

**Podcast:** On Being III  
**Season #:** 1  
**Executive Producer:** Emilia Nielsen  
**Producer(s):** Emily Blyth and Coco Nielsen  
**Episode Title:** Refusing to be Disciplined by our Discipline  
**Guest:** Ela Przybylo  
**Release Date:** October 2022  
**Website:** <https://emilianielsen.com/>

### Transcript

(References included below)

**Ela Przybylo [EP]:** So it's usually two weeks of every month where it was pain that was very severe, and of course, very hard to work around and navigate. So to hear such pain minimization from people, it was...it was absurd. And I think this is of course very common for people who are chronic pain sufferers, is that unless it's visible, people don't want to believe you for some reason.

[Music throughout introduction: Ascending, bright, twinkly, uplifting, electronic]

**Emilia Nielsen [EN]:** This is *On Being III*, a show about creativity, disability and identity. I'm your host, Emilia Nielsen.

Today's guest is Ela Przybylo, an assistant professor in the Department of English and core faculty in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program at Illinois State University. She is the author of *Asexual Erotics: Intimate Readings of Compulsory Sexuality* from The Ohio State University Press, and co-editor of *On the Politics of Ugliness* from Palgrave, as well as the author of many peer-reviewed articles and chapters on asexuality and other topics. Ela is a founding and managing editor of the peer-reviewed, open access journal *Feral Feminisms* and is in the process of developing a book called *Ungendering Menstruation* that draws on crip theories, queer and trans science studies, and critical menstruation studies to trouble the binding of menstrual bleeding to cisgender "womanness" and to explore the mismanagement of menstrual pain by medical science.

I sat down with Ela to talk about their work on chronic menstrual pain, how their multidisciplinary approach to research keeps things interesting, and their most recent foray into public facing scholarship via the small screen.

[Music fades]

**EN:** So this was kind of exciting for me mid-month, I heard about this CBC show. So for listeners outside of Canada, that's the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, but specifically this show called, *The Big Sex Talk*. And I watched an episode which was specifically entitled "Not Having It," which I thought was fantastic. I want to hear about everything, including not having it. So you

were prominently featured in that episode. And I'm really curious about the process of making that episode, agreeing to participate...it's kind of the type of public-facing project that many of us would probably be thrilled to do but also slightly terrified. It kind of pushes against some of the edges that many academics have just in terms of comfort zones. So I'm so curious about if any of that rings true, or none of it does, and just kind of what it was like to, if you've seen the episode yet, to be on TV.

**EP:** Yeah, you've got it, definitely both those things: terrifying and exciting. So they did a really good job. And when I watched the episode, I loved the representation they had in terms of people's different relationships to asexuality. They seemed to get the best angle for everyone, in terms of how they appeared, how they spoke. It was just really delightful. I thought they did an amazing job. I also learned about *Prude Magazine* from it, which I didn't even know about and I should have known about, so that was really exciting. And I mean for me a really special moment—this is like not quite process, but I guess I can get to process in a second—was when my...when my family watched the show, and they had a really delightful reaction. So my mom especially, she called me and she said, “Ela, I think I'm demisexual.” And this is amazing to me. She's, you know, she's in her 70s; and she's an immigrant from Poland; english is her, I don't know, technically third or fourth language. And it was amazing that this word—and she said it so crisply—really resonated with her. And what's really odd too, is that she has known that I do work on asexuality for the last decade. And this is why I'm getting to this... something about seeing me on TV, and this is the first time I've been shot in this way, I mean filmed at all, or been in any film thing. For some reason her seeing me in this way made it actually legible to her. And I found this fascinating, I found this really interesting. But preparing for it, I was thinking about...you don't know exactly who the audience is, but I definitely wasn't expecting it to be my mother. And I was just trying to re-theorize everything for myself, thinking about how I can make it resonate for whoever the audience might be. So the process was exciting. And this is what I think I like about so-called public outreach things like this, is that it's...it gets us back to that space of excitement about our research that I think is easily lost with things like burnout and exploitation and being you know, at one point, a precarious worker and gigafication. And you lose the sense of the goal and the purpose of the research you're doing. So a kind of curating like they did, it makes it exciting. And it makes you think about how the journey of your research, the journey of the work you've done over time, and how really, it makes it legible to other people. So it was a, yeah, really, really exciting moment for me. And really special that my family really, really liked it for some reason. I don't know if they got all of it, but they definitely got the part about critiques of compulsory sexuality. So I...it was really cool.

