

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

Conversations with Bill Kristol

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Taped October 11, 2018

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I: On #MeToo, Women, and Men (0:15 – 32:49)

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to be joined today by my colleague and friend Christine Rosen, Managing Editor of *The Weekly Standard*, regular columnist for *Commentary* magazine, author of many interesting articles on many topics: technology, other political and social topics, cultural topics. But especially, I think, recently, men and women. That's a small topic.

ROSEN: Small topic. [Laughter].

KRISTOL: So, you're going to tell us here in an hour, an hour and a quarter, what to think about men and women. We're talking in October just after the Kavanaugh confirmation, but maybe we can avoid that contentious topic. We don't have to avoid it, but we can refer to it as we wish.

But let's step back more broadly. What is going on with men? I mean, it just seems, I don't know, very chaotic and everyone is aggrieved. Everyone is unhappy. Should we be unhappy with the current situation? Is it actually okay? What's the situation in the eternal war or conflict in relations between the sexes?

ROSEN: It's a deeply confusing time, I think, for everyone, and I promise not to talk too much about the Kavanaugh hearing.

KRISTOL: No, no it's fine.

ROSEN: But they did throw into high relief a lot of what we don't understand. And by that, I mean men and women don't really know how to behave with each other. And not because either side has nefarious motives, but because we don't know what the rules are anymore. You see this when what one person might call a bad date, another person sees as an aggressive potential assault. That's two very different interpretations of the same event. And the fact that we can't come to agreement on a lot of this stuff, I think, signals that we need to be having different kinds of conversations about this subject.

KRISTOL: So, was there a Golden Age? I mean, we both come from sort of the conservative side of the spectrum, I think, both of us would say. So, is there a moment when we had it right and everything has gone awry?

ROSEN: No, I mean, I definitely consider myself conservative-ish. But on this, no. I'm a woman. I would not want to go back to the 1950s if you tried to drag me there. I mean, these times have changed for the better in so many ways, and I think any thoughtful conservative would say that we're not going to go back to that time. We either can't do it economically, or we don't want to culturally and socially go back to the time where women had fewer opportunities and were expected to be wives and mothers and little else.

That said, we haven't quite figured out the roles now either, because women are still wives and mothers, but they're also in the workplace and we haven't squared that circle for a lot of men and women.

And, more importantly, I think we're coming to a point where there's a whole lot of anger – much of it, I think, unfairly fomented by the more radical, feminist left. But also stemming from a genuine confusion about power and how do women exercise power in a way that's fair and equal? Where are they being prevented from exercising genuine power and having genuine opportunity?

So, that, I think, is why we have these dramas play out like we've seen with Kavanaugh: where, this really was about a great deal more than a Supreme Court nominee. There were so many other cultural flashpoints, almost culture-war like themes that were going on all along. There were so many interest groups with grievances, as you've said.

And in that sense, it was a useful moment for people now to think about what we do going forward. Because we have to do something because it's obviously not working. Whether you look at dating culture for young people; whether you look at college campuses and some of the issues about sexual assault on college campuses; or even if you look at how do we define success for men and women these days? How do women define it for themselves?

And, you know, again, as a conservative, I've never believed that a feminist movement can speak for all women. I don't agree with half of what feminists want. I agree with *some* of it. But what's been disturbing to me is this "Believe All Women": *believe women, believe survivors*. Just because you have a uterus, pardon me, that you share the same sets of beliefs. And just because a woman – you shouldn't believe all women. Women are human beings. That was what I thought feminism was always supposed to be about. So, the rhetoric, I think, has reached a point that casts a lot more heat than light.

KRISTOL: There is something crazy about it. I mean, I've also said it's a culture-war moment. The Kavanaugh thing became a culture war. But, of course, we can have culture wars about all kinds of topics: believers or non-believers, rich and poor, traditionalists and progressives. There's something a little crazy about having a culture war between men and women. I mean, they do mostly end up together, right?

ROSEN: Yes, no. I mean, the longstanding joke is you'll never have a gender war because everyone is sleeping with the enemy.

KRISTOL: Right.

ROSEN: So, I think in that sense, no, we're not going to have a –

KRISTOL: And people have brothers and sisters.

ROSEN: Yes.

KRISTOL: Sons and daughters.

ROSEN: Yes, exactly.

KRISTOL: Parents are usually of both sexes.

So, how did we get here, I guess? I really am a little surprised. Were you surprised? Was this the way feminism was always going to work out, or a combination of feminism and the sexual revolution? Or sort of what's the problem?

ROSEN: So, I think – I've actually been bedeviled by this question for a while now. And one of the things I did was go back and reread some of the more radical feminist theorists, you know, the people who were writing manifestos in the 1960s and the 1970s. And try to really understand what kind of society were they hoping to achieve. One of the manifestos that really stuck with me was "The Redstockings Manifesto." This was Shulamith Firestone and a lot of the radical women in New York in the late 1960s, early 1970s.

And I was struck by how much of what they said depended on assuming the worst motives of men. So, it was very easy to be a radical if you can say "patriarchy." What is *patriarchy*? I mean, is patriarchy your dad? Is patriarchy your brother, your husband, or your son? Or is it all of it?

So, the sort of sweeping generalizations that were fairly common among radical feminists at that point in time never really did become mainstream. I mean, this was always a fringe. I think more mainstream feminism understood – you know, they talked about having allies and equal opportunity, not equal outcomes, and what not.

But that started to change. You saw it first on college campuses. You saw it with Gender Studies, feminist theory, Women's Studies. And again, though, not mainstream.

What has struck me in recent years and particularly this moment post-Kavanaugh hearings, is how much of the radical arguments have become mainstream. So, this idea that if a woman makes an accusation, she should be believed, regardless of whether there's evidence. The presumption of innocence – the Redstockings Manifesto has something in there about basically saying, "We believe women's experience. If it doesn't comport with our experience, it can't be true." All men are oppressors because they're part of a system that oppresses.

So, this extremely sweeping language that I used to read and think, "Oh, well, okay. So, there's radical fringes on either end of the political spectrum." But I heard some of the resonance of that in a lot of the charges lodged against Kavanaugh and just in the general tone of the discussion.

And that does concern me. Due process and the presumption of innocence are gender-neutral values that we should all embrace. And you don't even have to embrace it as a *general* good, because *you* might need them someday. So, I think that really disturbed me.

What also disturbed me was the charges of "gender traitor" that were thrown around for any woman in particular who didn't agree to what feminists were saying about Kavanaugh and about his accusers. You were called a *traitor*. That sort of language is not only unhelpful, it's dangerous. It does not get us to a point where we can have a healthy conversation about how men and women should be acting.

