

Steve McGuire:

Carole, thanks for joining us on *Higher Ed Now*.

Carole Hooven:

Thank you so much for having me. I'm delighted to be here.

Steve McGuire:

So, I want to talk to you today, primarily, about academic freedom and truth-seeking as the primary mission of a university, as well as some of the unfortunate experiences that you've had in your career as an academic.

But first, let me ask you about your area of expertise, what you research and teach about, sex differences, which is, I think, an inherently controversial subject or certainly one that can invite controversy.

And you're the author of a book, *T: The Story of Testosterone, the Hormone that Dominates and Divides Us*. And in this book, you argue that there are biological causes of differences between men and women. Some people would like to say that these differences are all cultural or social.

Could you just tell us a little bit about what you argue in the book and why that's important?

Carole Hooven:

Sure. I'll just start off with my area of expertise. It's broadly human evolutionary biology, and I specialized in behavioral endocrinology. So, that behavioral endocrinology is all about the relationship, which is bidirectional between our hormones, our nervous system, and our behavior and culture.

So, I find that a really powerful and interesting way to understand who we are as humans and animals on this planet. And I studied chimpanzees in the wild before I came to Harvard, and the sex differences in the chimps are so blatantly obvious and so is the fact that they don't have human culture.

So, there's a shared evolutionary history. There's shared anatomy and physiology. And in particular, when it comes to sex differences, hormones are really important, particularly the reproductive hormones, estrogen and testosterone.

And that's ultimately what really got me interested in human sex differences and specifically taking an evolutionary biological approach to understanding their origins. So, while my book was specifically looking at sex differences through the lens of testosterone, really, my focus is on hormones and the endocrine system, and how it shapes behavior more generally.

So, you mentioned something about sex differences being controversial. What's controversial isn't really the existence of sex differences, it's the debates about or explanations for why those sex differences exist.

So, the less controversial explanation focuses on social causes of sex differences with the idea being that we are identified as male or female, or now we would say assigned male or female at birth, which I'm not in favor of using that terminology, but we are recognized by our genitalia as belonging to one sex or the other.

And then, we are streamlined socially into one sex role replete with stereotypical explanations, which just happened to be very consistent across cultures and times and even with non-human animals.

So, that is all just some coincidence in my view, according to this narrative that our cultural scripts so closely... the results of that would match so closely, say, what we see in non-human animals. And just

looking at the chimpanzees, for instance, they don't have cultural scripts, but you see the similar kinds of behaviors in males being more dominant and aggressive than the females who are more nurturing.

The reason, I think, that is controversial is because another narrative, which is based on faulty logic, is that if something is natural or is genetically a result of our inherited biology, it's immune to change. And that the expression of the traits that we think differentiate males and females is inevitable.

And of course, that's just not true. You just need to look around the planet and see that there's tremendous diversity based on culture that varies by culture, not genes in sex differences. And in the ways that people express, what I would say, are something like a male or female nature.

That's not essentialist. That doesn't mean that all males are one way and all females or another way. There's variability. But culture and laws, and norms, and religion have a huge amount of influence over how we express ourselves.

So, that's just one bit of evidence to show that just because we inherited predispositions that can help to explain broad patterns of behavior, that doesn't mean that though the expression of certain behaviors is inevitable.

Or what we inherit or what is natural is good. Of course, there are plenty of things that we inherit through our genes, plenty kinds of predispositions, which are bad, including disease or violence. And so, those are really not based in reason.

I think those are fears that have come to dominate the discourse around sex differences, which people then... I think, there's a knee-jerk reaction to resist biological explanations for group differences, in general, and to embrace those that are based in culture.

Of course, all behavioral complex behavior is a result of interactions between environment and inherited biology. But there's a tremendous amount that we can do with the environment to shape human behavior. And there's no need to resist one explanation or the other.

It's never only culture or only behavior. And that's something that everybody needs to appreciate. We have to understand the contribution of both kinds of forces. That's really, really important to understanding who we are.

Steve McGuire:

Okay. So, do you have an example that you could use to illustrate why it would be important to take biology into account when you're talking about sex differences?

Carole Hooven:

Sure, sure. And I gave an example in my book that was relevant to me as a grad student at Harvard and just finishing my PhD. I think I had just finished my PhD and I was getting ready to teach my first class, which just so happened to be on the evolution of human sex differences.

