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SPEAKERS

Omkari Williams, Lisa Selin Davis



Omkari Williams 00:20

Hello, and welcome to Stepping Into Truth, the podcast where we take on the issues of race, gender and social justice. I'm your host Omkari Williams and I'm very happy that you're here with me today. I love doing this podcast. I'm privileged to speak with people who are out in the world making a difference with their day jobs, their programs, their art, their activism. If you would like to support me in doing this work, you can do so for as little as \$3 a month by becoming a member of my Patreon community. You can go to patreon.com/omkariwilliams to sign up. There's also a link on my website omkariwilliams.com.



Omkari Williams 01:04

As I record this interview, we in the United States are still struggling, and failing, to get the pandemic under control. One of the things that this has meant for me is that I've had a lot more time to read. And one of the books that came across my radar is Tomboy, a book that looks at a segment of the population that I completely identified with. Today, I get to speak with the woman who wrote that book about what she learned and what it means for us as a society. Lisa Selin Davis is the author of Tomboy along with two novels Belly and Lost Stars. Her articles and essays have appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal salon, The Guardian, Yahoo, and many other publications. It is my great pleasure to welcome Lisa to the podcast. Hi, Lisa.



Lisa Selin Davis 01:57

Hi.



Omkari Williams 01:58

How are you?



Lisa Selin Davis 01:59

I'm as well as I can be in these crazy times, you know, you?



Omkari Williams 02:05

Pretty much the same. You know, I mostly stopped asking people that question because that's generally the answer that I get. But every now and then old habits kick in. You know?



Lisa Selin Davis 02:18

It's kind of like, if you say you're doing great, is that okay? You know, yeah, that's really hard to answer that today.



Omkari Williams 02:26

Yeah, it's like, oh, I don't really think I should say I'm doing great because that just makes me sound like I am completely clueless. Anyway, let's dive in. Because I really have a lot of thoughts about your book, and I want to make sure we have time to get to as many of them as we can. And the first thought I had when I read your book is that we as a society are completely obsessed with putting people into boxes, Democrat, Republican, straight, queer, male, female, and that this labeling, because it mostly happens to us as children really shapes us as individuals.



Omkari Williams 03:07

And that that has serious implications, not only for us as individuals, but also for our society as a whole. And having been someone who was described as a tomboy when I was a kid, I remember having this feeling that that meant something very specific. And that that was a container. So when I read in your book that one of the white middle class's,

great projects of the 19th century was breeding the white race, which directly connects to the struggle we're witnessing right now with racial justice and equity. I thought, "They actually had a project to breed the white race?". So I know it's a big place to jump in. But can we jump in there?



Lisa Selin Davis 03:59

Yeah. We can jump in there. And there's so much to talk about, I have to figure out how to focus. But in the 19th century, a lot of white, upper middle and middle class women were expected to be wearing up to 25 pounds of restrictive clothing. And the ideal for those women was to remain in the domestic sphere. And part of being feminine was to be frail and weak. And all of that was really prized for these women. And the problem with that, for white people was, it wasn't good for procreating. So they began to understand and when I say they, I guess, you know, that's part of the problem, who is who is "they" is always the question. But the society in general the kind of white upper middle class society began to understand that having a healthful childhood would lead to better chances of procreation as the white birth rate was declining. So, tomboyism was encouraged for young girls so that they would have these healthful youths that made them better able to procreate once they hit puberty. So that kind of tomboyism movement of the 19th century was really connected to eugenics and breeding the white race.



Omkari Williams 05:36

Okay. Well, but then I'm assuming that as soon as they popped out two or three or four kids, then the strictures came back and it was back to the 25 pounds of clothing.



Lisa Selin Davis 05:52

Absolutely and and the whole ultra feminine gender role that they were expected to assume. And once they were done with their healthy tree climbing, baseball playing childhood, you know, once puberty hit, all of that was expected to end and then you take your place in the domestic sphere. So it was this taste of freedom, but by no means were these girls expected to grow up to become feminist women. However many of them did. Many of them got their kind of first taste of freedom and didn't want to relinquish it. So although this hasn't been carefully studied, I did feel that there was a connection between kind of late 19th century tomboyism and first wave feminism and the suffrage movement. And I think when you look at a lot of the quote unquote great women and you know, they're they're almost always white women, but biographies of the great women of the

19th and early 20th century. Almost all of them claimed to have been tomboys when they were kids.



