Disability and Violence Against Women – Part One

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Hi I am Lorna Brown and this week's episode is about Violence against women in the wake of Ashling Murphy's murder. And for those who may not have known or want a refresher, Ashling Murphy was a 23-year-old primary school teacher who was killed whilst she was on a run. And this has this issue has brought up a lot of the issues around violence against women. And today we're here to talk. Today here to talk is Aoife Grimes. Would you like to give a background about yourself?

Absolutely, thank you so much Lorna and thank you for having me. I'm delighted to be here. My name is Aoife, as you say, and I'm a research assistant in sexual consent education and sexual violence prevention in Trinity. So, it's kind of a really long-winded title. But I guess how I got into this was when I was in undergraduate in Trinity. I took part in consent workshops in their very first year. And then after that I had a real interest in the area. I was studying law. So, it was kind of not really related, but also quite related, I guess. And started facilitating and organizing the workshops in my second year and since then, throughout my undergraduate kind of worked away at them and have been working for almost a year and a half, maybe two years in Trinity in the area of sexual consent education, so kind of creating programs but then also sexual violence prevention. So, things are in policy and cultural change. So yeah, that's me. I'm also 23, and that's I think the Ashling Murphy, the murder of Ashling Murphy really stood out to me for that reason, and that we are the exact same age. And it feels like such a tragic, unnecessary loss, you know, and I think that it's really brought conversations that have been going on for a while I think in the background kind of to the forefront, which is really good, but obviously should not have happened.

Yeah, like I remember when it was first announced that she died. I remember sitting there actually looking at TV crying because it's thinking, How did this happen? She should be here and also we want to say on the behalf of Trinity Ability co \_op want to send our condolences to her family and her boyfriend and her friends and all students because it's a great loss. I still have to deal with in the next few years and forever. And but that's not what I wanted to talk to you about. Now, I remember the Monday after her murder. I remember sitting in the library trying to look at work and a song came on. And it was by Taylor Swift called ‘Mad Woman’

I love Taylor Swift.

Honestly, this woman should really feel this woman should have a PhD.

I believe that she is the greatest storyteller of our generation!

Yes. But I remember sitting there and then all of a sudden, everything, like everything just stopped. And so I remember thinking, wow. So I was hoping if you don't mind if maybe we could break down some of the parts of the song

that really can resonate with.

So starts off by saying, What do you think? What do you think I'd say to that does a scorpion sting when fighting back? They strike to kill, and you know I will. What do you sing on your drive home? Do you see my face in your neighbor's lawn? Does she smile? Or does she mouth f\*ck you forever? And every time you call me crazy, I get more crazy. What about that? And when you say I seem angry? I get more angry. And I was looking at looking at this. I was thinking about how they gaslighting that happens when like when women bring up issues around violence against women. And there's always this backlash of like, oh, it is not that bad. You know yourself the like the jokes around violence and I say so why would you kind of say even with the impact of kinda like it's almost like a norm. That. Yeah. The violence against women is the norm.

Completely. I think it's such a great point. And I think you've expressed it so well, because I think that there's a few facets to it, I think. Firstly, there is a general lack of belief around the experiences of women. So, people do not believe the women in their lives and the non-binary people in their lives. And the trans people in their lives when they say that they're constantly at risk of sexual violence and constantly victims and it doesn't it feels like an exaggeration. So it's, there's a disbelief there because they cannot comprehend it. And the reason I think that they cannot comprehend it, it goes back to rape culture. So rape culture, I mean, it's kind of it's a word that is thrown around it started around but it's actually a really interesting concept and it's the concept that like, the society we live within normalizes and accept sexual assault. So if sexual assault is normalized and accepted, then for us to speak out against it is a rebellion against the norm. So for us, it's just speaking our truth. But for other people who don't exist within a truthful reality, that they could be victims of sexual violence at any point. It's a rallying against normality, which is always really difficult. So, it's not only having to tell our stories, which is really traumatizing, like it is traumatizing in and of itself to recap trauma, but then to force to try and get people to believe you who do not want to believe you. So, I think there's so many layers to it. And I also think it's really important to like to recognize how none of the actions exists in like a vacuum. Because an argument that's often brought up is like, well, it's not all men and it's, it doesn't it just doesn't happen that often and, but the fact of the matter is, is that anyone who is condoning accepting any kind of behaviour that is in any way connected to sexual assaults, therefore permits rape to recur, there's a direct correlation there. So if we're in a society that's allows for rape jokes, and allows for homophobic jokes, and allows for sexism in the workplace, there's a direct correlation between that and people getting assaulted. I think that we really have to step up to the mic and recognize that, like, even if it's not all men who are committing rape, then is their behavior, allowing others to do so is that what's happening because they're playing a part in some way.