And then, the president of Harvard, at the time, Larry Summers, spoke at a closed conference that was designed to discuss the source of the problem of what was perceived to be a problem, and which I think is a problem, underrepresentation of women in STEM fields.

Larry's explanation invoked both biological and cultural inputs to this output of women being underrepresented in STEM. And he talked about predispositions that differentiate males and females that might make females less, for one thing, interested in pursuing STEM fields.

But in addition, there are biological constraints, basically, imposed on females that are not imposed on males, which have to do with reproduction, i.e. gestating the offspring and nursing them. I found this very interesting at the time, and I was really excited that the president of Harvard was talking about this stuff because I knew that this is the conversation that we need to have if we're really going to tackle this problem.

But then, first of all, this was great for my class because over 100 students showed up for my first seminar that I'd ever taught, which was supposed to be 12 people. And that was very exciting.

But he was [inaudible 00:11:42]. And he ended up leaving the presidency. I'm not sure that it was a direct consequence of what he had said, but it certainly gave people an excuse to push him out.

You asked for an example of when it's important to acknowledge the contribution of biology and of environment. And for any social problem that involves complex behaviors and group differences, of course, the solution has something to do with the cause.

And if we think the cause is just social and that people are following these social scripts, you're going to try to force a square into a round hole, essentially, or shape or something.

Steve McGuire:

So, there's a long history in the background here, which you talk about in your book. And I am obviously quite aware of philosophers and scientists making claims about how women are really biologically inferior to men in certain ways, say in terms of their intellect, in terms of their disposition.

I'm thinking of Aristotle, you mentioned Charles Darwin in your book, if someone hears somebody say there are biological reasons for why there are fewer women in STEM fields or that there are biological reasons for why the people to reach the pinnacle of those fields are less likely to be women. People, right away, are going to have probably a negative reaction to that if they're concerned about equality between the sexes. But also, in terms of how we deal with that information, they could be worried about the implications that that might have about social, cultural narratives, about policies.

I mean, if it were the case that women are biologically restrained from having interest, as you said, in going into, say, certain STEM fields or succeeding as much as men, let's say, in those fields, obviously we're on controversial territory here, some people might say, "Well, maybe the idea of parity between the sexes in those fields is not a policy we should pursue."

"Maybe we shouldn't be spending so much time talking about it." "Maybe we shouldn't be investing so many resources in it in trying to encourage women to go into STEM." I think, you would probably agree that those would be legitimate concerns that people might have, right?

Carole Hooven:

Yeah. So, Larry Summers was offering reasonable hypotheses based on the evidence available.

So, what should have happened in that conference was that there was a discussion about the evidence and its implications, the strength of the evidence and what does it mean.

So, if it's true, which I believe it is true based on the evidence, that on average, and this is important and this is what we need to acknowledge, and this is what we need to teach in all levels of education on average means that there is overlap between populations, a huge amount of variability. But that if we see patterns emerging in various domains, if we see more women in the helping and say teaching professions, and more men in the more risky, super competitive professions, and that includes things

like firefighting or working in a coal mine, or going to war, for instance, then we cannot just assume this is because of a cultural script.

I think it is totally reasonable to assume that there is a genetic hormonal contribution or just a contributions having to do just with reproductive differences. So, there are biological contributions to those outcomes and those deserve to be investigated and discussed.

The problem is that you're not allowed to openly discussed and even research in many cases the topics that we need to really understand group differences because of what you just said, because the implications are not clear.

The implications for group differences are misunderstood. I'm in favor of equality of opportunity, and I think that's incredibly important. And if we strive for equality of opportunity, and of course, economically, this is also very complicated because what needs to happen is that the things like teaching and helping professions, of course, need to be better compensated because it happens to be that the men gravitate more towards professions in which they can achieve high status and more money and power, basically.

And that's a very deep issue economically in capitalism. And that's something I'm not prepared to address. So, what I think you said is right. I think the answer is open discussion, debate, and research, and using evidence-based reasoning, and policies, and being very, very clear about the implications of average differences.

The problem is that we are not clear in teaching about implications because we just avoid the topic altogether, and instead substitute it with, "Look, this is all about culture and the patriarchy, and that's where we have to focus our efforts."

Steve McGuire:

Okay. And in your book, you talked about an early experience you, yourself, had where you experienced, I think, a moral revulsion in the classroom, reading, I forget if it was an article or a book, but-

Carole Hooven:

Article.