KRISTOL: And if we just reject then this radical strain, what about just the normal, liberal view? It's a free country. People can choose how to share, equal opportunity, no discrimination. People can choose how to live and how to organize their families. People shouldn't be discriminated against in the workplace or taken advantage of, obviously. That would seem to be a place that one could have gotten – that we could have gotten to, or that we could get to. Or no? Am I missing something? Is it too complicated? Can

gender relations not be worked out the way other kinds of civil rights and interest-group changes have been worked out, I guess?

ROSEN: Well, I think we have done a lot of that. You're right. I mean, I think we, certainly with a lot of the discussion about sexual harassment, we've come a long way in the workplace in terms of what's acceptable. The big change in our recent history is the "Me Too" movement, obviously. And here we have a challenge ahead because I don't think anyone would argue with it having been a necessary cultural reckoning certainly for the men whose egregious behavior should have been punished long ago and not covered up by the people who worked in their industries. But also, because we have to define what we mean in the terms that we're using.

So, I don't mean to sound vague, but we talk about – women are coming forward with their stories, right. There's a huge emotional tone to a lot of what we are discussing. And that's fine, that's important. I think people feel strongly about these things. If they have a personal experience, they should testify to their personal experience. But it doesn't end there.

So, with social media in particular, people are lodging accusations against people, naming them on social media as their "rapist" or, "This is my assaulter." And I have a problem with that in terms of the destructiveness and the power of those kinds of charges.

So, I think that's one thing is that we need to think about responsibly dealing with people who harass or assault. I take this very seriously, and I worry about the language and tone. Sort of the ease with which people will level charges against another human being. I mean, these are serious things. So, there's the lack of seriousness on that part.

But then there's also what I think has been a real transformation culturally, particularly among young women. The term "assault" is often used to describe what – I mean, I'm older probably than a lot of your viewers – what we used to call "regrettable sexual experiences." You know, I mean, "Oops, I shouldn't have done that," or "That was a mistake." I mean, there's a whole way of talking about these things that I think has radically shifted.

There was a recent article which was looking at women who said they were assaulted in the whole year of the "Me Too" movement. And reading them, they all involved consensual consumption of vast quantities of alcohol, invitations to come back to the house or the apartment. Some *consensual sex*. And then, at a certain point, the woman said, "I don't want any more." Something else happened, and they parted on terms that would not suggest assault or rape. And then the next day, the woman said, "I was the victim of an assault, because I didn't want to do that, and I did it."

And I read these stories and I feel really badly for these women. I mean, they are confused. And I think *culturally* we're confused, because that was not a good experience. It was obviously not a good experience for these women. And one was a same-sex experience. So, this is not just men and women. The other was – obviously, it's confusing for the men, too.

So, that confusion is, I think, what is the next stage for the "Me Too" movement. It's into this gray area of male-female relationships and trying to figure out how we understand what consent is. How do we express that? How do we raise young men and young women to understand not just the rights they have themselves, but the responsibilities that come with those rights?

KRISTOL: So, you said young men and young women, a somewhat slightly striking formulation. You didn't say "young people" or "young individuals." And I guess it does raise the question: Do we as a society agree, or should we agree, that we raise young men and young women, which probably has a lot of overlap in the raising but there's some differences? Or should we be gender neutral or gender blind, one might almost say, and raise individuals?

Another way of saying it is – the “conservative reaction,” I think – well, this is the somewhat cartoonish or stereotypical conservative reaction to what you were just saying – is, “Well, that’s what happens. You have feminism; you have the sexual revolution. This is all contrary to nature, in the case of feminism, and contrary to sound behavior in the case of sex, I suppose. And it’s all just chaos now because we kind of got away from this natural or well-established order.” So, pushback on that.

ROSEN: Yeah, I don’t like that. I hate that.

KRISTOL: No, I don’t either, personally. But pushback on it.

ROSEN: No, I know, you’re a great devil’s advocate. Yes, that has actually typically been the argument that cultural conservatives make when these issues arise. And that is no longer compelling and it’s no longer persuasive, and it’s just irrelevant because things have changed. Times have moved on. The birth-control pill is here to stay. Like I hate to tell all my culturally conservative friends this, but, you know, legal abortion is here to stay. I mean, these are not things that we are going to as a culture turn back on. And you don’t have – this is not a political argument. Look at polling data, which has been consistent about all of these things for 30-odd years now. This is where we are now.

KRISTOL: And look at behaviors.

ROSEN: And look at behaviors.

KRISTOL: What the economists I think call “revealed preferences,” right?

ROSEN: Yes, exactly. So, unless you’re willing to have the argument on the terms of where we live now, not some utopian past or some dystopian future – And on the dystopian future point, I’ll say, that’s, I think, where a lot of Feminists are starting that argument from is a kind of more dystopian and pessimistic view. We have to have the conversation on the terms we have now.

So, that means, honestly, trying to help young people figure out what it means to be a responsible sexual being, right, of whatever preference. And that’s about rights and responsibilities. And I’m sure I sound schoolmarm-ish and finger-wagging because I keep saying responsibilities. But that’s the missing piece, in my opinion. That’s what I want to say to these young women who tell these assault stories, you know, post-“Me Too” assault stories, is, “Okay, you are absolutely right. You should be able to say ‘no.’ No one is allowed to touch you without your consent. However, if you go out into the world as an adult and you make choices, there are consequences for the choices you make.” And that’s not to say it’s fair and that’s not to blame the victim or any of these things. But we’re not even able as a culture to have that discussion. I would be called a rape apologist. I would be called blaming the victim. *I have* been called those things when I’ve tried to raise these points.

KRISTOL: Well, what about the men? Don’t they have responsibilities?

ROSEN: The men absolutely have responsibilities and, in fact, their challenge at this particular moment in time is harder. I have two sons, so I have works-in-progress here on this. They’re teenagers. We do talk about things like consent. We talk about how to express their own feelings and how to understand the feelings of others. And boys are really struggling these days. I mean, I think the rise of kind of pop-psychological, masculinity-study types like Jordan Peterson – I mean, I don’t agree with his approach, but I understand why it’s so appealing to so many young men. They’re looking for a way to be good men. Whether they’re gay or straight, it’s not about their sexual preference. It’s about what’s the role for men these days?

And, again, that discussion doesn’t come up in this “Me Too” moment, and it has to because we’re all in it together.

KRISTOL: But you do think – So, I guess what you’re saying, though, is there is a role for men and a role for women which overlaps and [is] non-discriminatory in terms of job opportunities and so forth. But you think that needs to be explicitly part of the social conversation, it sounds like.