Omkari Williams 07:06

That is fascinating to me. That's absolutely fascinating and unsurprising, because once you have that experience of freedom, why would you want to go back to a so much more restrictive life? But the thing that also really interests me is just the fact that even then there was this awareness that "they", being the powers that be, needed to make sure that white people were reproducing at whatever they decided was an acceptable number. And that they were intentionally creating a structure that would support that. So that in a society where still there were, you know, a lot of enslaved people and a lot of people who were indigenous to the United States. So the proportions were probably were not as high of white to people of color as they would become it seems like that was part of their intention was to make sure that they kept increasing the disparity in those numbers so that white people were more and more of the population.



Lisa Selin Davis 08:20

Yes, and there are, you know, waves of immigration, immigration throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. So, all every time there's a wave of immigration, specifically, not just from people of color, but from from people who became white in America, right. But her were not thought of as white as the time, Jews and Italians and Irish and people who then become part of the white race once they get integrated into America. And each time there are these waves, it stokes those fears. And what's really interesting about thinking about that in today's context is is how those fears that white people had are, are going to be realized. Because the projections are that by 2045, white people will not be the majority. I think they're about 70% right now, but, but very soon, white people will not be in the majority of this country. So the thing they feared most is going to happen. And rather than trying to force the birthing rate of white people up, you know, what white people need to do is figure out how to live in a diverse and integrated society, and share more and be less terrified of that. And it's pretty fascinating to see how that fear lingers in this country.



Omkari Williams 09:54

That's a whole other conversation.



Lisa Selin Davis 09:56

Yeah.



Omkari Williams 09:59

But yeah, I mean, it's really interesting to witness that, especially in this moment with this president and all of the divisive racist rhetoric that's being flung around lately.



Lisa Selin Davis 10:13

Yeah, I mean, it's all old rhetoric. You know, it's, it's what they were using, you know, in the mid 19th century to get these girls to climb trees and live like tomboy so they could do their duty and make white people.



Omkari Williams 10:29

Well, that hey, sorting isn't didn't work out for them, right anticipated.



Lisa Selin Davis 10:34

Right.



Omkari Williams 10:34

And I'm fine with that. So something else that really interested me was the connection between being a tomboy and race because you describe a history in media up to the 1970s and 80s of tomboys being dark haired with darker skin. And, you know, sort of as you described it, and I'm quoting here, "white girls, co-opting facets of Blackness and what white people thought of as Black women's inherent masculinity". And that kind of stopped me cold. I thought, Wow, what a weird thing, but when I thought about it, and I thought about images of tomboys that I'd seen, I mean, you know, Jo in Little Women is not the blonde.



Lisa Selin Davis 11:25

Right.



Omkari Williams 11:26

I realized, yeah, they were all dark haired and you know, somewhat, just darker skin. They weren't fair and blonde, like Amy.



Lisa Selin Davis 11:36

Yeah.



Omkari Williams 11:37

And that was a really interesting thing. And I thought, isn't it funny how that shifted all of a sudden. And I'm wondering what you think precipitated the shift to tomboy sort of being blonder and just generally, honestly girlier than in some ways than they used to be?



Lisa Selin Davis 12:02

Yeah. Well, there are two scholars who did really interesting and important work on this one's name is Michelle Abate, and she wrote about mostly tomboys and literature and a little bit in media, and the other is Renee Sentilles. And she wrote about 19th and early 20th century tomboys more in the material culture than in the popular culture and I learned a lot from both of their books. And both of them talk about how these early tomboys are portrayed as dark haired, and their, you know, their skin is dark and because they're playing out in the sun. And if we're talking about that ultimate femininity of frailty, you know, those women were not in the sun. They were as pale as can be, that was part of being the ultimate feminine white woman, you know is to have incredibly pale skin.