Steve McGuire:

It was an article and it made some claims about the history of sexuality, I guess, or why men have evolved in certain ways.

Carole Hooven:

Evolution of rape, yeah.

Steve McGuire:

And so, you had this moral revulsion. And you recount that nobody was really there with you. The professor was saying, you need to make arguments. You need to look at the evidence in advance that.

But then, I think, you also have found in your own teaching and then, of course, in your experiences, which we'll talk about in a minute, that people do have this experience of moral revulsion, society set up taboos, that seems like an equally natural human thing in a certain way, and presumably, that has evolutionary causes or reasons, as well.

And again, like you were saying earlier, there may be positive reasons or not. I'm just wondering if you... obviously this is, I think, sensitive because of what you've gone through, but do you have any thoughts on those sorts of reactions and any positive role they might have in human society and how that relates?

Because I certainly agree with you that we need, especially in the context of a university, to follow the truth or the science wherever it leads, but this is obviously, also, a common reaction that needs to be managed, right?

Carole Hooven:

Yes. Steve, your questions are too good and too detailed, and too interesting for me to give these shorter responses because I want to talk for another couple hours about what you just asked.

So, I am going to do my best to be brief, but I can't resist just going back to the classroom where I, as a grad student, like a second year grad student, experienced that moral revulsion because that was such a pivotal point for me, and I think it illustrates the point that I'm trying to make, which is something can feel.

So, what we were talking about in the classroom, we were reading a paper about the evolution of rape. I have a history of sexual assault, like many women do. I read a paper suggesting that this has evolutionary origins and is in fact adaptive for men and that's why they do it.

Because I am an emotional person, which I think why I'm drawn to this whole field because it allows me to use evidence to consider my responses. So, I was reading this paper in this small graduate discussion group with a male professor, who became a good friend, and I was angry and I was not letting... the evidence wasn't coming into my brain.

All that was happening is my body was aroused, and I was angry, really, because I was hurt and felt vulnerable. In my way of dealing with that is to just push back and lash out, which is what I did in the classroom in this seminar. And I said, "When it was my turn to talk?"

I said, "This guy is an asshole." And that's just not what you're supposed to do as a scientist. You're not supposed to attack the character of people you disagree with. But this was like 2002, and I hadn't read my own book yet.

And I thought that this was correct. Of course, we dismissed this hypothesis. It's ridiculous. It's hurting my feelings. And the professor, I think if it was today, he might've reacted very differently.

A little coddling might've happened, which thank God it because he treated me like an adult and like a scientist and said, look at the evidence. Look at the evidence. Look at the evidence. And I finally did look at the evidence.

And that was just super empowering for me because it helped me to understand the world and to understand men. And that was why I was in graduate school, not just to understand men, but figure out how to learn these techniques to make sense of the world in a way that I found very powerful.

And I think most people do using the tools of science and evidence. So, this is what I try to teach my students. It works. Everybody responds emotionally. Everybody brings in their preconceptions.

And there are certain ideas that seem repulsive. Well, let's explore that. Maybe they're right, and if they are, you really want to know because that's something you'd want to deal with. If reality is repulsive in that way, what do we do about it?

And I think those reactions are adaptive, and that's wired into us. And I want to understand how that works, too. So, if I feel it happening in me, I can recognize it and draw on the tools that I have learned as a scientist.

And that's what I try to do in my work. That's what I try to do in my book. That's just learning the truth and how to see it and speak about it, and have conversations where you're not attacking somebody's character because of the view that they hold, like happened to Larry Summers, but you're challenging them on the evidence to try to figure out what's going on in the world.

Steve McGuire:

Yeah. There's a lot more I'd like to ask you about, too. You mentioned coddling. I think we can pick up what your take is on that and how it's detrimental to the purpose of a university if students are coddled.

But I really want to get to your story. So, if I understand correctly, you published your book. You get invited to a peer on Fox and Friends television program. And you're there to talk, I think if I recall correctly, about the claim that sex is binary in humans, and that there was people who were saying, we should talk about pregnant people instead of pregnant women, and that's sort of thing, or at least that's the context.

Maybe you can clarify that for me. You made a few statements based on your area of expertise, and then a graduate student in your program at Harvard took to Twitter and said that she respected you as a colleague, but was very upset by what you had said and that it was harmful to trans people, and that sort of thing.