ROSEN: I think it needs to be explicit in the sense that we have to acknowledge that men and women physically are different. I mean, again, these are – we have the caveat that these are generalizations. Obviously, there are “weaking men” and “tough ladies,” whatever. But in general, there’s a kind of complementarity of the sexes that we should celebrate. Not see as evidence of oppression. There are different risks for women, physically, for sex, obviously. But there’s also different physical risks sometimes, right? I mean, well, you know, I train in martial arts and I train self-defense. I teach young women self-defense as well because, again, this is, unfortunately, you don’t want to live in a world where you ever have to use those skills. But why not have them?

And you teach young men about the complementarity of the sexes, not so they think that women are somehow subordinate to them in any way, shape, or form. But so that they understand how those differences are expressed, and understand what it means when a woman who really likes you after making out with you, says, “Actually, that’s all I want to do now.” They might have an understanding of what that means versus being confused and maybe being too aggressive.

Those are the conversations I know lots of parents are already having with their kids, but as a culture, we just push aside. It’s much easier to say, “Men are potentially aggressive rapists.” Or, “Patriarchy is not giving women these opportunities and not protecting women, so we have to believe survivors, believe all women.” It misses the point.

KRISTOL: And it’s also easier on the Right to say –

ROSEN: “Women should behave and they should never” –

KRISTOL: – “This is the price we’re paying for women’s liberation or sexual liberation.”

ROSEN: Yes. No, I agree. That’s completely fair and completely right. And so, both of those conversations aren’t getting us – aren’t moving the ball forward.

KRISTOL: So, that’s a little bit of a bleak picture that, I mean – well, in the sense that –

ROSEN: I thought I was an optimist.

KRISTOL: Well, no. Just in the sense that there’s a natural – I mean, “natural” – but there’s a traditional conservative view, which I think is accessible, I would think we would say. A distinction between the sexes; a preference for traditional roles and traditional behavior. Let’s call it that.

There’s a perfectly intelligible gender-neutral society view. And it’s consistent with a kind of liberalism: Just everyone gets treated the same. We have no presumptions about anyone being more or less inclined or apt to – don’t talk about different natures or different – and so forth. And that’s sort of, let’s say, a progressive view that is fairly coherent.

But you’re saying neither, in a way, is true to reality.

ROSEN: Right, because it’s both, right. I mean, we’re to be treated as equal in the workplace and in the eyes of the law, but when it comes to dating, it’s a little more complicated, I would say.

KRISTOL: Right. And you can’t just rest on the liberal or the progressive, like, “Let’s just not even talk about these other things in the public sphere.” People can think what they want, I suppose. It’s a free society, “But we’re going to be resolutely blind to distinctions of gender or sex.”

ROSEN: Right, and understandably, I think. I mean, if I can try to give the most charitable explanation for that position: it comes from this place of being told, you know, for decades, “Well, culturally, women should do X, Y, and Z.” And, again, feminism did a great deal to push back on that and say, “You know, actually, they can also do all these things, too.” So, I think a lot of that defensive response from the progressive feminists in particular comes from a place of, *we cannot give an inch because if we do, they’re going to push us back.*

And this is why – and it drives me nuts every time they do this, but how many op-eds, how many protests began with dystopian references to “The Handmaid’s Tale”? I mean, they’re all addressing – that is also ineffective. But I understand the kind of emotional place they’re coming from when they do that. There’s a fear. There’s a fear of going back, rather than kind of coming to some sort of agreement about where we should be going.

KRISTOL: And what strikes me, I guess – this is not a good comparison – but, I don’t know, civil rights, even a fraught area, and obviously, there’s been a lot of tension – Black Lives Matter. But still, one has the vague sense that one can imagine it being worked out over time – where each group having a better understanding of the problems, concerns, legitimate worries of the other.

And I guess what I’m struck about the men and women, as you speak about the kind of conversation we should be having, I can’t really think, well, what authors are having that conversation? Or what even novelists or cultural figures? It does seem that all the energy is on the extremes in a sense. I don’t know, maybe I’m wrong about that. Or maybe is reality better than our culture, the sort of conversations that the loudest voices would suggest? Or is reality really – I guess that’s what I’m saying, should we be worried about “reality” or should we be worried about Hollywood and politics and sort of the drama of college campuses, which is a slightly bizarre slice of life and so forth?

ROSEN: Well, I think we – I mean, in the day-to-day lives of most people these issues really aren’t really relevant? I mean, they’re relevant in the sense that they’re living their lives with husbands, girlfriends, whatever. The problem tends to happen when they fall over the tripwire and they didn’t even realize there was a wire there, right. So, it’s the college student who, you know, dates a lot of different girls and one of those girls wakes up and says, “Actually, that wasn’t consensual,” and files a charge. And then he’s in a kangaroo court with Title IX administrators and no ability to defend himself. Some of these young men have been expelled. There are lawsuits now by the students against universities.

The infamous one was the Columbia University “Mattress Girl” who publicly defamed a young man and the university’s own investigation found no legitimate evidence for her charges. She got a career as a performance artist out of it, which she continues to pursue. And he is infamous and has lost his reputation.

So, that, I think, is the kind of vague fear, certainly if you’re raising young men. But also for young women, right. So, the young women go to college campuses and they participate in a culture that several decades of feminist liberation has persuaded them is their right, which it is, to go to parties, drink as much as you want, wear whatever you want. None of those things put a sign around your neck saying, “I’m free to assault.” However, they’re not given the second part of that lecture unless, hopefully, their parents are giving it to them, which is “You do have to take certain precautions. You don’t go to places alone. You don’t because you’re a woman.” Is that fair? No, but Mother Nature is not fair either. I mean, this is just – the world is not a fair place.

So, the frustration that’s expressed by young women who get near-blackout drunk and then regret their actions, they have a responsibility for their choices. They’re not responsible for anyone who commits assault, absolutely not. I mean, that is a no-brainer. And I think there is a lot of disingenuous pushback from the feminist left when you talk about responsibilities, that’s the answer you get. “So, you’re saying that any man can rape a girl because she had a beer.” No, that’s really not what we’re saying.

So, that's the conversation that needs to happen. My fear is that, although this obviously occupies activists and political people and what not, it doesn't occupy everyday people *until it's too late for them* or until they stumble across one of these situations and they're caught by surprise. And that's what I worry about for young kids, especially the ones going off to college or into the workplace for the first time – aided and abetted by having grown up on social media where anything goes. They expect to be able to have an opinion about everything and no consequences for that because it's just pushing a button, right? Well, suddenly, their boss is firing them for a tweet they sent out.

So, these are the kinds of things where we don't want to talk about the rules because rules are boring and, you know, who wants to talk about that? But that's my concern going ahead is that we're not being straightforward about the fact that there are consequences. And that's the conservative – conservatives have always said "ideas have consequences," right? Well, actions have consequences. Choices have consequences. Tradeoffs happen.

So, that's the message that I'd like to give young men and women more than just the kind of polarizing tribal politics of, you know, "You're either with women or against them. You're either a rapist or you're an ally. And you're the woke or not." I mean, this is not helpful, the way that we've defined these debates.