**EN:** That's amazing. I mean, listening to you speak about this sparked something for me. And it is...it's that newness that can arise when you are asked to speak about your research or writing to a new audience, especially when you can sense their excitement. When I think about so many people that I know that work in academia, in all the different guises, many of us started because we're excited about ideas, and we loved learning, and we wondered if one day maybe that excitement around learning and ideas and writing and words might translate into being able to teach or mentor around those ideas. But it certainly started with that spark of, like, the pleasure of learning, or the pleasure of ideas. And, like you say, that so-called public-facing

scholarship...I'm still trying to figure out exactly what that is and kind of what counts as public-facing scholarship. But you do get to connect with people that you might not otherwise in such an immediate way, as a lot of scholarly knowledge is kind of codified in journals, sometimes behind paywalls, mostly behind paywalls, or conferences that are inordinately expensive to attend and sometimes terribly boring even for participants. Right? It doesn't spark that excitement. So it sounds like maybe for you moving forward, you would be a "yes" to doing something like this again. Or has this kind of piqued your excitement in other forms of, I don't love the language of traditional or nontraditional, just because I always go "to what tradition are we speaking about." But if you think about academics, perhaps purportedly being most comfortable with the library research, and the writing in journals, and the disseminating information that way...edited collections. It seems like your work has always sort of disrupted that a bit, in terms of whether it's starting a journal on your own. I mean, the formation of something is exciting, or this television project, I'm just curious if there's anything you are working on these days that is that way looking, or, or perhaps not?

**EP:** One of the things that you said that I really liked just now was you were talking about the excitement that gets us to that point of wanting to investigate questions, wanting to choose methods, to pursue something we want to explore. And in my book on asexual erotics, I use Audre Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic* to think about different ways of thinking sexuality. But that essay has really played such a role in the last few years for me for thinking also about coming to research and teaching, and that energy that we want to hang on to as we advance in our careers or as we struggle with careers that aren't developing as we wanted them to, which is so common. I mean, being on a very precarious job market where it's not you choosing what job you want, it's you hoping for the best and reconstructing your life around that. So holding on to that *Uses of the Erotic* piece about the erotic or the eros in relation to research, has been really important for me. And I think you might know this scholar too...and I happened to read her book a few years ago, Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World*. And I was surprised that she uses eros in that as well, and talks about this concept that I've been really into, of polydisciplinamoury. And this idea...of not just like interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary or even polydisciplinary research, but this idea of being amorous to a research, and also not being bound to any discipline...refusing to be disciplined by the disciplines that, you know, we are in. And that's resonated a lot for me. Thinking about how I can continue to remain amorous towards my research and teaching and everything really, how to maintain that erotic sense of interest, where there's some deep connection with the research we're doing and refusing to follow any one track for it. And unfortunately, there is a way in which if a person is polydisciplinamorous, in a true sense, it also makes you really illegible on the job market. People don't know what you're doing, they don't know what discipline you're in, you know, you have to tailor your, like, cover letter. So you talk about one thing, but then not another thing. And then you mention another thing in the interview, and they're like, "Oh, what?". It feels like a mishmash, which is, you know, very negative. So the concept of polydisciplinamoury has given me this framework for thinking about it that I can justify; that I'm not bound by one discipline, that I can talk about it as something that's a methodology on its own, that's a specific approach, that isn't, you know, about fickleness or like noncommitment. Which, ironically, though, could also be things deployed against polyamorous people too. But it's about tapping into that erotic mode of

doing research, where you might not get it right. And you might have to learn something about different areas, but that there's a sense of wanting to experiment and following our research questions and investments, not based on the disciplinary modes, but based on the direction kind of that erotic leads us in. That's what I've been thinking about a lot lately, in terms of what work I want to do, reviewing the work I've been doing, thinking about which work that I've done has felt good and which hasn't. And I guess that is one thing, if you do that kind of polydisciplinamorous research, and you allow yourself to experiment, you have a greater chance of thinking about where the joy and the erotic lie for you as well.