And then, maybe start with that and then we can get into what happened after that.

Carole Hooven:

Sure. So, I was invited in response to an article that Katie Herzog had written in Bari Weiss's. I think at the time was a Substack. And the piece that Katie wrote was an investigative piece looking at what was happening in some medical schools, specifically, where instructors were... they even had audio linked to some audio.

I think they linked to audio. At least I heard the audio where medical school professors are apologizing up and down for using terms like pregnant women and male and female, and that they're being pushed, even bullied in some cases, by students and shamed because they're using the wrong language.

And that the language that they were using was not considered to be inclusive enough. So, I provided a quote in that article about the fact that these are our future medical professionals and that this is not a good idea, that they need to teach what they see as... they need to use clear language.

So, when I went on Fox News, they were covering that story, and I was brought in because I had just released my book. And I didn't say anything about pregnant, about women or pregnant women. I forget exactly what the terms were, because at the time, I didn't really care about those words.

I cared about male and female because I'd just written a book about sex differences and how testosterone helps to explain why we're so different and the importance of sex in behavior and culture.

So, for someone to say that instructors in medical school or anywhere in science should not be able to use the terms male and female, that I felt really needed to be addressed. And I pushed back and I said, "No, these are real biological reproductive categories. They're important. They're based on the kinds of gametes we produce."

And then, I said, "But these are just the facts of nature, and this doesn't prevent us from respecting everybody's gender expression and gender identity." And then, I went on to say that people are being punished for saying what I'm saying, and they're even losing their jobs and blah, blah, blah.

I was like, "But as science instructors, in particular, we can't be changing what we teach and the words we use based on the current ideology and based on what our students tell us they want us to use." I was like, "That's just not our job."

And so, then, what happened in response to that was... and I should just preface this whole thing by saying, first of all, my book was extremely well reviewed in the popular press and in the academic press. I was even praised as a sensitive and caring communicator of the science.

And that is consistent with my reputation at Harvard and my dealings with undergraduates. I, at the time, was the co-director of undergraduate studies in human evolutionary biology, and I had been teaching there for 20 years with outstanding teaching evaluations.

I was a very respected member of the Harvard community and had gotten my PhD there, and made a lot of contributions to the institution. So, what happened was the grad student director of our diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging committee in the department, her tweet read as "The director at Harvard evolutionary biology, equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging Committee, I am appalled and frustrated by the transphobic remarks of me with a link to the Fox News program."

So, she represented herself as speaking on behalf of Harvard, speaking on behalf of the department, accusing me of endangering the undergrads and basically being transphobic, which is ridiculous.

And everyone I have worked with for my entire career knows it, all the faculty in the department knows it, all the deans who've written letters saying that I'm doing an outstanding job know it, especially because of what I teach.

I get all kinds of students who are gender non-conforming, gender minorities, and I've had close relationships with them. And so, this accusation really hurt for me. And then, newspapers all over the world, online papers, actual print newspapers picked this up and it made the headlines.

The tweet went viral. And I fully expected that the higher ups in my department would have my back and would issue some statement that, "This person does not speak on behalf of the department. This is a valued member of our community, and we support her." Of course, that did not happen at all.

Steve McGuire:

Yeah. So, what can you tell us about the response from your internal to Harvard? I think that's a great point that you make, that the student represented herself as representing Harvard and this committee in your department.

And I think that's right, that ideally, the other powers that be at the institution would've issued some statement saying, "No, no, this is not representative of Harvard." And maybe there would've still been some interpersonal conflict within the department between individuals or something like that.

But I think that arguably would've done a lot to help you out. And to-

Carole Hooven:

Oh, it would've made all the difference in the world. I would've had a statement backing me from Harvard, from someone in a position of authority, and I had nothing. And I was told that would not be forthcoming because the optics were bad.

And I think this is how this works. She happened to be a Black woman. And we can talk more about this later. I think that poses a challenge for the DEI infrastructure at a place like Harvard.

How exactly do you respond in this situation where she is making a claim, basically, against me? And I should say, the entire graduate student union linked, and anyone can read this in the Harvard Crimson, linked to basically a petition that is essentially against me.

It's framed as being in support of her because of the abuse that she suffered as a result of my actions, which were to retweet her tweet and asking what I had actually said that was transphobic. And there were claims of racist abuse and death threats, et cetera.