KRISTOL: And you think it's a college campus/maybe first few years in the workplace problem and that then people get married, or they don't get married. Or they have relationships but it's just – or do you feel like the whole society is somehow now fraught with these kinds of issues? That was one interesting thing about the reaction to Kavanaugh. It didn't seem to be just activists.

ROSEN: No. So, no, I mean, and again, so anecdotally –

KRISTOL: For better or worse, incidentally. I mean, I'm not – Maybe people should be more upset about it.

ROSEN: Right. I mean, anecdotally, I would say that, no, it definitely affects a lot more people because, again, when you don't know what the rules are, if you're smart, you're going to err on the side of extreme caution, right? So, you know, I have had conversations with many men in the workplace who will say, "Oh, yeah, I don't go out to work with my female friend alone anymore," or "I always keep my door open," or "I'm not going to mentor this person because of the optics of it." "What do you mean?" "Well, she's an attractive 28-year-old and I'm a 60-year-old."

So, this is real. I mean, this is the kind of caution. And ultimately, that harms everybody. So, you're not going to get the best, smartest people being mentored by the ones who can help them most. It's a culture of mistrust and sort of a sensibility of caution that undermines the best kind of collegiality. And it's just unnecessary. Even with all the HR rules we have in place about harassment and what not, people feel culturally uneasy about their relations between men and women.

I mean, I had a really funny conversation with a friend who, we're friends outside of work and we always give each other a hug when we see each other. But we saw each other at a work-related event and it's like, "Do we do the hug? Is the hug inappropriate now?" And it was hilarious because we both kind of agree about a lot of this stuff, but even that moment of just casual friendship had to be questioned and second-guessed. And it's a shame.

KRISTOL: And how much of this is a gender problem and how much is sort of just other aspects of modern society, modern technology, modern economics, and so forth, spilling out over, so to speak, the two genders and sort of causing problems? I'm thinking even a lot about technology. Its effect on social mores and culture and so forth. What about that? I have a vague sense that it's related.

ROSEN: It is.

KRISTOL: You know, the iPhone, social media is somehow a part of the story.

ROSEN: Well, it's – and this is just my opinion – but what I've seen is the power that we have now at our disposal for on-demand anything, convenience, and the ease with which we can register an opinion about everything immediately and expect to see a result. I mean, how many times – when you pump gas now, they are like, “How was your experience pumping gas?” Everything. Everything about our behavior is questioned and asked. Like our opinion must be so important. Of course, it's all just a big advertising and marketing grab. But the idea is that it cultivates a sensibility.

And you see this especially with online dating, especially the younger generation, I've seen. This embarrassment of riches, which is kind of good, right? I mean, in the old days, pre-online dating, it could often be difficult to go out and meet people outside of your immediate social sphere. So, there's definitely good that has come of it. And I know lots of people, I'm sure you do too, who've met their spouses online.

But what comes with that is the paradox of choice, right. There's always the possibility of another option. There are so many options out there. And the constant self-presentation, which, I think, especially for young people is harmful.

And then, on the matter of nuanced and difficult cultural and political questions, it obliterates that. Because all you have to do is retweet someone or check a box or go to an online campaign and say, “Ahh, I'm an activist” because I ticked that box.

There's no – the barrier for entry is so low to consider oneself a warrior for whatever cause one wants to take on. And this is true across the political spectrum, and that's worrisome to me because there's a sort of mob mentality that's allowed to form very quickly over any number of issues. And some of these things don't do well under that kind of intense scrutiny, because they're difficult questions with no simple answer.

Twitter is a very Manichean medium. You're either retweeting and liking this person or you're calling him a Nazi. The middle ground can be difficult to find. So, in that sense, for our political discourse, I think it's not been a good thing.

KRISTOL: And I suppose that's particularly problematic for the genders because, I guess – the political argument, fine. You have your political argument, argue. At the end of the day, you kind of forget about it. Most normal people do. Or you just leave it unresolved. There should be more redistribution of wealth or less redistribution of wealth. It doesn't live with you 24 hours a day.

I think this is maybe why the gender stuff feels so much more fraught and more difficult and more worrisome in a certain sense, in terms of social stability and harmony and even happiness, if you want to use that term. Because you can't really walk away from that. You can't say, okay, well, we have a big difference on how to organize our economy, or on whether to have a tough foreign policy or not. I don't know, if you have really conflicting beliefs about how people should behave towards each other, that's kind of a problem, right?

ROSEN: I think it is and I think that this is where this issue of sort of suspicion of motives and intentions comes into play. Because a lot of these questions are not going to be easily resolved. They're going to be huge battles in our future.

And I say this again, I still consider myself an optimist about how to – I mean, sex education, for example, needs to be transformed to take a lot of these issues into account. But how I would want someone to talk about – do I want some teacher at my kid's public school talking about consent with my teenage kid? I don't know. I trust the teachers, but is that the role? But what about the kids whose

parents aren't going to talk about it with them? Who get all of their information about this through pop culture and online? I mean, that's not ideal either.

So, I think that these conversations have to be nuanced, and our media for doing that are becoming less nuanced, not more. And when it comes to gender relations, as you say, I'm sure you know some couples who have had lots of fights since the "Me Too" movement took over. I mean, people can agree about the egregious cases, but it's the gray areas. It's the cases on the margins. It's do you believe the woman or the man? Was this appropriate or not? What should the consequences be? This is the other thing that we still – even for people who have acknowledged their bad behavior. I mean, there was a huge uproar when the comedian Louis C.K. was allowed to do a set in New York. People were like *why would you let him come back?* Because he was a "Me Too" head that we put on the wall. You can't bring those guys back. We haven't resolved those questions yet.

II: A Way Forward? (32:49 – 1:05:20)

KRISTOL: Yeah, we haven't resolved, I guess, the more underlying – even if we got rid of a bad behavior, just of what the normal, so to speak – *normal* is not the right word. The norm or the norms of sexual or gender relations should be. I guess I come back to that. Does that have to be somehow – I don't know, it's nice to say we should have a conversation about it, but do we have to actually come to some conclusions or is it just a matter of –

ROSEN: I hope not.

KRISTOL: Right. Or is it just a matter of sort of more understanding, more tolerance of different solutions that different people come up with? I mean, I don't know. Does there have to be sort of a societal consensus on this, or will we always be sort of jabbing at each other?

ROSEN: Well, I hope the former not the latter. One of the things that I think has been destructive and unhelpful has been this valorization of female anger, right. It's such a righteous and wonderful thing that women are so angry. We're going to do this. We're going to do that. And we're going to chase people down and yell at them, and this is a cathartic, important experience. It's akin to the sort of consciousness-raising sessions that feminists did in the 1960s and 70s. And I get the kind of emotional high that must give people. Like, "Look at all of us out here wearing hats that look like vaginas, screaming and yelling at Donald Trump. Like, this is a great moment." And it was. I have many friends who went to the march. I mean, I get it.

