset about the fact that it was still highly relevant today. And so, you know, what I love about Catalyst is we're really focused a lot on solutions and pragmatic and where do we go. So, when we raise an issue and we raise concern, we'll say, okay, so what can you do about that, to help to change that? And I think that's really the discussion we need to have because we can focus on the low statistics around women and leadership and what we need to do, but we actually need to look at solutions and moving forward as well. But unfortunately, you know, in many situations, women are still seen as atypical leaders. When you're looking at Fortune 500 countries, when you're looking at the number of CEOs, when you're looking at women politicians, and there still is this think leader, think male mindset. And it's very, very hard to escape. And there's a term by Rosabeth Kanter and she talks about critical mass theory. And according to Dr. Kanter, a group needs 30% to no longer be considered a token group, whatever that might be. And so, when you're looking at 4% of Canadian CEOs that are women, as an example, we're not even close to getting to that number in terms of critical mass theory. So, a lot of this there's extreme perceptions around women that they're too soft or that they're too tough and they never seem to be just right in terms of their leadership style. The idea of this high competence threshold and that women face higher standards and are frankly rewarded less than men leaders. The one that's really interesting is around the norm violators. And we read a lot about this, so that when women are competent, they're frankly more frequently disliked. And it's very difficult to be perceived as both competent and likeable as a woman leader. And we talk about this of course in the area of pay equity and when women negotiate for salaries they're seen as violating their gender norm and it's often seen quite negatively. And then just imagine, intersectionality is so core to everything that we do at Catalyst, so imagine when you're adding on layers as women of colour, as Indigenous women, identifying as LGBTQ or trans women? This is just amplified and amplified and amplified again in terms of the challenges that are faced by these women wherever they might be. So, it's hard to undo, this stereotype is profound and I've actually worked in an organisation at one point where it was said, oh, we're delegating the empathy file to Julie as the woman in the organisation, right? So, we have a lot to do. I do have a lot of hope in this area. We work with a lot of men CEOs who are focusing on more inclusive workplaces and frankly, empathy and curiosity and connection with bringing our whole selves to work is really, really, really important. And one of the angles to kind of going forward to changing this is really the concept of male allyship and the importance that that plays in terms of changing a lot of these underlying stereotypes. So, how are men, and perhaps they even say white men in positions of privilege speaking up and talking about these issues and raising them and having the discussions and noting the unconscious bias. And, one of our corporate supporters the other day, there was a call and the woman came on the line a little bit earlier and the chief human resource officer says, oh, there's the lovely so-and-so that's joining. And the male CEO right away said, well, I don't know about that term. Isn't that a gendered term to refer to her as being lovely? And, you know, I, as a male CEO I've never been referred to as lovely. And they had this really candid and open discussion about the stereotype surrounding that word and what that meant. And so, I think whether you're talking about people in the workplace or whether you're talking about, you know, you and I seeing a new baby and associating different adjectives based on it being a little boy or a little girl, you and I will catch ourselves, but so many people just haven't even learned that that's not helpful in terms of the stereotypes that we provide,

**KW:** That we're continuing to perpetuate. I appreciate that you brought up this idea about empathy and connection because when it comes to gender stereotypes, there's a long school of debate on nature versus nurture, right? This idea that the extreme nature position is that the difference between boys and girls are all biologically predetermined and unalterable, right? This is just the way boys and girls are different because of their predetermined gender makeup, but that's been discredited by neuroscience. We're not going to get into the details of the science here, but I would love to hear your perspective on is there room specifically for policymakers to address the way that their public education or other spaces, and I know Catalyst works a lot in the workplace scenarios. How do we address, can we use policy? Cause you've worked in the policy space. So, can we use policy to address the stereotypes that are created and promoted?