[Music: Uplifting choral voices, punctuated melodic string instrument, peppy electronic clapping sounds]

**EN:** Oh, I love that. I mean, so much of what you just said, just deeply resonates with me. And I certainly have had moments where I gave myself a stern talking to, which I immediately then abandoned about my lack of careerism in my PhD, that I was never driven by...I would say, much to the chagrin, probably, of my supervisor and my committee, and I'm speaking now, as, you know, nine years out...I was also very much working on that crip time, as my own kind of crippled reality quickly led me to understand that I would not be finishing my PhD in the four years that I originally thought I would. And I took a meandering path throughout my undergrad and I didn't even tap into, sort of, that there was a different way to do that. And I'm so thankful to early mentors that really—without saying it explicitly—really said, like, follow the interest, follow, you know, the thing that sparks joy, I guess, but like the thing that keeps you wanting to spend that careful and steadied attention. And that very much is so at odds with the reality of the academic job market. I never thought about...and I've heard you and Natalie use this word, and it is more than a word or a concept, but a methodology, and I'm definitely putting it on my “return to in the summer,” to think about more deeply...but this polydisciplinarity...polydisciplinarity? I can't even say it! But I know where it brings people, right? Which is the antithesis of “stay in your lane,” which is I think, more of the advice that is now given, which struck me as so odd. I understand it's maybe coming from respect or maybe coming from disciplinary conventions. But I did an interdisciplinary PhD...I was always trying to figure out the role of interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary or for myself, I was very much committed to post-disciplinary work. I wanted to think about the ever ongoing after of putting different disciplinary knowledge in conversation with each other. But yes, then you hit the job market, and you can reduce yourself and reduce your interests. And certainly, for me, that is the opposite of kind of staying with the joy. That's probably why I reached out to you and we did on the podcast, because I'm always interested when folks that I maybe understand as not doing Health or Critical Disability Studies work reveal themselves to be interested in those conversations. And that makes so much sense to me, because we live our embodied lives in bodies that are uncertain and at times disruptive, pleasantly, sometimes unpleasantly, so...and I don't really know anyone among us that isn't affected by questions of health or disability. But the way we respond to that is very different. And I've definitely noticed the resistance of thinking about oneself through disability or crip realms and then others kind of embracing...the moment is now, around Alison's Kafer's work, around *Feminist Queer Crip*, and her real call for a political-relational model, which then pretty much brings us all into conversation about the future of disability, and this future *for* disability, maybe

more importantly, to make the world we want, to include rich, joyful, disabled lives and communities. So in your article entitled—I'll read it out because it's a great title, I think you're good with titles—"Feels and Flows; On the Realness of Menstrual Pain and Crippling Menstrual Chronicity," which you co-authored, you, in my estimation, really write against this medical model of the ordinariness, I suppose, of chronic, cyclical, menstrual pain. And you really reveal how these so-called "growing pains," that can be kind of, I guess, a disciplinary phrase or trying to reduce pain, that's felt cyclically or chronically, to something everyone goes through which really, I think denigrates the experience. You write against this medical kind of vernacular for describing this type of pain, and call for a feelings-based model, which kind of brings us back to the conversation we were having earlier about sticking with the feeling or connecting to the spark of feeling, the erotic, the eros. And I love Audre Lorde's article. But the feelings-based model, for you, what makes this distinction so important, when we're thinking about cyclical chronic pain, menstrual pain in particular, which has a various but also distinct gendered discourse, I think, attached to it.

**EP:** Yeah, so first of all, I'll say the article, I co-wrote it with Breanne Fahs who's a really fantastic scholar at Arizona State University. I mean, it's one of those things where, like you were saying, that feeling of a piece of writing building up in your body for so long, that when you get to it, it feels like...like something that had to be written. This was definitely one of those pieces. I guess I can tell you a little bit about my own medical history, because this will also set us up for thinking about that medical approach to chronic pain a little bit more curiously or challenging it, as you mentioned. So I've had a very rich and long history as a menstruator. And, of course, the first thing that's important to note is that so many menstruators—and that word is important, not ascribing a gender to it, because a wide variety of people do menstruate across genders, and many people who are considered women also don't menstruate. So the word "menstruators" has been important in that regard. And so many menstruators experience pain. I'm not necessarily saying that menstruation is chronic pain, but that there is definitely overlap there. And so in terms of statistics, studies vary, but it's between like 80 and 85% of all menstruators experience pain. And of those 30%, if not more, experience very severe pain, which is also called dysmenorrhea. And it's a sizable part of the population anywhere in the world is going to have these problems and these confrontations with pain. On top of that there's also endometriosis, which is very serious and was for a long time not treated seriously by doctors at all: very hard to diagnose, very hard to treat, and often seen as malingering by people who have it rather than taken seriously as anything. And a scholar who does really great work on this as Cara Jones, writes really beautifully on crip approaches to endometriosis. But so for me as a young menstruator right away I experienced pain, and it was of course horrible and life-changing and it would always come back. So it was frequent and ongoing. I also had the misfortune of having toxic shock syndrome at the age of about 14, due to a tampon and blood accumulation. That led very closely to my death at that age. And then of course, I continued to have menstrual pain for years and years. And now I'm...for the last four years or so I've been doing menstrual suppression, which has...I mean, comes with its own risks, but has also transformed my relationship to pain in the sense that I just don't have it as frequently. I mean, all of that medical history is to say that the medical model has never served menstruators very well, nor has it arguably served chronic pain very well. So in regards to menstrual-related pains, it's