But how does that translate into civilized civil discourse in general? It doesn't. It can't, right? Because you have to if you're angry and you feel your anger is valid and righteous, what do you do with that anger?

And that's why I think Donald Trump's presidential win was a crucial moment in a way that even the "Me Too" movement wasn't, right. Because Hillary Clinton lost to Donald Trump. I mean, some of us are still getting our heads around this. But for a certain cohort of women who consider themselves even moderate feminists, this was a moment of "Wow, women can't get anything." I mean, here's the most qualified, etc., etc. I mean, I disagree with that assessment of Hillary Clinton. But still, this was this sort of sense that "Wow, even a Hillary Clinton can't get elected president. We must live in a misogynistic, patriarchal society."

KRISTOL: But the other side, to take the pro-feminists side of this, Donald Trump was elected president after *really bad* behavior towards women.

ROSEN: Horrible.

KRISTOL: Retrograde views, I guess you might say.

ROSEN: Horrible. Yeah.

KRISTOL: That's not what his views are. About, more importantly, the behavior, which he was not apologetic about.

ROSEN: Right.

KRISTOL: And so forth.

ROSEN: No, he boasted avidly about it.

KRISTOL: Yeah. And that "Take him out" and that was a big moment and it didn't hurt him much, it didn't seem.

ROSEN: No.

KRISTOL: And then you have rallies with people who are sort of – maybe it's too strong to say they were embracing that, but they certainly don't take it as a demerit for Trump. And in a certain way, there's a backlash which thinks, "Good for Trump. He's getting away with this stuff and he's not taking this from these feminist harridans," and so forth. I don't know, that part, if I were a woman or if I were – not even if I were. I am, being who I am, I find, gee, that's kind of bad that so many people are on that wavelength also.

ROSEN: Well, you're absolutely right and I agree with everything you just said. And it is, I think, going to be an unfortunate testament to the destructiveness of Donald Trump as the leader of the Republican Party. That we'll be feeling the aftershocks of that for so long. I mean, don't even get me started on Evangelical Christians and what they have – the moral and political cover they have offered to Donald Trump, and compare it to the rhetoric from –

KRISTOL: Well, let's talk about Evangelicals. No, where you come from, you've written about your youth and that community, I guess. Let's talk about, not Trump or the fact that they shouldn't be so nice to Trump, but more of the sex and gender question.

ROSEN: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I mean, what about, I mean – is there sort of a future there of reconciling sort of certain traditions with certain modern understandings? I mean, that would be what one might have hoped for.

KRISTOL: I mean, maybe. I mean, the problem, of course, when you get into the question of religious moral teaching versus secular teaching is that the religious moral teaching – although any individual can live their life by those constraints and flourish amid that community. That stops at the door because you operate in a secular world. And I was raised Fundamentalist. So, that was always the challenge, right? It's like you could be the best Christian Fundamentalist on earth, but then you have to go get a job and everybody on your job is using curse words and smoking cigarettes. And, "Oh, my God, you're all going to Hell." Am I compelled to tell them that?

So, I think that as an answer to these culture-war problems, and this is, I think, a shift from the earlier culture wars, which really were about kind of more conservative, traditional, largely religious values pitted against a more secular society. I would say that was resolved in favor of secular society.

Now we're having the second iteration. It's like the First Great Awakening and the Second Great Awakening, right. And there's a huge moral and religious tone to much of the discussion on both sides. You know, when you're talking about sin and innocence and guilt, these are moral terms. But the concern for me in that regard is that I'd like to keep religion as far away as possible from any of it, because we are

having struggles enough with the kind of black and white rhetoric on both sides about, you know, “If you don’t believe.” See, I mean, the fact that it says *believe* women. Belief, you have to *believe* me. You have to – my testimony. That’s also a religious term. I mean, I’m struck by how much of the tone of all of these discussions is almost faith-based even though we’re having a secular debate. I’m not sure they can weigh in helpfully, I have to say. No offense to all my old Evangelical friends.

KRISTOL: And that’s very interesting. It sort of raises the question of – and I have to – I’ll just ask – this is written about this. I don’t want to pry, but so when you left your Fundamentalist community and went to college, and I guess kind of broke away kind of, I mean, how much was gender part of it? Or was that really just a side?

ROSEN: So much of it.

KRISTOL: Really?

ROSEN: Yeah, so much of it. Yeah, the path given for young women, at least in the community I was raised in, was certainly not college. But to be a minister’s wife and to have good Christian kids, to have a family, to be a traditional feminine role model in the church. And we didn’t have any females in church leadership or in the school leadership. So, for me –

KRISTOL: And this is in the ’90s basically, late ’80s?

ROSEN: Yeah, basically 1980s in Florida. So, there you go. There was a lot of bad hair and fashion as well. But for me, I was one of three daughters and I was being raised by parents and particularly a father who said, “Oh, you could be whatever you want to be. Be an astronaut, a judge.” So, the message I got at home was very much – I mean, I actually had a nightgown that said “Girls can do anything boys can do better.” Like all three of us had nightgowns that had this feminist message. My parents were not super feminists, but there was a sense of, *of course you should be able to do what you want; you’re an individual*. It was very much being raised as an individual and to have equal opportunity, but without the feminist overlay.

So, when I was, you know, in high school and I was being told things like “College really isn’t – it’s one option, but...” by school officials. I didn’t get my questions answered by them and I knew I didn’t want to stay withdrawn from the secular world. I wanted to be out in it doing something. So, for me that was the break, but it was heavily gendered. If you talk to any woman who grew up in that tradition, they’ll tell you something similar – particularly the more conservative religious traditions. It’s a struggle. I have a lot of friends who stayed, who I am still friends with. And I have many who left.

KRISTOL: And I guess the question with them and for me just thinking about it is this is – I hadn’t actually expected to talk this much about this, but I’m interested by this. If religion doesn’t provide much guidance, let’s just put it that way, to the current questions about men and women – and I don’t mean to minimize it. Of course, religions have deep thoughts in them, and one could study them and learn a lot. But it’s not going to be easy guidance, let’s put it that way. And nature is not something that one can really – it’s hard to appeal to in the modern world, the different “natures” of men and women and so forth.

And then I think what we normally fall back on – liberal societies then fall back on a kind of procedural liberalism that everyone should do what they want. Women want to stay home, they should be treated equally. If they don’t, if they want to be in the workplace, make sure there’s no discrimination and try to arrange the tax code to be equitable or whatever. I guess sort of where I had assumed this would all end up.