And then, I was framed as the aggressor who had brought, threatened, essentially, this student, this graduate student. So, it was complex from the point of view of the administrators. This is 2021. There was no plan about what you're supposed to do in these situations.

And I should mention that there was a subsequent incident that also involved a trans woman graduate student in another department's DEI committee, and the chair of that department circulated that student's email, with a foreword that the department chair wrote, which gave all appearances of endorsing the graduate student statement.

Again, basically, accusing me of transphobia and encouraging people, essentially, not to attend a talk that I was to give at Harvard. So, that was a choice that the chair of the department made to send an email to the entire listserv of well over 100 people, a neighboring biology department saying that, "I, Carole Hooven, I'm transphobic."

So, when that happened, then I did not let it go, and I started agitating for some backing, and that did not come.

Steve McGuire:

Sorry, can I just ask real quick, this other student, who made these claims in this email that got circulated, was that also tied back to the Fox and Friends appearance, or were they talking about something else you had done or said?

Carole Hooven:

Well, that was mentioned, that was part of it, but it was quotes taken from various podcasts or print interviews that were omitted the preceding or subsequent sentence where I had contextualized whatever claim I was making.

So, there were quotes taken, I would say, maliciously out of context to make it look like I was some huge transphobe. And that was then, circulated, again, to my colleagues and peers, none of whom spoke out on my behalf.

So, at that point, when I started agitating within my department, within my division, I met with the division dean, I met with DEI people. I was told explicitly in a private meeting, in this person's office, and this is someone who is a high level administrator in my department, who I'd worked closely with for 20 years, who was, I would say, a good friend.

But in this situation, this person told me not to speak about this, not to respond, to literally put my head down, grip my teeth and be professional. So, I was explicitly instructed, in essence, to keep my mouth shut.

I did not keep my mouth shut. And I felt frozen out. This person stopped speaking to me, this one person who was the one person I counted on basically to speak up for me. And that was painful, the whole thing.

And as I'm describing all these events to you, there's a human being me going through this in shock, devastated, and having an emotional breakdown. And eventually, that's why I eventually then, had to take a leave because I was struggling severely in terms of my mental health.

I had a severe depressive episode. It was scary. And thankfully, my family was super supportive. And I had a couple people at Harvard, in the psychology department, I'll just say Steve Pinker and Dan Gilbert, who were both incredibly supportive, but they were not in a position to issue any a statement.

They're not administrators. They weren't in my department. So, when you hear these stories... Sorry, and I have to say, also, the graduate student union petition, I believe, resulted in my inability to teach my course because, for the first time ever, no graduate students would agree to be the teaching fellow for my lecture course, which used to be 70 people or so.

So, I couldn't even run it without graduate student assistants. And zero of them agreed. So, I taught a seminar, instead, which was fantastic. The undergrads have always been fantastic. So yeah, so, I took a leave at that point.

Steve McGuire:

You couldn't teach your course because students now had a misperception of your reputation that directly had a bearing on the topic that you teach?

Carole Hooven:

Well, no, no, it's the graduate student union. So, the person who tweeted that tweet, the young woman who tweeted that tweet, who was a graduate student, the narrative was that I had caused her to be subjected to abuse, basically.

And so, the graduate student union's petition was framed as in solidarity with this person. So, it was the grad students who refused then, to help me out serving as teaching assistants for my course. It could have been ideological, but really, it was just in solidarity with this person.

But it froze me out. And when you're in an academic department, there are grad students all over the place. And if people aren't speaking to you, I don't have a lab because I wasn't a tenure track professor, I was a permanent lecturer.

And that's because I had this administrative position as co-director of undergraduate studies in my department. And so, I started to feel extremely lonely and isolated, and ostracized, and that no one was standing up for me after everything I had as integral to the department in these very deep ways.

And I just felt that I was being pushed out, and I became miserable. And so, that's ultimately why I ended up with the help of an attorney retiring, essentially.

Steve McGuire:

So, you don't work for Harvard?

Carole Hooven:

I do not. So, Steve Pinker rescued me and allowed me to retain an affiliation with Harvard. So, I am an associate in the psychology department, and I have an office.

And what's important is I also retain access to all of the academic journals, and that's incredibly important to me and my research, and book writing, and et cetera. And we can talk about the council on academic freedom later, but I'm at Harvard. I'm also involved in that.