I also think if I was looking at this and where she says, this is Scorpion Sting, does a scorpion just a scorpion sting when fighting back. There's a photo going around, and it was the week after Sarah Everard’s death. And it was like, there would been a peaceful protest. Yeah, same. Yes, the same issues. There was in a photo of a woman basically, rugby tackled to the ground, I believe. Yeah. I remember thinking this like, exactly what this. Yeah, this line is like, what do you expect from like, for Continental presses? I know it's not happening. Like you're, you're just making a mountain out of a molehill?

What do you do? Exactly. It's going to go somewhere and it's going to there's, I think that something that really stuck out to me, after the murder of Ashling Murphy and Sarah it was, how sad and so sad for her family. And so sad for everyone who loved her. But how excuse my language fucking unnecessary it was and how unnecessary and how could you not be angry? Like how can we not be angry? How could we not be angry? When this is just like another instance of preventable violence? Like the only normal reaction is anger? I think that's such a good point where it's like, where do you expect it to go? What do you expect to happen if we keep telling our truth and no one is believing us.

I don't know about you, but sometimes it feels like you're having your head against a brick wall ache. At some stage, what's going to happen? Your head will just be a skull.

I know. I'm hopeful that things are changing. I am hopeful. Yeah, I don't think I could work in this area if I didn't see that hope. But whenever there is an instance like that. It's really I think it's really important to just like, reflect on the unnecessariness of it. Like this didn't have to happen. Yeah. You know, and they

Yeah, like I think even the understand what you were like working earliers. So like, it kind of gives us a sense of like, is this the product the earlier than the price of, you know, teaching young boys how to like how actually treats girls and making you know, this whole you know, like boys will be boys.

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. You know, it's no, it's, I think that you make such a good point about early childhood education, because if we don't think starting there, then we're not looking closely enough at the problem. Like that is where these kinds of behaviors that prevent other behaviors later in life, that's where they began, you know, yeah, evolution has gotten them. Yeah.

I think like I don't want to toot my own horn but, this is where it needs more investment in the likes the early years because if this sort of issue, what's happening is if they put more investment in earlier years, like it gives more resources to actually help defeat the issue of

preventative. Yeah, I completely agree with you. Yeah. Because, I mean, a lot of my work is focused on higher education. Just because kind of that's where I found myself in it. But, again, again, the research shows that higher education is too late Secondary School is oftentimes even too late. You know, if we're having conversations around, consent and behaviors and interpersonal relations with other people, and especially the gender aspect of that, and especially around disabled people, and there's, these conversations have to start as soon as they start interacting with people. That's the right age, you know?

Yeah. And I kind of remember even growing up that if someone says to me like you're over exaggerating, itself, nearly defeatist.

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Completely, because it's, you never especially with children, if you're the expert here but I think children there's a presumption that they will be believed. So children have presumption that if they say if something happens to me tell someone they're going to be believed, but as soon as women start recounting their experiences, where young girls start recounting their experience, read this, and they're told, Oh, that means he likes you. Or they're told to cop on and boys will be boys, or grow up a wee bit that is when we start to doubt ourselves and that is when we start to begin to accept a place within society that is listened to less and heard less. And I think that if, if this didn't take place, could you imagine how much more self esteem women would have and how much safer they would feel? Like it would be such a societal change if we just started listening to what young girls are telling us, you know,

like, I think like, I fear for like, you know, how families are experienced domestic violence and then if you're bringing it into the, into our society, you know, as well, even with the pandemic, the vicious cycles get more vicious. It's not even, like the cycles continue to go around. What's more vicious?