But that seems, maybe it just runs up against this brute fact – more brute than I think ethnicity, race, or all the other obstacles to equal opportunity and to, let’s say, liberal individualism as a social model – of men

and women being different. Or being different enough that it's not so easy to just say, "equal opportunity, due process, equality before the law, gender neutrality, basically."

ROSEN: Right. No, I think that's absolutely right.

KRISTOL: But there's no then guidance to look to for what then supplements, you might say, the liberal foundation of how to treat or think about each of the genders, or about yourself, I mean. One's self as a young man or woman, I suppose. Even if one wants to rebel against certain traditional things.

ROSEN: Well, this is why I think we get into the realm of either ideology or emotion, emotional experience. So, this is what people now appeal to because it is – those are the options available. This is why so much of debate occurs with the overlay of the language of therapy. And it's understandable. I mean, we all kind of do this. Because the appeal to authority is important.

And to go back to something you said earlier about Trump and Trump voters and the defense of him: I would say a lot of that comes from a sense that the people who do live by a particular moral code – be it religious or culturally conservative, whatever that is – they are existing in a secular universe that's constantly telling them that the way they live is wrong. That they are racist, sexist, any number of -isms that they have violated.

And I think a lot of that anger and frustration, which I think the liberal intelligentsia read as "angry, male entitlement," I read as they were just really sick and tired of Hollywood and mainstream media and political candidates telling that they're deplorable and ignorant and racist and sexist.

And, look, some of them may be. But as we've seen with "Me Too," plenty of sexist men are progressive leaders. I mean, a lot of the heads that have been collected so far have been of liberal men. So, that, I think, fuels some of the anger, rather than a kind of sense, you know, of angry, white, male entitlement.

I'm not sure, though, what we *do* appeal to. And this is why the crisis of institutional authority concerns me a great deal. And that was another thing that came out during the Kavanaugh hearings that worries me is that now everyone is saying, "Well, the Electoral College, we know that's not legitimate. Congress is obviously not legitimate. Look at these hearings." And now the Supreme Court's not legitimate because they've put Bret Kavanaugh on it. That kind of rhetoric really disturbs me because we are – for better or worse, we're a secular country and we need to have at least a bit of faith in our institutions. Otherwise what's left? What do we appeal to as a source of authority?

I don't want to appeal to Hollywood. I don't want to appeal to – who else do we appeal to? And then we start appealing to our own emotions and our own – and that's again where Twitter feeds into this. Like people, the tribal politics that a lot of us lament is a response to that void. We're trying to fill that void and so far, not doing it so well.

KRISTOL: Yeah, the degree to which emotions have been privileged is very striking. And that was true on both sides of the – Kavanaugh was compelling. People were believable. But, really, this is not like who's a better actor or actress, presumably. It shouldn't be. I'm not saying either was acting, but, I mean, who was a better performer? Who had a better statement? It's supposed to be kind of about facts and evidence you would have thought.

ROSEN: Right.

KRISTOL: And about norms and what the right standards would be to judge and contest the case. But that was not how the discussion went.

ROSEN: It was a very emotional – it was a melodrama. It played out for the entire world. And there were no winners, is I think the takeaway there. No winners.

KRISTOL: It does seem like the whole, gender relations in general have become more melodramatic, so to speak.

ROSEN: Yes.

KRISTOL: At least, they're a little bit loosed from reality.

So, I guess I come back to that question. So, where do we go? What's the sort of thing to look to? Just, you, as a writer on the subject, as a mother. Apart from, obviously, behave decently and due process and don't charge people with things they [haven't] done, but don't take advantage of people either. All the obvious things one would say just to be a decent human being. For further guidance about how to think about oneself as a young man or a young woman, what's your guidance?

ROSEN: So, obviously, all the virtues you've just outlined, we hope and expect all parents to inculcate those values in their kids. I would say – honestly, this is going to sound – now I do sound like a conservative fuddy-duddy, but I trained technically as an historian. We need to read better and more deeply into history and literature. These are the two things that – and I'm lucky to have kids who are readers. But what they glean about human nature – because this really is a human nature question. Why do we behave the way we do, with the overlay that there might be some differences between men and women? Why do we do the things we do?

And if we can't rely on religion to answer those questions for everyone; if we can't rely on our government – and we certainly don't want our government telling us why we do the things we do. That leads to all kinds of dystopian mischief. What can we look to for guidance?

And I really think that this has long been one of the things that culturally conservative people have done well but maybe need to increase the volume of, which is we need to understand the past, not so that we don't repeat the mistakes, but so that we understand what other people have done in slightly different situations and where they went wrong and why. We need to read literature to understand, to try to see the world through other people's eyes.

And this was always the big con of social media, in my opinion. Now, I'm not on social media, so I'm one of those obnoxious luddites who isn't on it. But the big con from what I saw from the beginning is this idea that it's going to help us understand and empathize with other people because we'll see more opinions and we'll have all these connections. That just struck me as ludicrous, because we can't concentrate on that many people at any given time. We're not wired that way as human beings. Literature lets us do that, right? It lets us dive into a story, see it through someone else's eyes, see good behavior, bad behavior, bad moral choices, good ones, all of the virtues you would like to see in the next generation, whether they're your own children or not.

And if you look at the reading lists of schools these days, even colleges, with the exception of the Great Books schools, it's disheartening. It's very contemporaneous. It's very emotion-based. It's driven by a lot of these kind of culture war questions. I think returning to some of those classics is important and necessary. It's probably a fool's errand; but I mean, I make my kids read a lot of those books. Some of them they like; some of them they don't. But we should all be doing that, right. Those are two things that although they have been somewhat politicized, certainly, less so than a lot of other cultural arenas these days, in my opinion.

KRISTOL: I think it's, the question is can you get them to read them, and also think they're somehow relevant to their lives? I find there are a lot of people who do enjoy them, but then that's just another world. Maybe it would be nice if we lived in that world. Jane Austen or something. But it is amazing how popular Jane Austen is.

ROSEN: Yeah, it remains –

KRISTOL: Given her world was a very different world than this one. A huge Jane Austen –

ROSEN: They knew what the norms were. They were a little strict about them.

KRISTOL: Well, she also, of course, has a complicated view of them, and they cause unhappiness at times and are misunderstood at times and some of them are artificial.

ROSEN: Right.

KRISTOL: When you think hard about them, not so admirable almost.

I guess that's another thing is that it tends to be, in this area – I mean, every area of life has tradeoffs. But at some point, one could say, I think, authentically, that an equal society for different races and different ethnicities in the U.S., it really isn't zero sum. I mean, it needn't be zero sum. Yes, will some people who have enjoyed unearned privilege give it up? Yes. But at the end of the day, one presumes, one could have a decent society where everyone has a chance and has a chance to do well, etc.