Lisa Selin Davis 13:04

And so these girls that are outside being rough and tumble, are also connecting themselves in some ways to white people's idea of what Black girls are like. And, you know, Black girls are not necessarily outside playing in the sun, some of them are enslaved and constricted to hard labor. And so they're not being tomboys as a way of expressing freedom. It's quite the opposite. And so this way of explaining their more masculine behavior of these girls, especially in the popular culture and literature, is that they take on some facets of Blackness and that continues, for the most part, until the 1970s.



Lisa Selin Davis 13:57

And what happens in the 1970s is basically feminism and a lot of white feminism. And that

message that being tomboyish doesn't alter your status as a female at all. And so you don't have to take on these facets of Blackness. You don't have to explain it with dark hair and dark skin. Blonde girls can be tomboys too, but it's also it's still not actually making room for tomboys of different races. In the media or in literature. It's still very much a white phenomenon. In fact, perhaps whiter, right? Where the kids, the tomboys get even blonder and blue eyed. But it also kind of excuses it and makes it available to a whole section of girls who might have felt cut off from it in its earlier iterations. So it's always that so many different things are happening at once.



Omkari Williams 15:08

Mm hmm.



Lisa Selin Davis 15:08

But that's that's what happens in the 70s is tomboys go from being dark haired and dark skin to being blonde and light eyed.



Omkari Williams 15:19

And I think it's very interesting that that was happening in the 70s. Because as you said, feminism, white feminism specifically. But these gendered roles at that point were coming under attack in some ways. They were being questioned in a way that they hadn't been questioned in a long time. So, you know, the idea that men are self reliant and express leadership while women are empathetic and compassionate. All of that was being questioned as the default. It's like, well, is that necessarily true? You know, Maybe yes, maybe no, but that was a question that was asked mostly for white women.



Omkari Williams 16:05

For Black women the idea of empathy and compassion wasn't really part of the description. I mean, you know, yes, Black women were given the task often of raising children, but it was always with a different energy to it. And it's strikes me as really funny that white feminism still encouraged, in its own way, that different energy of Black women being tougher and you know, more aggressive. And even in their parenting, you know, stricter with the kids. And it's just fascinating to me that we still are seeing not, I'm not going to say the remnants because I don't think it's remnants, I think it's still a very clear division in how Black women and white women are perceived. And that no one thinks it's odd that Black women are leading so much of this movement towards equity right now

because they feel like yeah, of course, you know, that's, you know, Black women are tough. Well, you know, I think yeah, we are because we've had to be, but I don't think that that's an inherent thing.



Lisa Selin Davis 17:20

Right. Well, that question of what's biology what what's culture is, you know, throughout the book asking that, and how do we untangle those? And know, but also throughout the book is this discussion of the different standards for white and Black girls, not just white and Black women. And how, you know, why are Black girls punished so much more than white girls in school? And what is seen as empowerment for white girls, standing up for themselves. We worked on for years equity issues for girls and getting more girls in STEM and having them feel more confident and comfortable speaking up in class. And then we find that for white girls, that stuff is encouraged. And often for Black girls, that stuff is punished. You know, those same behaviors. And so those inequities rear themselves together in interesting ways with race and gender, their entanglement and the unfairness.



Omkari Williams 18:26

I remember being chastised in school for speaking up in ways that my white friends were not. And I was very aware of it. I mean, I don't know that I necessarily put it down to race, but I was very aware that I was being held to a different standard, and I didn't really understand why that was the case. And now looking back, I think how much damage was done to both groups, both ways. Girls and Black girls with that double standard and how we are so trying now to unpack and unlearn some of those behaviors. And I think it's really going to be critical to how we move forward as a society to decouple race from, well, everything. But specifically in this conversation decouple race from what is allowable for a woman and what is not allowable for a woman or girl.



Lisa Selin Davis 19:35

Yeah.