Absolutely, and I think that intimate partner violence, domestic violence, but I think that the issues there, so much of it, hopefully can be resolved with long term can be resolved with education prevention. There's not enough supports for intimate partner violence in Ireland. I mean, there's not there's I'm pretty sure there's the same amount of money given to greyhound racing in Ireland than there is to Women's Refuge by the government. Which is a terrifying concept. And I think that we cannot disconnect that from a cause. So we can't say that, Oh, that's not relevant, that resourcing isn't relevant that we just need to like teach our people better. That's not it. Like, if everyone is paying attention to this. Something I think about all the time, whenever I'm doing my work is that if everyone is paying attention to this no one will be able to function everyone would be so angry, like if everyone actually faced up to the issue of gender based violence. And like, if we all just accept like looked at that head on, no one would be able to function because it's so bad. It's everywhere. It's hyper prevalent. Everywhere in society.

Like do you think there's like emotional awareness of like, no, issues of like, funds for example, like, for me, I I've started giving my brother my location, anywhere I am going because I'm just thinking like, heaven forbid, if I'm traveling to Trinity, for example. I don't know if I'm going to be attacked or if something is going to happen on my home. So I'm kind of thinking like, I remember when I first initially said it to him like I fully prepared to have like a full blown argument of like, just do it. What do you think like the terms of men and boys nowadays. Do you think there's like some sort of, like, understanding?

I do. I do. I truly do. And I think I see it more and more every year that I give consent workshops, to first years. I do think the tide is turning. And I'm really hopeful that it is I think that we all everyone starts just needing to listening to people's experiences, you know, and truly asking questions will truly in every aspect of our life, checking in with the women and vulnerable people around us, because in reality, they're probably scared some a lot of the time. And I think you giving your location is such a good example of the things that we try to do to help ourselves even though we know that realistically, there's not actually that much we can do on a personal level. And it can only come from other people protecting each other. That's the only thing where things will change. But I think women have been trying their best and non-binary people and trans people again, all gender minorities, that are not cis men have been trying for so long. And I think that there's a realization now that this has been happening for a really long time. I think that is coming in young men and boys. And the more conversations I have with it, I would say that if you if you are listening to this podcast, and you are a woman, and you haven't had a conversation, a genuine conversation with the male people around you about your experiences, I think it'd be really worthwhile doing so if you can, because they probably don't know.

Yeah, and actually that's only really what you're saying there but like having the conversation like pray to god I remember praying to God that asking for the likes of my uncle's to have conversation with the boys and you know, what do you think about this? Yeah, like it's, I think, personally, it's all yes, it's like, it's good to have a conversation regardless if you’re a man or woman with your children. But coming from a man’s perspective, yeah. And understanding that like, Oh, this is wrong. I would pray to God.

And I think it is, especially if men do know then it's on men, to educate. It's been on women and we ever it's been on us for so long. And there is I think it's a really interesting argument on the argument of like, the cis male role in removal of rape culture, because realistically, if again, they actually looked at the problem they would realize the source is the patriarchy and the sources of masculine beings. I guess that I am probably like the maybe a little bit controversial opinion that like, if we can help them get there, we should, but I know that that's kind of I mean, that is controversial but. I think that as you say if we encourage the men in our lives, to have conversations with the men in their lives, and say actually, this is happening to all of the people that we love all of the time, and they're constantly scared, like, just it's just a constant state of hyper awareness that we go into every time we ever has, and oftentimes for a lot of women, every time they're inside their house, every time they're with their partners you know,

think about it, like, you're like the thing where violence against women and it's like, you don't know who it can affect. Oh, I don't know the experiences of anyone,