I guess it does seem to me that in the men and women sphere, people are just unwilling to be serious about the tradeoffs between things. I mean, whether it's work and family. In a more prosaic way or a deeper sense – I guess Harvey Mansfield says somewhere that he thinks feminism has made our lives more just, made our society more just, but perhaps made people less happy, you know. And justice and happiness don't always go together, of course. I don't know, that strikes me as part of what is not serious about our conversation.

ROSEN: Right, that's exactly right.

KRISTOL: That you can't have everything.

ROSEN: Right. Well, in that because, first of all, Americans hate to hear that because, hello, Amazon. I mean, I can get whatever I want delivered here within an hour. So, I think the acceleration of that sensibility makes this argument even harder to make, but it's absolutely crucial. I think that's really an important point.

The happiness thing is interesting to me because with the boom in "happiness studies" of late, I constantly come back to that phrase. It was the pursuit of happiness that we were guaranteed, not happiness itself. That's what makes me a conservative, I think. But I don't think we should – Feminism's promises, I think, are part of the problem here. What feminism promised women was a form of happiness, right. It was, "We're going to solve all these problems that are making you unhappy." And they solved a lot of them. Many women were still unhappy.

So, the question is "Why am I still unhappy?" It must be this – "It's not this problem, it's this problem." Or It's not just that I need equal opportunity in the workplace, I actually need, you know, 50% of the board of the organization I work for to be female even if there aren't qualified women for that. And it becomes this

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KRISTOL: And I need other people's attitudes –

ROSEN: To change.

KRISTOL: – towards me to change.

ROSEN: To change.

KRISTOL: Even if they treat me adequately.

ROSEN: Right.

KRISTOL: And that's, I think, when you get to a step of then irreconcilable, almost, in the liberal society.

ROSEN: It's an attempt to control.

KRISTOL: If your happiness depends on others attitudes improving? We're in a free country so it's kind of hard to make people change their attitudes.

ROSEN: Or is it? So, the compelling of people's beliefs to come to the "Right Side" of things, that's another thing that fueled, unfortunately, Trump's rise. I think – he would stand up there and say, "They can't make you think this way. They think you're horrible. You don't have to do what they say. The mainstream media –." You know, all of those phrases he used fell on very receptive ears for a reason that had nothing to do with Trump. It had to do with a sense that we don't really feel respected in this society, and we don't feel like our voices are heard. And that anger came out. Again, a lot of it's anger.

But this idea that other people – that equality is achieved when everybody agrees with you, that's not what equality is. That's not equality. Equality of opportunity means everybody gets a fair shot. That involves a lot of – the Civil Rights Movement is a perfect example, because that involves struggle; that involves violence; that involves overcoming racist attitudes over the course of many generations and we're still working on that. That's an ongoing project for America. And conservatives have not always been good about talking about it in that way, but it is ongoing.

But it doesn't guaran –

KRISTOL: It is a more manageable goal, I think.

ROSEN: Yes, it does.

KRISTOL: Justice really is the goal.

ROSEN: Exactly. It's not acceptance of my life choices. You don't have to accept my life choices, and I shouldn't require you to or compel you to.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

ROSEN: For that I would need an exorcism. You're absolutely right to identify that as a huge part of this ideological tensions.

KRISTOL: I guess it's interesting what you say about it. I hadn't really thought about that. At what stage of feminism did it become – some of it – become about happiness, not just about justice? Because that is a big leap, I guess I would say.

ROSEN: As soon as equal justice in the eyes of the law was achieved, once you had the Civil Right Act and you had equal opportunity in the workplace and in education.

I mean, look, the counterpoint to all of the hysteria on campus about how women are treated is that they get the majority of undergraduate degrees and graduate degrees these days. I mean, women dominate in higher education. How do you square that circle, right? How are these two things the same story? And that's part of why they're not told it's the same story. But this is important. It's just not coming into these conversations because they become so ideologically polarized so quickly.

KRISTOL: But you were about to say, so the justice got –

ROSEN: Oh, the justice got thwarted when women had the opportunity, went into the workplace, and looked around and thought, “This isn’t that much fun.” Like some of them were like “Uh, okay, fine.” Some women were like, “Yes, I’m going to be a CEO. I’m going to be a general. I’m going to be all these things.” Great. Other women thought, “I’ll do this, but I also want to have children,” and balancing those two things isn’t great. We need to change workplace culture.

But I think that speaks to the empty promise that was sold to a lot of women by feminism, which is that this isn’t just a movement for equality. It’s a movement to achieve gains that will give women a sense of control and happiness. No one can guarantee you those things, right. And you can’t control all things. So, I think that was a huge disappointment.

And then the focus shifts then, right: What’s the new enemy? What’s the new thing that needs to be tackled because I’m still unhappy? “I have a job. I have an education. I’ve got a husband. I’ve got kids. But it’s still not working for me.” And, again, I’m not trying to stereotype women as like horrible harridans who complain all the time. Men face these challenges, too. But there’s no ideology. There’s no activist movement on behalf of men working for this. Now, the feminist response would be, “Ah, patriarchy, they don’t need it.”

KRISTOL: Right, I suppose another Feminist response would be – what is striking is how many men – I think there’s some truth to this. You know, it turns out their self-image and their happiness, if you want to put it that way, came from unjust superiority to or lording it over women in various ways.

ROSEN: Sure. Oh, absolutely. That’s human nature.

KRISTOL: And they miss that, I mean, in a sense. You know, the good old days.

ROSEN: Right. Boys club.

KRISTOL: When it was unquestioned that they were the head of the household, and the way you described sort of the views in the fundamentalist community and so forth. And there’s a reaction against that, against losing that. And that was part of – you know, if you didn’t have a great job or there were other things about your life that weren’t so great, this was something you could sort of hang onto, you know.

ROSEN: Right. Give you a sense of identity, right? I mean, that’s the part that – no, and I think that’s right. And good riddance, right. Good riddance to that idea. I think there are very few people – I mean, there are obviously still people who think that they would love to return to that. But I say good riddance.

KRISTOL: Right. So, going forward, you said you were optimistic. So, cheer me up here. I don’t know that this is –

ROSEN: Maybe I’m not optimistic.

KRISTOL: Yeah. Well, you have kids and you’re in touch with – we have so many young people at *The Weekly Standard*. It doesn’t feel to me – my optimistic version would be, for all the sort of theoretical problems of what do we ground the relations of the sexes on, you can’t really have a gender-neutral society. We don’t want to have a gender – what’s the alternative to neutral? *Stratified* or *specified* society. We’re sort of lost a little bit in a No Man’s Land in between. Religion doesn’t provide much guidance. Nature – if you allow it to appeal to that for guidance, if it differentiates the sexes, that they are sort of different.