So, I have a smaller community, but it's of like-minded people now. And I'm happy to talk about ways that I think this could have been handled better and why it happened.

Steve McGuire:

It's just an appalling story. I'm sorry that it happened to you. Just one more question before we turn to things you think could have made things go better. I mean, this just sounds like a full-blown cancellation as it tends to be called today.

It sounds awful. I wonder with all your colleagues and say, the other grad students who signed on to this petition or what have you. You mentioned ideology, how much of it do you think was people who were seriously ideologically opposed to what you were saying or thought you had committed some grievous moral error or professional error, or something like that versus how many people were just trying to...

And I think you alluded to this, as well, when you were talking about the DEI stuff and all that. How much of this people just themselves basically running for cover and abandoning you as the person who maybe got stray from the pack a little bit and they left even though all you were doing is talking about your science, what you study and research, but there you were called out or what have you and embroiled in controversy.

And I guess what I'm saying is, how much of this is people who really thought like, "Oh, what you did was terrible," versus how much of it was people just trying to save their own skin or following perverse incentives, or like that advice you got, they're just trying to keep their head down.

They don't want to be caught standing up with somebody who's going through what you're going through because that might negatively impact them and their careers, too.

Carole Hooven:

Yeah. I mean, so, there's three things. One is what I said, correct. Is it scientifically accurate? Two is, is it damaging?

Steve McGuire:

Sorry to interrupt you. But even that, I mean, if you're saying what you think, based on your scientific research, I'm sure you'll agree, even if it turned out to be wrong, we still need to live in a society or have universities where you can advance what you think is correct in good faith and not face anything remotely like this blowback.

Carole Hooven:

Yes, of course. So yeah, I agree, fully. So, there's the science, is it correct? There's, is it damaging to utter the facts in public, especially on Fox News or Fox and Friends? And then, the third is, is it actually transphobic?

Is this a transphobic statement? And are people reacting, like you said, just because they need to be perceived as belonging to the right social group and that they need to be perceived as following the correct cultural norms to get the benefits of the social group, essentially?

So, in terms of the science, what was interesting is very few people cared about that, almost no one. There was one person, I think, who wanted to have a conversation with me about whether there were

two sexes, essentially, and I really appreciated that person. That was one person in my department who did that.

And if you read the Crimson article, what's interesting is that people came out of the woodwork, who are in biology, to explain why sex is not binary. This is the minority view by far among biologists. There's one thing in the world that is binary.

It is the reproductive categories of male and female in biology, at least in nature. But I know that the people who could have supported me agreed with me about what I said because they were my friends. I talked to them about this stuff many times.

So, it is really about reputation and power, and maintaining one's reputation, two, I think maintain some power or to benefits of some membership in a social group, whether that's the graduate student group or the higher echelons of Harvard faculty, which are quite high, or people who are just really scared.

And these things are not mutually exclusive, of course. So, I think that fear among the faculty and administrators is what motivated their lack of action. And also, just my colleagues, who were just regular faculty, who could have just written back on the listserv, "Hey, I know Carole, and this is false."

"And this is not how we should be responding to scientific disagreements. We should be teaching our students how to respond with evidence instead of personal attacks." And it's amazing that given how many people I know and I'm friends with, who are on the faculty in both departments, not one person did that.

Steve McGuire:

Yeah, I mean, that must have been extremely, extremely difficult. I can only imagine. Well, at ACTA, we're really excited that we're going to be presenting you with our Hero of Intellectual Freedom Award this fall.

And one of the things that we admire is that having gone through this, you've stood up for academic freedom and spoken about it, and the pursuit of truth is the mission of the university. You've written an article arguing that academic freedom is social justice or part of social justice.

And in that article, you talked about some things that you think universities could do, policies, practices, things that could have perhaps been done in your case that would've made things go better. We've already addressed that a little bit with the idea of somebody in authority issuing a corrective statement

But let me just ask you, generally, what are some key things... and then, I'll ask you about the Harvard Academic Freedom Council, as well. But just in principle, what are some of the things you think are really important that universities should be doing to protect academic freedom so that people like you can pursue scientific truth without fear of these sorts of consequences?

Carole Hooven:

So, I'm glad you asked that. I think that's incredibly important. And I think we have to, first of all, take human psychology into consideration so that we can understand... and this is the approach, I think, we should take to pretty much everything, is how do people respond when threatened, for instance.