anyone, anyone. I think that's something that's really important to think about is how risk factors for sexual violence compound. So risk factors for sexual bonds are things like being a woman or being trans or being from a minority social class, or being from an ethnic minority or being disabled. And if you fulfill one of these criteria, you're more likely to experience sexual violence, but if these compound and so, if you are a disabled trans woman, the risk is gets higher and higher, because you become more and more isolated from society or you are like society isolated because of you know, society. But basically risk compounds. And I think that if we focus in on that and start with the most vulnerable members of our society, or those who are most vulnerable to sexual violence, that would refocus energy and resources, I think, you know,

and like I them I'm a friend and the girl I went to college with her boyfriends really, really good to me like, you can really pray to God that they're a girl in trouble that he would be there, because he's the type of person that like he won't be a bystander. Yes, like, or, like I remember, we were going, we were on a night outs, and I was trying to fix my bag or something.

And he stayed with me.

But at the same time I was hyper vigilant.

But we're always hyper vigilant. It's our normal it's I know, it's a learned behavior. And we've learned it from experience. You know,

like, like I remember like, I know for this guy wanting to go near me know at the same time. It's like, this whole, like, yeah, there's like your nature versus nurture. Yeah, it's a bit of both, but I think that's true. Yeah. Once it comes, like I I will believe that women now like women in general, that as soon as they were born they realize the hypertension. hypervigilance was done.

Oh, and it's because it's because I think it's really interesting point, nature versus nurture. I think it's such a learned behavior. We didn't pick it off the ground. You know, we saw it we learned it when with our friends when we were in primary school and from our mothers and aunties, and we do this behavior because we know that we are just always at a higher risk. And I think that the emotional, emotional labor of that, like the actual amount of emotional work that that takes can't be underestimated. It's so much harder for us to relax.

And I think about even like nights out so imagine like, where we're always kind of watching everything we're saying, your players. I was thinking about this while we were kind of planning this episode, and I was thinking to myself, well, I'd love to see happening a if, in the next few years if someone created like contact lenses or glasses, I could tell you and who's good and who's

bad. I know. Yeah. Oh, no, but I agree because it would make life so much easier. Obviously. Let me do less work for us. Yeah, yeah. I know. I really actually noticed after the, after the pandemic, we are still in the pandemic. But the thing that I really noticed, kind of when we started phasing back into life, was obviously during the pandemic you have you have this really small amount that you can spend your time with. So you're not really interacting with like, people you don't know on a daily basis per se. So you know, maybe I would be spending most of my time with like my friends and my boyfriend and people who I know. And then as we started like, more of a return to society and I was like walking at night or like going too fast or like going to the pub or something. I started to realize that I hadn't felt unsafe in a physical situation in a really long time. Because I hadn't been around potential dangers in a really long time. And I realized how scary it can be. And I was like, Oh, this is so strange, because I hadn't realized I had stopped doing it. But now that I have to do it again, I'm just like, oh my gosh, it's it's so much, you know? Yeah, yeah.

And come back bring back to the Mad, Mad woman. Yes.

Everything's Taylor, of course.

so, the next part I was looking at was tears. And there's nothing like a mad woman. What a shame she went mad. No one likes a mad woman. You made her like that. And you poked that, bear till the claws come out. And you find something to wrap your noose around. On there's nothing like a madwoman. Now you breath flames each time I talk. My cannons all firing at your yacht, They say “move on” But you know I And women like hunting witches too, doing your dirtiest work for you. It's obvious that wanting me dead has really brought you two together. I this was the part of the song where I really got taken back and you don't sit you sit there thinking? Oh, yeah. So I kind of looked at this in the sense of victim blaming. So I know first and what I'm saying is I do not know where these are true. I it's just what occurred from like online. Have I heard was that the were saying that the because Ashling Murphy's killer was not from Ireland that this is not an Irish issue.