Omkari Williams 19:36

It's really challenging as, especially as an ex tomboy, I mean, I loved that freedom. And I was fortunate. I mean, I grew up in a family that was like, you want to do something, do it. Just, you know, as long as it's not going to kill you or you're going to be bleeding on the street, you're good. But not everyone has that experience and that freedom and it makes

a difference. I mean, there's a high school across the street from where I live. And I look at the girls as they're walking around. And it's so interesting to watch the behaviors and then to look at the boys and see what they do. And see how you can tell, as they go through the different years of school, you know, they get more and more timid, but constrained. And that that is something I feel like when you're a tomboy, you have a freedom that other girls don't have. And that that's actually something we should be building into all kids is just that freedom, aside from gender and how do we decouple gender and race from our raising of children so that they're just people?



Lisa Selin Davis 20:54

That is such an interesting question. And right now, there's so much emphasis on being honest about and talking about social categories and implicit bias. And so until there's equity, we have to really talk about race and talk about categories. But the goal is that when you have equity, when you have equal access to resources and opportunities, then it can fade more to the background. But, obviously, pretending that there weren't inequities, and the kind of colorblind approach was 100% ineffective in creating more equity.



Lisa Selin Davis 21:38

However, when it comes to gender and kids, you know, I couldn't agree with you more about what you've said about making people feel that they have that freedom that you had as a kid. And, you know, that was really also promoted in the 1970s of let girls have access to what's on the boy, side. And there was so much backlash after that, that we got to the world we're in now, of really hyper gendering kids material and psychic worlds. Hyper dividing everything about their lives into pink and blue. And, you know, my contention is that it's really bad for their psychological health and very confusing for any child who is not going to line up neatly on one side of that line.



Lisa Selin Davis 22:26

So I think there is a way to decouple gender from from kids material and psychic worlds. But it requires parents to do things a little differently and it requires marketers to do things a lot differently. So not abiding the pink/blue divide. And you know, putting boys on Lego Friends packaging and having feminine boys be the stars of adventure shows and you know, having gender diverse kids in all kinds of roles. And also parents just not making decisions about their, what they sign their kids up for, and who they encourage their kids to play with and how they treat their kids. But they have to be, just like with race, they have to be aware of it before they can change it.



Omkari Williams 23:16

It's so interesting that you mentioned marketing, because I grew up with a mother who would not ever let me buy something pink.



Lisa Selin Davis 23:29

Ah hah.



Omkari Williams 23:30

Which really, really made me angry because pink is actually a really good color for me. And so,



Omkari Williams 23:38

Yeah, I see that.



Omkari Williams 23:40

I like this color this color. Let me wear pink. It's like nope, nope, nope. Not gonna happen while I'm still buying your clothing. All right. So you know, now I have a wardrobe full of pink, but I didn't understand it at the time. But now looking back, I realized that she was trying to protect me from getting stuck in a box. And then that box was being driven by Madison Avenue. And this is "what girls do" box and this is "what boys do" box. And we're still deep in that with our marketing. I mean it's 2020 and you still see it all the time. And I actually find that kind of shocking.



Lisa Selin Davis 24:24

Yeah, it is kind of shocking because it's so regressive. And, and it's also shocking because it's just so effective. It's so good for selling stuff. You know, people if they bought a pink stroller for when they got a prenatal test and found out they're having a girl and they got a pink stroller and then they second time around, they're having a boy and they're like, I can't use this stroller, it's pink. And that message about you've got to reject what's culturally marked as feminine which was big in the 70s. That was part of the 1970s tomboy hate it was not just, you can have access to what's on the boys side of the line, but you got to reject what's on the girls side of the line. And from the research I did, I came to see that as also very harmful because boys internalize that message. And then everybody learns

that traditional femininity is a bad thing, whether it's the color pink, or it's being kind and other centered and empathetic, right? We put so much over the pink side of the pink/blue divide. And a lot of the stuff on there is good. And by the way, I'm with you on pink, I love pink. But I don't think the answer is to get girls to reject what's feminine. I think the answer is to get boys to accept what's feminine and in fact to stop calling it feminine and to stop thinking of pink as the girls color. And to open up as much of childhood as possible. Whether that's toys, playmates activities, personality traits to boys, girls and everyone in between. Because all kids learn to use girly as an insult.



Omkari Williams 26:15

Right.