just so minimized and so disbelieved, there's really no way to get the support you need. There's no accessibility to menstrual suppression from any young menstruators. Most of the drugs that exist don't fully alleviate the pain. It's not a very just approach to the pain that exists for so many people. So the medical model has been insufficient to menstrual-related chronic pain already. And so it really made sense for Breanna and I, and it kind of developed naturally, to think about more crip and feeling-based approaches that allowed us to think with our pain, sit with our pain, and also to write in a way that echoed the pain, and the cyclical and chronicity of it. So all those things were really important. I think for me it felt very vindicating, like, over the years, I had heard so many pain-minimizing things from people...I mean, and for me, it's probably endometriosis, although it's undiagnosed, which is again, how the medical model has failed to serve me because it's so hard to be diagnosed with endometriosis. So it's usually two weeks of every month, where it was pain that was very severe, and, of course, very hard to work around and navigate. So to hear such pain minimization from people, it was absurd. And I think this is, of course, very common for people who are chronic pain sufferers is that, unless it's visible, people don't want to believe you for some reason. And of course, you get all those negative stereotypes associated with that, that, you know, either you're lazy, or that you're malingering or that, you know, whatever it might be. So it was really important for us to challenge that medical model, which, of course, so much Critical Disability Studies and Crip Studies and Feminist Critical and Queer Disability Studies work has done. So whilst we weren't reinventing anything there, we were just thinking about its application to this very common element of menstruators lives, which is pain.

[Music: Fast-paced keyboard sounds ascending and descending, slow melodic wind instrument]

**EN:** Yeah, I think that's actually partly what makes it exciting, though, right? When we think about what is purportedly ordinary or natural, and we kind of reorient so it doesn't look so ordinary or natural... I mean *that* word. Because when I think about that, I mean, my relationship to pain and chronic pain is a kind of long one too in different ways. And one thing that I think that folks that don't experience that particular relationship to pain, is that, which makes sense, they experience more acute notions. So they stub their toe, which can be an incredibly painful, maybe break their toe, and that pain is very absolute. And it can be localized in a very specific place. And then hopefully it can be treated, and then it goes away. It doesn't return. But what I know to be true about chronic pain, it's not just the two weeks of the month—which I think is just you know, that's a lot of time—it's not just the two weeks of the month, where one is actively enduring, working with, trying to find ways to shape your body to the pain to do the other things you want in your life. It's that when it ends, that memory of pain is still there. There's that kind of lingering, where you're either in disbelief that you are out of pain, or you're anticipatory about when the pain is going to arise again. And I've kind of argued that that means that it doesn't actually ever go away. You know, and migraine sufferers can speak about this quite viscerally, that there's that the hangover kind of effect of that type of pain, but also watching and waiting for when the pain is going to return, is its own kind of discomfort, that's more than ordinary. And we shape our bodies, our lives—work and otherwise—around those kinds of cycles, which means there isn't a time then when it's just free from pain. It's always there: reminding, cajoling, disrupting our other kinds of structures we might want to put in place. And I think that's very hard