Yeah, I think that's so reductive. I don't. I think that it's I mean, the person who has been arrested we don't that trial hasn't even taken place. Firstly. And I think that the easy option for us as Irish people is to say, this is not an Irish problem. Like that's so easy, isn't it? It's so easy for us to not look inward and see the problem in ourselves. As obviously racist like, you know, but I think that I think it's a knee jerk reaction, because people don't want to face reality. In reality, nine out of 10 victims of femicide are killed by their intimate partners. That's the reality. It's not by strangers on the street. And it's in reality. The problem of sexual violence exists as much in Ireland as it does anywhere else. And really, we don't even know if it's more because we've been so bad at taking records of it in Ireland, because it's not something we could face up to for a really long time. And I think that I'm hopeful that we are on the crest of a wave around, kind of facing up to the problem of gender based violence in Ireland but I think that that was that was that kind of language was really are like, these kind of statements were really indicative of the work that has to be done.

Yeah. Like I say, we don't we don't know for certain, like whether they like these things are true. So yes, or no. Yeah. Also the fact like yeah, when they say that, like, you can play with that.

Well, that is inherently connected to a belief that if a woman behaves badly. She was looking for trouble. She know, like, if Anyone who is out in the club, wearing tiny clothing, which is what I love to do, by the way, that is that doesn't make me less worthy of existence than somebody who's not doing that. And as soon as we start quantifying people's right to exist or right to exist safely, that's when our true colours start coming up around how we actually feel about women. You know,

like, as well, do you think, do you think that the Catholic Church has an element of this because if you think about loads of, oh, women,

Yes, the magdeleine laundaries and the behavior that we wanted out of women and the kind of women that we wanted, and that is so I know that people when they say that we're more secular society now, but 90% of our primary schools are Catholic. And there is inherent I mean, a part engineering part of Catholicism is the concept of women being sinful and you cannot the last magdeleine laundry closed in the 1990s in Ireland. So we can't remove that from our perspectives. Like we can't say, oh, that was so long ago. That's not relevant anymore. Absolutely not. Of course it is. Of course it is.

Like, like I can't even think like we have moved on. A lot from like, where we were like the introduction of doctrine, but they repealed the Eighth Amendment. That was a big stand to for women. But at the same time, it's like, if you think about that, sorry, a year, and of when it was being brought in, it didn't really It didn't take into the consideration of orally, intimate, intimate partner violence. It doesn't the protection wasn't there for women. No, oh my god. I

know. And I think it was repeal. I was at Dublin Castle, actually, when Repeal was announced. It was one of the best days ever. And I remember feeling so much joy and hope and mostly relief, like so relieved because we just didn't know how was going to go. And it felt like a real turning point. And I think it was I think it really was a real turning point, especially for the vocalization of whether generally considered to be women's problems, which is a generalization obviously. But I think that since repeal, we've seen how much even when we feel like the work is done, we still have to keep doing the work. Like nine out of 10 GPS and Ireland's I think are not currently offering abortion services in their practices. So like the it's the work is done on paper, and there's also no exclusionary zones outside of maternity hospitals. The work is done on paper. But on practice, we always keep I think that is it's kind of unfortunately, a really good metaphor for life as a woman is that even when the work is done on paper, we still have to keep pushing for it. We still have to keep projecting our voices and we can't get complacent.

We are coming full circle in the sense of like, with the gas lighting and like we haven't, every time we exactly yeah, every time we try and say something. We're looking at it like

this. You're being chaotic. Yeah, exactly. And have you feel that Are you not happy with that? Some of them are free. You know, like, yeah.

Yeah, you're thinking Well, I kind of wish, like I remember I seen like a video online and like, this woman upon this question is like, Would you be okay with everything that happened to black people? Yeah. And to that, like your hands if you're okay with it. No, I'm dead. You're kind of thinking at the same analogy of women. Yeah. Would you be okay with having to basically be told? Like, what what you can be done with your body? Of

course, no, it's it's, it's an uphill battle, but I'm also hopeful. I am. I'm really hopeful. I mean, the conversations that we're having today wouldn't have happened 15-20 years ago, you know, and the narrative is changing and I think that things are getting better. I'm hopeful anyway.