Having said all that, in the real world, I don't know, I don't look at the 24-year-olds at *The Weekly Standard* or the kids, people your age, as far as I know them, or 35-year-olds for that matter, and think, I don't know, it's just like a horrible wasteland of resentment and anxiety and unhappiness. I mean, I don't think – it doesn't feel to me like it is. I don't know. What's your sense?

ROSEN: I agree. I think we are obviously trafficking a lot of generalizations. And I'm very hopeful. Honestly, if you talk to someone under the age of 30 these days, their main concern is student debt. It's a very practical thing. If you look at the behavior of millennials and the generation after them, they're actually far more – especially the generation after the millennials. There's a lot less of the kind of stereotypical "entitled behavior" that people always griped about, I think to a degree unfairly, about millennials. There's a sense of responsibility. There's some cautiousness in terms of their behavior. They're having less sex. They're drinking less. They don't even want to get drivers' licenses and drive cars.

I mean, there's an interesting generational shift happening there, and they're a large generation. And I see when I talk to people who are the younger kids who are dating and who sort of do all this – go out together and everything. Of course, they're optimistic. And I think that's where I fall back on human nature. Because we do want to create families. We do want to create communities. We actually do want to get along.

Which is why, ironically, the words we use become even more important, because we can't talk to each other in the way that we are talking to each other now. Men and women, and the people who've appointed themselves spokespeople for women and spokespeople for men, it's an unproductive conversation.

And maybe that means having more conversations that aren't happening just on Twitter or just on social media. Maybe it means – I would fault the conservative side of these arguments as much as the liberal side, which is, like people really having more discussions across the table in a civilized way, civil discourse. I mean, we're supposed to care about this in theory, but I don't see us doing it enough in practice. Because money is raised, attention is gained, and Twitter followers are added when you yell and scream at the other side, not when you sit across the table and try to find commonalities.

KRISTOL: I do think here the legal jeopardy, and the sort of reputational jeopardy, one could get into by making one mistake discourages people from engagement in the conversation.

ROSEN: I think that's so.

KRISTOL: I think that if you're rational, you think, "Well, that topic is just a nightmare to get involved in."

ROSEN: "I'm not going to touch that."

KRISTOL: "I might think I have something interesting to say. Why bother? I'll write about something else or speak about something else."

ROSEN: Right, sure.

KRISTOL: Focus on something else. And so, I wonder how many people who aren't sort of invested in resentment or grievance on either side are jumping into this conversation. I suppose that's a kind of funny – I guess that's a problem often in these kinds of circumstances.

ROSEN: That's true.

KRISTOL: Okay, so you've cheered me up a little bit. Anything we haven't discussed that we should discuss in this interesting area?

ROSEN: I just really would say technology has transformed the way we have these conversations.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

ROSEN: And we need to be – the pendulum is swinging towards a little more skepticism of the big technology companies in terms of we no longer believe they're going to save us from any number of problems, including drone taco delivery. I mean, this is, you know – we're having a little more sensibility about that. But we still are so enthralled to the convenience and the immediacy that we haven't thought about what they're doing to us as human beings.

And everybody always likes to say, "Oh, it's not the technology. It's how you use it." That's not been the case for many, many years. I mean –

KRISTOL: What do you think the key sort of breakthroughs or moments were? I mean, obviously there's a ton of developments in technology for hundreds of years, but –

ROSEN: Smartphone.

KRISTOL: Really?

ROSEN: It's the smartphone. With the smartphone you can no longer get away from the internet. And with the future of –

KRISTOL: Or from other people, I suppose.

ROSEN: Exactly. And just in terms of like having a private life. There's no such thing as a private life anymore. And if you study history, there's this whole development of private spaces and homes. And the Victorians with the parlor. I mean, we have all these moments in history where we carve out private space, whether it's for the family or for the community. And all those spaces have migrated online now. Some for the better, because it draws in more people and increases certain kinds of discussions. But we've lost some of those face-to-face, in-person connections. I think that's especially important for young people and especially important for men and women.

We were talking earlier about how someone wrote an article about how they're having a much more successful dating life once she and the man she was dating agreed not to text each other throughout the day. They had this time to actually miss each other and be alone with their own thoughts and not have to be constantly performing and responding to someone else who they were just getting to know. So, the rituals of courtship – all of this stuff changed remarkably once you could carry around a computer in your pocket. And it could track you and you were expected to be in touch with everyone.

We have a colleague at *The Weekly Standard* who still has a kind of old-fashioned flip phone, Matt Labash. I held out as long as I could, but there comes a point where, for work or kids, you need the smartphone. We're never giving them up, but we need to be more self-critical about how we use our time and how we communicate.

KRISTOL: I think the privacy point is a very interesting point because, in a way, to get back to that earlier discussion, the way a liberal society can resolve some of these problems is by not resolving them. By there being a large private sphere, non-governmental, non-public sphere. People can make their own accommodations and work things out as they choose. It's not necessarily a model for anyone else. Others don't even know kind of how they've worked it out. One would say they're in their own house, living their own lives as they wish.

But I guess that's harder now. If everything is kind of subject to scrutiny, then everything becomes, "Well, you're doing that. Why are you doing that?"

ROSEN: And even to a more mundane degree, the homogeneity of our private experience, we're all binge watching the same shows on Netflix or binge watching something, or playing Fortnite. I mean, there's not the unique and unusual hobbies. If you look, there's been a massive decline in people having hobbies.

KRISTOL: Is that true?

ROSEN: We're doing more of the same thing in our private time and I think that's not good. I mean, you're right that we used to have these private spaces that were not surveyed, either by strangers or by technology companies and advertisers, where we could just be ourselves. And now – the sociologist Erving Goffman used to talk about "the backstage." Everybody needs a backstage where you can take off your wig and your makeup and your mask and whatever it is and you don't have to perform. Everybody's always performing. That includes our political leaders, our "culture leaders." Everyone's always performing and there aren't as many spaces to turn it off.

KRISTOL: And men and women maybe particularly need backstages, right?

ROSEN: Exactly.

KRISTOL: I like the story about the dating couple.

ROSEN: Yeah, the texting, yeah.

KRISTOL: That's a very good point, though. I hadn't really thought about that.

ROSEN: They were allowed to miss each other for small bits of time, which you really aren't able to do if you're constantly in touch.

KRISTOL: So, you'll keep an eye on them and report back about how they're doing.

ROSEN: That's right.

KRISTOL: That'll be our test.

ROSEN: A follow-up.

KRISTOL: Yeah, a test, a social science test. Christine, thanks so much for taking the time for this very interesting discussion on a very complex topic that I hope has stimulated people's thinking about it. We'll get back together in a year or two and see how things are going one way or the other. So, thanks very much for joining me.

And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]