And if there is someone who's perceived to be marginalized or vulnerable and saying that they are hurt and they're saying it publicly, and they're calling for action so that the organization does something about the person who hurt them.

What is the incentive structure for any faculty member or administrator to then, start waving the academic freedom flag? Is that going to satisfy the aggrieved parties and their allies who are quite vocal and have a lot of social support?

What happened to me is totally understandable. I'm angry. I'm angry at some actual individual human beings. I'm disappointed in them. But I understand, given the incentives that Harvard and so many other universities are creating, which are diversity, equity, and inclusion, above all else, this is the messaging that we get on almost a daily basis.

If you are on campus, you cannot avoid the messaging. It is in your email box. It is in trainings. It is in flyers. It is talked about. That is the dominant value. It's about protection and safety from words that can hurt, essentially.

And this is fascinating and disturbing. What is not emphasized are the values on which the institution is founded. And that those values, for me, the most important one is Veritas.

You see Veritas etched into stone all over the place, and it's on our shield, and it's on websites, but it's not really talked about. So, the imagery is there, but the message is not something that we receive.

It's not something that's really emphasized in the way that the DEI message is emphasized. So, I think that that infiltrates people's psychology. So that when an emergency, when some crisis happens, you're responding out of fear. That is what we do.

You make decisions out of fear to protect yourself. And the best thing that people feel like they can do to protect themselves is what is going to please the institution, and that is to protect the marginalized individual. And that's what happens.

So, I just want to recommend a book to everyone. It's by Yuval Levin. It's called Time to Build. And it's really interesting book about why institutions are losing some of their power, and it's because individuals and ego are pushing on the institution to adopt their values, which fluctuate with the wind, with the prevailing ideology.

And that the core values of institutions are no longer being... people aren't open to those core values, the students say, or the journalists, or the employees aren't soaking in the institutional values. It's the other way around that they're coming in with their own values and the institutions are soaking them up.

And that's a dangerous situation. And I think that is the situation we face. So, what needs to happen is not to destroy all the institutions, but in some sense, to really look at the founding values and in terms of higher ed, Veritas is an excellent value in academia and in discovery and knowledge.

It's about truth. Of course, we need to care about inclusion and diversity, but we have to do that in a way that doesn't interfere with our ability to pursue the truth. So, University of Chicago has an academic freedom statement that helps.

It does provide basically a script to administrators, giving them the tools to respond appropriately to crises as they arise. So, they're not making decisions on the fly out of fear. They can just say, "Look, these are the rules. I'm following them. I'm not weighing in with an opinion."

"I support the right of this student or this faculty member to make these statements. That's what we're about, respond with evidence, and that's what institutions, academic institutions, in particular, need to be doing."

So, at Harvard, we have established an academic freedom council to try to put together a really robust academic freedom statement and then work on trying to get that adopted by Harvard.

Steve McGuire:

Okay. And so, this Harvard Academic Freedom Council, it's fairly new.

Carole Hooven:

Sorry, it's the council. Sorry, it's Council on Academic Freedom.

Steve McGuire:

Right, the Harvard Council on Academic Freedom, is that right?

Carole Hooven:

No, because it's not technically Harvard's council.

Steve McGuire:

Oh, I see, the Council on Academic Freedom.

Carole Hooven:

Academic Freedom at Harvard, right.

Steve McGuire:

At Harvard, right. Okay. So, it's not officially or formally Harvard affiliated. It's not an official organ of Harvard University or something like that.

Carole Hooven:

It's associated with Harvard.

Steve McGuire:

Okay. So, you're part of that. You're one of the members. You're working on an academic freedom statement. Can you tell us a little bit more about the genesis of this Academic Freedom Council and what it hopes to accomplish?

Carole Hooven:

Yeah, I think that one of the founders, Flynn Cratty, was one of the first people who reached out to me after... basically, in the midst of my crisis. And he's part of the Human Flourishing Program. He might even be the director, sorry, I'm not sure, at Harvard.

And he reached out to me and was extremely supportive. And he later told me that my case was one of the main reasons that he wanted. And a couple other people wanted to ensure that Harvard's commitment to academic freedom was strengthened.

So, that scholars would feel supported and comfortable in doing the research that they feel is important regardless of the prevailing ideology, and that they're able to do that work. And that students and faculty are not only allowed, but encouraged to engage with controversial ideas in a way where they feel protected because this creates a thriving academic environment.