Like, I think as well, like Seeing how many women turned up to the vigil for Ashling Murphy.

That really emotional. Yeah. Yeah.

Because like, you don't necessarily think you don't you know how women will react but you don't know how many men will like, will actually come out and say, Yeah, I was walking it in. They show their support. And going back to bring it back to Taylor again. Follow the next line though. I'm taking my time I'm taking my time because you took everything from me. What new climb watching you climb over. People like me. A master of spin as a couple of side flings. Good wives always know. She should be mad should be scathing like me. But no one likes a mad woman. She was saying she went mad. You made her like that. I actually was on to Courtney about this but it's in the water, trying to pull the car and we're talking about how the justice system because it comes like I find it can be seen that any case, a cases where men have been brought to court. There been the courts have been very lenient. Oh, yeah. With their sentencing. Like it's God's fact. Like I'm actually on final words. I know. I'm speaking to you

know, we're setting

like if I look at the the young girl before Christmas, it was a new year was just before New Year's who got attacked for a friend attack. Yes is two lads. Were led on to bail. Silence really?

Yeah, it's just I think.

I studied law.

It's my background is in law. And I think that the legal system is one of however many systems that do just perpetuate patriarchal systems. So it's, it's it is that of rape culture. It is that of acceptance and disbelief of women. You can bring up previous sexual conduct as evidence in a rape trial. So you can say well, she's had sex before in a rape trial in Ireland so yeah, yeah, it's it's bad. But I think that again, there's more recognition coming out about that now but it is one of I think, the most, if you are a victim of gender based violence, like it is so traumatizing to go through the court system, it's so re traumatizing. And I think that more trauma informed approaches have to be applied here. And it's something that we're seeing in higher education right now as a trauma informed approaches are being applied to kind of policies and procedures to take into account what trauma is and how it affects people. And I'm hopeful that that will start coming into the legal system very soon. But for right now, it's not good.

Yeah. Like I looked at looked at the like the UK. A was the police officer. That was completed for Sarah Everards murder. He was convicted of life, thieves life and then when you look at likes of over here, like life usually means like, you know, 15 years. There's a very big difference. Oh, absolutely. It's like, I think the silence really says itself. Yeah. Oh. Like, I think even like, we look at different countries, how they handle different cases. It's different.

Yeah. And I think that it's not coming from nowhere, you know, Ireland, did. We really, the grip of Catholicism can be ignored that, that we can't advance as much we have been able to advance much the last 20 years, as they have in other jurisdictions for that reason, you know? But I also think that I mean, the justice system in the UK is not good for victims of gender based violence, you know, this era of rape case, obviously, but it's not. It's not really good anywhere. There's not a perfect system, I think. Yeah. And I think it's a lot of legal reform has to take place around that.

I think it does take time, but they you have to start from somewhere, honestly,

oh, we can't write it off. Nope, completely. Absolutely not.

What happened to Ashling, because it's so much of a public outcry because you see online how like people are really annoyed. So lastly, I just want to talk about how the I was kind of looking at the fact that like, if I was Taoiseach for the day, what would I bring in and I was thinking about maybe bringing in likes of Ashling's law. So I was thinking about bringing in likes of, you know, not having bail or having more strict and

more harsh sentencing.

Yeah. So there's so much that we could probably do and say certain areas, but we do, let's see, say, for future, like, in the case of and

I think, yeah, I think that I mean, there's no kind of easy answer there. I think that I mean, for me it would be like a wider cultural change. I would say that there's a lack of, I would say education, to be honest with you like long term, I would say an educational program that really speaks to rape culture that speaks to use of pornography a sex education that speaks to an acceptance of low level access, sexual violence. And I guess if I had if I could pick a dream in that area, I would pick resourcing as regards to gender based violence. have so many more refuges and so many more education programs, a gender based violence center, and you don't have anything like that. That would be my wishlist. Yeah, I think I think it'll come. I do. Yeah, I'm hopeful. Yeah. It's great talking to you about the subject your conversation. Thank you so much. For now. I was delighted to be here.