for non-chronic-pain-sufferers to sort of get their head around. Because the other type of pain does go away. Or it can be medically managed. And the medical model for viewing both pain and disability is that it needs to be cured, that whatever is perceived as being wrong—whether the sufferer thinks so or not, doesn't kind of figure within this expansive category of the normal, that shifts and changes over time and place, that's what makes it kind of, I think, a bit suspicious, right? These categories of normalcy—but yet, you know, wants to bring that body into the alignment of the normal. And pain is a funny one. Not “haha” funny. Many pain sufferers that do identify as crip or disabled would love the medical model to work, to say “yes, I would love to be cured of this.” But that curing doesn't, you know, mean that one has to dis-identify from feminist-queer-crip cultures and disability and crip cultures because of that lived embodiment, right? If you do find yourself pain-free, all those years of chronic pain don't somehow go away, they continue to impact, I think, dare I say, in like productive ways in terms of thinking about allyship and community building with other people that are currently experiencing pain. So I'm wondering, like in your embodied writing, because I really saw “Feels and Flows” as being kind of an example of, you know, creating a new sort of... I think more than a style, I think that, a kind of methodology was at play, as you in and Breanne wrote. And I could see the places where you purposefully kind of disrupt the scholarly texts with autobiography, which is a technique that I love. And I've, I've always loved, you know, whether it's Ann Cvetkovich doing that, or Eve Sedgwick, or just other writers that I've loved [for a] long time, do that kind of little insertions, right, that kind of disrupt the text in a great way. But there's also this element where the pain is kind of producing, or motivating—I don't know what the right word is—the two of you as writers. And so I'm curious about that productive—kind of the wrong word— but the disruptive and the productive that was at play as the two of you wrote together, and I think it's really important, that is a collaborative work because you're playing off each other as well. How did pain kind of show up as you were working on that piece together?

**EP:** Yeah, one of the things that Breanne had done research on was this concept of menstrual synchronicity. And this is a really prevailing, commonly held, like, idea that menstruators, that they menstruate in tandem, so if you like, live...you know, if you're like in a queer household with other people who menstruate that everyone's gonna menstruate at the same time, or....So this is like, very commonly held but Breanne did some digging and there's like no research to back this up at all. There's this commitment that people hold and it's kind of weird, but it could be like a feminist tale that could cut either way. It could either be like erasing difference, or it can be used to sort of build solidarity. I feel like it could go either way. And so we didn't, like, deliberately do that. But we did end up developing this way of writing back and fourth, and then inserting, as so many great feminist, queer, anti-racist, crip theorists do, inserting autobiographical moments. And I know you do this as well. And also, by the way, I really love the essay, I just read that you wrote on chronic poetics. And so we didn't want to be in synchronicity with how we narrated our experiences, because we had, to some extent, different experiences. There was overlap. I mean, there's pain in both of them. But we wanted to emphasize that kind of disjunction, and that dissonance. So we did think about how those autobiographical moments could almost emit that kind of chronicity we were talking about: returning, but not always returning in the same place, and having multiple “I”s, not just one kind of narrative experience there. And one thing that was really interesting in the editing process,

originally, the way we wrote it, it wasn't clear what autobiographical moment belonged to which of us, but then the way they edited it, they recommended that we put our initials in parentheses after. So that was really interesting, too, because it's almost like we were ourselves building towards that synchronizing menstrual model. And then we're like, "What is happening here?" So, the autobiographical elements were really important to me for sure. The thing you mentioned before with the concept of *growing pain*, ended up being meaningful for me with this article. When I had just first become a new menstruator I went to a pediatrician, who told me that I was experiencing growing pains. And this was absurd to me, because I knew for sure that this pain was coinciding with menstruation. And this was a very senior physician, this was someone who had been working for a long time, and he was unable to, of course, recognize the pain and prescribed some sort of weird muscle balm for me, because I was apparently growing so much—which was not true, either. I was very short, I continue to be very short. And so this was just totally inability to recognize my experience, in this case. So when we were thinking about this medical model not recognizing, in that instance, for example, my pain, we're also thinking about how there are ways to *grow* pain, that might be more, like you're saying, productive, without also wanting to have a recuperative model of pain, understanding how life-inhibiting it can be, really. But so we thought about this "growing pain" as growing pain in the sense of growing conversations around pain, growing, maybe awareness around pain, growing in terms of that collaborative effort to think about our pain together. And also growing pain in terms of just the recognition around its existence. So we were sort of thinking about that "growing pain" as maybe itself a crip temporality: what would it mean to grow pain, not necessarily in the body, but metaphorically?

[Music: Quick, light, percussion, descending keyboard, minor tones]

**EN:** I do want to make sure we have a chance to talk about *Feral Feminisms*. I love the word "feral." I love the concept of feral. I grew up where we had feral horses, which, oh my goodness, just completely captivated my imagination. I couldn't quite get my head around what they had done to be living a kind of wild life on this little island whereby at one time they were attached to human owners and broke from that relationship. *Feral Feminisms* has broken from a kind of, I think, relationship around publishing, in the sense that this was student-generated by yourself and others, which is, which is so very cool. And you've said, if I could quote you, "journals are world-making undertakings." So it sounds like you and perhaps other folks kind of made the world, at least in a print journal, that you wanted to see in a particular time. And I think now that journal is being carried on by other folks. But certainly, that's something that you got off the ground, and I'm sure you're still attached to in lots of ways. What did you sort of see that needed to be highlit? Or why another journal? You know, at that time...it's a huge amount of work. But it's also a place to publish and amplify the kind of work that one might want to and it's just...it's a huge undertaking. I'm so...I'm so curious about that project. Its genesis and maybe what it's up to today.