And to do that, of course, we need... so, in my case, there was just no strong statement that anyone could refer to, to figure out what to do basically in that crisis. So, of course, they're going to respond in a way that's self-protective.

And now, a couple other cases have come up that are providing... this council can now provide support to individuals who are experiencing something along the lines of what I experienced. I had no idea what to do or where to go. I felt totally lost at sea.

And if it weren't for a couple of faculty members, I mentioned earlier, yeah, I don't know what I would've done. I mean, they were tremendously helpful, but they didn't have a resource. So, this council will now be a resource to scholars at Harvard to provide guidance.

One of the goals is also to create this statement, and not just to have a statement, but to help Harvard adopt practices and policies that are not just DEI policies, but to really make sure that diversity of opinion is emphasized in the diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Because I certainly didn't feel that I belonged or was included at Harvard, and that, of course, didn't matter. What matters now is identity group. And of course, there are some good reasons for that.

But I think overall, there's been more harm than good done to the ability to produce and communicate knowledge.

Steve McGuire:

Well, it seems like this council could be at least one positive that comes out of what you've gone through. I don't know.

Carole Hooven:

Yeah. Sorry, can I just say one other thing? We have now, I think, it's over 130 faculty members have joined.

Steve McGuire:

Okay, good.

Carole Hooven:

Which is a great number, but in the grand scheme of things, it's like, where is everybody else? Why isn't everybody... why aren't all the faculty on this? But there are a lot of faculty who are ideologically opposed to academic freedom and to some extent, free speech. And so, that's a uphill battle.

Steve McGuire:

Sure. Yeah. That was what I was going to ask you, actually, is what's your sense of how likely some of these initiatives are to succeed, or what's the reception going to be at Harvard, but maybe just generally in higher ed, too?

Carole Hooven:

Yeah. Harvard is a good test case because we're not high on fires, rankings of schools that have strong support for academic freedom. I think we're actually pretty low. And I think it's going to be a long road because culturally, the divide about these issues, I think, is still increasing, the political divide.

And Harvard is obviously overwhelmingly liberal, and it's unfortunate that we have greater support from conservatives because, of course, political orientation really shouldn't be playing into this at all.

But progressives, I think, fear that academic freedom and free speech mean that people in power will usurp those rights somehow to hold on to their power and keep people who are perceived to be marginalized down and to squash their voices.

I think that is the fear. I don't think if people look at academic freedom and free speech through a historical lens, they would see that it's exactly the opposite. This is what gives people, with minority views, the right to voice those views and to be heard and engaged with.

Steve McGuire:

Okay. Let me just close by asking you about what you have planned. You mentioned that you're no longer working for Harvard. You are an associate, so you still have access to the stacks as it were, and that sort of thing.

But what are you working on now? What plans do you have for the immediate future?

Carole Hooven:

So, I was recently hired by the American Enterprise Institute as-

Steve McGuire:

Oh, congratulations.

Carole Hooven:

Thank you. No, it's great. I'm really excited about that, as a non-resident senior fellow. And they are supporting me in also writing my next book. So, that's what I'm really focusing on.

And that's about masculinity and the biology of... what's a really, I think, vulnerable time for masculinity, and that's adolescence, and the cultural narrative around masculinity right now, which I really think is quite damaging to men.

So, that's what I'm focusing on, and I'm excited to get help from the people at a AEI because there's just a lot of incredible thinkers there, who know a lot more about institutions and what's going on culturally around these issues than I do.

So, I think that'll be a really interesting collaboration. And I'm spending it a little more time with my 14-year-old, which is nice. That's part of why I want to focus on adolescence. So, I'm really excited about that.

But the one thing I really miss is teaching. And I live really close to Harvard, so it's all still weird because I'm not... that just ended so abruptly. I thought when I left, I would be retiring at some ripe old age and I'd get some party or something. So yeah, I'm still trying to come to terms with everything that happened.

Steve McGuire:

Yeah. Well, again, I mean, I'm really sorry that that happened to you, and thanks for sharing your story with us and your thoughts on how we can avoid this kind of thing happening to others, hopefully, in the future.

And I'm really glad to hear that you've landed at AEI, that's great, and excited to see your next book when it comes into print, and the other work that you'll no doubt produce in the meantime. So, thanks again for joining us on the podcast.

Carole Hooven:

Thank you so much for having me. It was a pleasure.