Lisa Selin Davis 26:15

And what kind of message is that? So in our in our house after I learned about this research about devaluing femininity, I just made this announcement of like, nothing has a gender. Pink does not have a gender and rainbows, unicorns, sparkles, hearts, none of that is for one kind of child. And if you look objectively out what is put on the pink side of the line, a lot of it is great stuff. I mean, you start thinking like, wait, boys have to say they hate rainbows. Like why would anybody hate a rainbow? Pink is, I don't like all shades of pink, but it's basically the color of sunsets and flowers. Why, why? Why do we have to hate it? It just doesn't make any sense. So, it seems clear to me that the most psychologically healthy people are people who don't feel they have to reject something because of the way it's gendered.



Omkari Williams 27:23

And I think that that also has implications beyond gender. Because I think what happens is when we start telling kids that this or that is good or bad, and it's just a default, that extends into other things. You know, it's like if you think that being like in pink makes you girly and a sissy, then you're also going to be more readily susceptible I think to thinking that being blonde is better than being a brunette or being brown or being Black or being Asian. Or, you know, I think that once we start telling kids that these things that they clearly see, have inherent value, that it makes it much easier for them to assign value to other traits, and sustain racist ideologies and sustain sexist ideologies. Whereas if we just said, this is who people are, you like what you like, you do what you do that would disrupt some of that training. I'm wondering what you think about that?



Lisa Selin Davis 28:41

Yeah, I'm with you on that. That's part of my mission in this book is to also to get people to see how they're participating in it. When you don't dress your little boy in pink because it's not a boys color. What history are you tapping into there and what message are you sending to your son about he shouldn't respect what's for girls or what's in girls territory. And I don't see how you can do that and then raise a feminist son. But you but most parents don't realize that they're participating in it. They don't realize they're treating their kids differently. They think there's gender equity, they think we've come so far. A lot of them remember having a, if they were raised in the 70s and early 80s, they remember having a tomboy childhood or knowing a lot of tomboys.



Lisa Selin Davis 29:34

They don't notice that there are very few running around on the playground today. And to be aware of how we're participating in this in our parenting is part of shifting it and I really just, you know, the way I did it was by getting hysterical and just screaming, like everyone is wearing pink in this household, we are not doing this. (laughter) But it actually, it worked. I mean, my super, you know, masculine or tomboyish daughter or whatever you want to call her. After that she had a pink ponytail. And she got a, we go to a family music camp every year, and she bought the pink shirt there. And so did my husband. We all bought the pink shirt, it was on sale for \$5. But I don't think generally that just yelling really loud that nothing has a gender is is the best way. But it was a start for my family of I don't want to participate in this. I don't want marketers to decide what's appropriate for my family.



Omkari Williams 30:40

Yeah. And because of course it's not just what do you buy? It's how do you think. I read something the other day about how one of the knocks on Kamala Harris as being Biden's VP pick is that she's ambitious.



Lisa Selin Davis 31:01

Right. And there was the thing about Amy Klobuchar being what was the word about her the way she handled? She was abrupt or something. Yeah, she treated her employees who can't remember the word. I mean, all all of these things are you just wouldn't even ask a man.



Omkari Williams 31:16

Oh, my God, no.



Lisa Selin Davis 31:18

That's just leadership for men.



Omkari Williams 31:19

Exactly. And of course, they would be ambitious, what's wrong with them? If they're not, you know, and it's so... So all of this really feeds into so many of the issues we're trying to confront. It's like, if you keep trying to put people in little boxes based on their gender, or their sexual orientation or how they present in the world, then you're going to keep having so many of the problems that we see and you're going to keep having to fight the same fights over and over. I mean, I was just kind of, I didn't know whether to bang my head on the desk or laugh when I read the thing about Kamala Harris.



Lisa Selin Davis 32:01

Yeah.



Omkari Williams 32:02

Yeah, ambition is a bad word for females got it. Right, right. still fighting that fight.



Lisa Selin Davis 32:10

Right.



Omkari Williams 32:10

You know, it's just it's it's absurd.