**JC:** Hmm. That's a great question. So, of course when we socialise anyone to believe that they can do certain things or behave in certain ways, we just limit, right? And so, whether we're limiting men and women in the workplace, whether we're limiting boys and girls in schools, whatever it is, this is just limiting what is possible. We create constructs that are frankly just unnecessary. And how do we kind of unlearn all of this process and, and what do we do? And I think a lot of the work that we're doing in this area, we're talking a lot about unlearning. And when I look at organisations and at leaders that are really advancing in this area, it's a lot around humility and I think DEI in general is often seen as something positive. We're ensuring that people are their best and they're bringing their best selves. The bottom line is a lot of this is really uncomfortable. So, you have some CEOs or some CHROs that are saying all of a sudden people are challenging things or people are questioning, the images that we're using, our decision-making procedures, and we don't know if we like that or not. There's kind of this employee activism that comes with people having their voice. And so, when you are in a hierarchical structure, and obviously you know, you're empowering people around you to say something, how you react to that has a huge, huge role. And I think that's what makes people uncomfortable around DEI, because I can think of another story where a CEO created a black employee resource group and didn't give them time support, financing to actually make a difference. And so, they ended up, this was during Covid, they ended up interrupting the CEO's Zoom meeting and getting the link and accessing the CEO to say, “Hey, what are you doing? Like, this is not working and you're not really giving us a voice.” So, I think that kind of those power constructs are really important. So, you know, challenging the organisational structure is really important. I think there's a lot of looking inward. There's a CEO from an oil and gas company in Calgary who did our male allyship training. And he said, this made me a better leader of my organisation, but frankly it made me a better husband and father. I sat in that training and realised, how I am coming home at night and what my unconscious bias and what those beliefs are, how they're affecting my home life. And he was really quite authentic and open about that. And that's where we need the change. You know, you and I and other women leaders can talk about this for days. And we're not going to change things amongst ourselves. We need to engage men, we need to engage people in all types of places and organisations to really see a change. And I think the final point is around role modelling, frankly. I think of an institution, I'm going to go back to Harvard cause they've done some great work in this area. You know, they actually realised that all of their presidents had been men up until a certain point, and so they actually went, and they had portraits done of some of the women trailblazers in the organisation and hung them up next to those male presidents. It's not a coincidence that they just recently announced their first black president who is a woman. This is purposeful, this is, you know, they focused on metrics, they focused on recreating structures, they focused on tangible change and not just on good intentions. So how do you actually do that purposefully? And I think I'm hyper focused on the workplace right now in terms of my work, but how do you deconstruct that learning within schools? Because it's profound. And we see it in terms of having our kids go to school and being a part of those processes, and I do have hope in terms of a new generation of teachers and leaders that will help to change that. But it really does need to be unbundled and unlearned, to help to remove so many of those stereotypes.

**KW:** I know a lot of your work at Catalyst focuses on women and leadership specifically, and women in the workplace and getting leaders on board for the diversity, equity, inclusion. There's so much research that shows that early in a child's life they're forming stereotypes or ideas about the type of work that they could do based on their gender, based on the way that they're socialised. So, what are early-stage recommendations and you might want to go back to your elementary school days, early-stage interventions that we can have. You've shared some great stories about CEOs having interventions, but this is like pretty late stage in a CEO's career and late stage in an individual team member's career, right? Because they're already a manager, assistant manager or something. So how do we, how can we make earlier interventions into this?

**JC:** Yeah. So, in terms of some of the data they've said, by nine years old a person has decided whether they're going into science and math as an example. Well, that's really, really, really young. But I think when you talk about privilege, if you grow up in a family where the parents have been to university, it's kind of instilled in you that you will go in that direction. And I think around the area of science and math, there's still profound stereotypes that exist amongst parents and amongst teachers, amongst kids themselves about women being good, young girls being good and strong at math and science in particular. Furthermore, in in the trades, we have a whole new initiative right now looking at frontline workers and young girls are not seeing themselves growing up to going into those trades. And there's significant opportunity, there's significant positive experiences, great careers, great pay, you know, and they're really looking at transforming those experiences for frontline workers. I think the days of issues around women's bathrooms and uniforms that don't fit women, we're moving beyond that, but how do you make that more interesting? So, whether it's a frontline worker, whether it's an engineer, whether it's a scientist or a mathematician, those stereotypes go really, really deep. And how do we really break that down? And I've heard moms who have kids my age, who have experienced horrific things that have come home from school, that have been said to their daughters about, you know, their aptitude to go forwarded math. So, one of my first jobs was in a faculty of engineering in a university, and then we were looking at such significant challenges around increasing that cohort of women, specifically in mechanical and civil electrical engineering. You know, we're seeing the numbers actually higher in things like chemical and environmental engineering for women, but how do we actually look at that in all disciplines, in physics, in math, in areas where women are highly underrepresented. So, we haven't cracked that nut yet, there's been exceptional success and there has been improvement in certain areas but it's very profound and those stereotypes are happening at home, at school, everywhere in books we read. And they're really, really profound changes that need to be done. So, it's not an easy question and I think that having discussions like this and really looking at redesigning those systems and looking at, frankly concrete and pragmatic solutions to undoing and unlearning a lot of those deep stereotypes and, we use the term at catalyst, interrupting sexism.

**KW:** That's a great term.

**JC:** So, how do you interrupt sexism in a workplace? How do you interrupt sexism, whether it's in a school, and I think the more knowledge we have, the easier it becomes. And the idea of strength and stamina of putting work first, or showing no weakness, those are stereotypes that frankly women in the workplace even fall victim to in a sense, in terms of that combative culture and what that means in terms of underlying sexism that exists. So, we can't rely on individuals alone. You know, as you and I have discussed before you can't try to fix women around negotiating higher for their pay. You need to actually fix workplaces. So, we can't say, let's try to fix kids in school systems. We need to actually fix the structures of education systems so that this sexism is eliminated.

**KW:** Absolutely. Julie, thank you so much for sharing insight across a broad spectrum, which is why we have invited you to speak because you have such a diverse background from the challenges we face, not just in education, but all the way up the sort of value chain as students grow and become young adults and enter careers and they become leaders, the challenges we face. So, thank you so much for helping us understand these issues a bit better. The questions we need to ask and what we can do to solve the problem.

**JC:** Thanks so much, Kadie.

**OUTRO**