Lisa Selin Davis 32:13

I mean, what woman would be holding public office if she were not ambitious? It doesn't get handed to you. You weren't reared to do it. Like, you know, so many men were just reared to go on this path and women have to fight their way onto the path.



Omkari Williams 32:32

Yeah, it's just, it's ludicrous. And yet here we are, you know, we're still having this conversation. years after I thought that this conversation would be gone from our minds entirely, but not yet.



Lisa Selin Davis 32:48

You know, I was, I was remembering. I cannot remember when this is from but this morning I was thinking about someone I feel like maybe it was Kimba Wood. A woman who was going to be nominated for the supreme court? And she had to recuse herself because she had a housekeeper paid off the books. And I was just I this just popped into my head this morning. Did, has anyone ever asked a man? You know, did anyone ask Brett Kavanaugh have you paid a housekeeper off the books? Come on. That's I'm sure they have had plenty of staff. Because but no one asked him because he's not expected to tend to the domestic sphere.



Omkari Williams 33:34

Right.



Lisa Selin Davis 33:34

And, you know, I think in order to be an ambitious woman, it means sacrificing all kinds of things that people think you're supposed to embrace you know. Like you, you it's hard to be ambitious, and a full time stay at home mom. It's hard to be ambitious and you know hyper feminine because that implies you know, a certain kind of demureness that doesn't necessarily go with ambition. So...



Omkari Williams 34:03

Exactly, yeah. I mean, the dichotomy between what we are told and what is actually expected, I think is as strong now as it's ever been in my lifetime, certainly. And it's going to be really interesting over the next few years, I think to see how this conversation shakes out. Especially when you include transgender people and non binary people in the conversation because that right there is pushing really hard on some of the basic structures of our society of this patriarchal society that we live in. And it's, I think it's going to be one of the things that shifts us off of this playing field that we're currently on because those people are just outside of what we have decided as a society is the norm.

And they're going to make us shift the norm. And I think that's fantastic. I'm really excited about that, because the norm kind of sucks. So, yeah.



Lisa Selin Davis 35:14

I mean, one of the questions I asked over and over again, when I was writing this is where did I get my idea of normal for all kinds of things? Who decided for me what was normal for boys and girls? Who decided that those are the only two categories? Who decided that you have to stay in them based on your birth? And I had to question my assumptions over and over again, which, by the way, was like a wonderful, an exciting thing for my brain to do.



Omkari Williams 35:45

Yeah.



Lisa Selin Davis 35:45

You know, and I think most people are wanting to avoid that at all costs. But I think it's one of the great human possibilities is to see the world from multiple points of view. If you can spend a lot of time trying to understand with people who have a very different life experience than you, then you really get to be a human.



Omkari Williams 36:08

You've just defined empathy.



Lisa Selin Davis 36:11

Oh, is that what it fits? Yeah.



Omkari Williams 36:13

Pretty sure? Yep. Yeah. And it's the thing that keeps us moving, I think in the struggle for racial justice. And the struggle for justice for trans people, in this struggle for equal rights for all people is empathy and just being able to say, "Oh, I have some clue as to what the world looks like from where you're standing". And that is, I think, honestly, the great human challenge because we can really get stuck in our our points of view and moving

out of them requires doing that thinking that, truthfully doesn't come that naturally necessarily.



Lisa Selin Davis 36:59

Right, because our instinct is to protect ourselves. And we also are living in these silos more than ever before and constructing our realities. We can, you know, read news sources that reinforce our points of view. We can block people who disagree with us. So we can dig our heels in, in deeper ways than ever before. And the problem with that is the whole project of America is to accommodate lots of different kinds of people and how do we do that, at the interpersonal level, and at the policy level if we're not empathizing? You know, which is, you know, why it's, it's hard, you know, having a real sociopath for a president. It's so horrible to see a lack of empathy translated into policy. I mean, it always has been right and, you know, with all kinds of racist policies. It's not like this is new, but the explicitness of it is painful and jaw dropping. And maybe important for people like me, who because it wasn't quite as explicit before, could ignore it. Maybe. Maybe that's why this is the breaking point is he's just so but he's so ill, you know his lack of empathy, it's such a sickness.



Omkari Williams 38:24

I was going to say pretty much exactly what you just said, which is, we probably needed to have it be this jaw droppingly clear what we are actually confronting in order to move out of our comfort zones and confront it as a larger society. Because it was easy for a lot of us to ignore what was going on people. There's a significant number of people in this country who are quite comfortable, and it was easy to just say, Oh, no, things are better.



Omkari Williams 39:00

Then those of us who have been uncomfortable pushing and all the time, kind of finally get a little bit of a break from the pushing, because people are saying, "Oh, yeah, I see what you're talking about", as opposed to "Oh, you know, you're really just imagining that", right? You know, because actually, no, we're really not just imagining this.



Omkari Williams 39:23

So, our time is almost up. And I just wanted to ask you, two more things. One thing is when you were writing this book, because one of the things that I really thought about when I was reading it, a question I had was, who would we be? What might we accomplish if we

didn't have the burden of gender based expectations on us? And I wonder if that was something that you thought about when you were writing this book? So the potential of people?

 Lisa Selin Davis 39:57

Well, it's a great question. And a difficult one to answer. Because, in some ways, we're seeing that with increasing visibility of trans and non binary people who are saying, I'm not staying in the category you put me in. So we'd be, if we accepted and accommodated those differences, then we would really be a pluralistic society that sort of figured out how to navigate and embrace difference, and live peacefully. And I love that idea. But until we learn to accept that people simply have different realities. And we don't always know who's right. What we know is that we have to figure out how to respect and accommodate those differences. So I believe that if we focus on reducing the gendering of kids material and psychic worlds and let them play and kind of try to really smush the paint blue divide into one big magenta area where everyone can play, that we create more empathetic, kinder, more generous human beings. And I think that's what the research on tomboys shows that. And also on some trans kids who are facilitated and accepted by their parents, that they tend to, these kids who defy the norms themselves, tend to be more accepting of other people who defy norms. So I want to widen the norms. You know?



Omkari Williams 41:45

I really love that partly because not only does it mean that the kids get to be freer and themselves, but we adults have to be freer to allow that. So we're creating the space for them to do that to be themselves by expanding who we are as individuals, adult individuals. And so I really appreciate that. I think that that's, that feels very helpful to me. And I'd like to end by asking you to just give us a couple of tips for how to do the non gendering that we've been talking about and how to just really let people be who they are.

 Lisa Selin Davis 42:33

Well, you said something a few minutes ago, that is key. You talked about being uncomfortable. And I think that is the most important thing to think about. In this time that we're in, in general, is we have to get we have to be comfortable being uncomfortable. So what I am talking about is having any boy who has an interest in wearing a dress and wants to wear pink, and just letting them. And not saying anything about it. And I am talking about buying not only buying all these toys for all kids, but

really, really, really pushing back against the stereotyped messaging on the packaging of the toys, in the culture, in the TV shows they watch, and trying to introduce them to expanded concepts of gender. It's very similar with the way we have to work very early with kids in terms of race and implicit bias. You know, that the same way they have figured out racial categories early on, they figured out gender categories and then they rank them. So they make they rank themselves and where they are and they rank boys higher than girls, and all of this stuff is happening so early. So we have to counteract those messages in a really proactive way. You know, and you can always stand up in your living room and just scream, "Pink is for everybody", at the top of your lungs. (laughter) You know, you can, you can start there.



Omkari Williams 44:26

I will remember that. Well, thank you so much, Lisa. I am so glad that I got to speak with you today. This has been great. And I do believe that we as a society will make a big leap forward when we stop pigeonholing people and just allow each of us to simply be just who we are full out, all the time. So thank you so much for your book and for the work you're doing.



Lisa Selin Davis 44:53

Thank you so much for your interest in and for this really interesting conversation. I really appreciate it.



Omkari Williams 44:59

Thanks!



Omkari Williams 45:01

Thank you all for joining me for this conversation. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. I want to remind you that we need the stories of all people and change starts with story. So keep sharing yours, and I will be back with another episode of Stepping Into Truth very soon.