**EP:** Yeah, thanks for asking about this. I mean, one of the things with journal work is it's invisibilized, feminized, unpaid labour. So it's always really validating when someone is interested in the process of journal-creation rather than just on the product on the other end. So

like you mentioned, I was a graduate student at the time. Myself and two of my friends, Danielle Cooper and Sarah Rodrigues, we felt very brazen, that kind of boldness of...well, you were doing the same work that people who have tenure track jobs are doing in many ways. I mean, in many ways, it's not the same. But there are lots of overlaps. You're also teaching, you're also doing research. But you also have that new energy of that excitement, that erotic we were talking about earlier. And we felt very brazen. And we were, honestly as graduate students, we were a little bit frustrated with how nobody was introducing us to the methods of publishing. And we were all...the word brazen is coming to mind again but I can't think of a better one. We all had figured out the publishing process ourselves. But we knew that wasn't true for a lot of people. And really the general vibe that I got from faculty, although this wasn't true of everyone, was there was a resistance to seeing graduate students publish at all, with this idea that you might regret it later on, or that your ideas may change, or that...probably as well, that as you know, if you're a faculty member and you're reading the work, you can recognize the gaps that exist there, of course. And I understand that now being on the other end, too. But we still felt very strongly that we can make this happen. We talked to someone else who had created a journal in a similar way. And the journal was at the U of A; it was also an online journal. And this is, I would say, not first generation online journal, probably like, second generation. So this was 2012. So it was stil...there weren't that many online journals at the time for feminist work, although that transition was starting to happen. And we did also want to have it be open access. We understood intuitively that that was really important. And I also have a background in Visual Communication Design. So I knew that I wanted to have a journal that looked a little bit more attractive than some other journals, academic journals, do. Kind of resisting that swishy blue Routledge cover model, which, you know, tends to homogenize research. And, frankly, in terms of public scholarship, just does a disservice to it, because it doesn't communicate what it's doing. So we had all those principles in mind—we wanted it to be visually exciting, we wanted to have very interdisciplinary conversations, we wanted to empower graduate students and non-traditional scholars in terms of people who aren't faculty, to publish. So Danielle and Sarah have since left; now we have a new editorial board. But I've been on board this whole time, and I continue to do a lot of the work. And so it's actually been 10 years now, which is amazing, and also exhausting. So I mean, definitely journal work, I think it is world-making work. And I think it's really important process-based thinking that just gets lost a lot. There's really fantastic publishing studies scholars, who have been doing the work of thinking about what people have been calling the mundane realities, the kind of process-based things, the collaborative things that happen, also the disagreements that happen through the publishing process, and there's been really rich work in this. And I've been thinking about this in these last few years, especially because I now teach publishing studies courses, too, that's one of the things here I do at Illinois State University. So I teach students how to have a more socially-justice-oriented approach to publishing. Thinking about things like copy-editing in ways that's attuned to anti-racist and Indigenous principles, thinking about who gets published and why. And also thinking about this one quote that has been really meaningful to me from the women in print movement, also sometimes attributed to the feminist Barbara Smith, who was instrumental in the Kitchen Table Press, a historic, of colour, queer, feminist press, based out of the US, that "freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press." So this has really stuck with me for in terms of the transformational work that feminist publishing can and does do. But then, of course, the other

side of it is that invisibilized, feminized, unpaid labour aspect. And it is really exhaustive. Basically, what ends up happening is that authors aren't always respectful. They usually don't think you're a scholar as well. And, of course, I've been on the author perspective as well where things go wrong in the publishing process. So I understand that. But there's this assumption that you're just there to serve their greater purpose, sometimes. And it is very diminishing in that sense. And that has been a difficult thing to grapple with: having the ability to do this exciting, creative work, to collaborate with others, but then being actively erased in the process all the time as if the work just happens to be published on its own without any human involvement. So there's very mixed feelings there. And it's definitely very labour-intensive work. And it does mean that you have to put your own research aside to help support this other project of making other people's research possible, which is a huge commitment, and it's a huge undertaking. So that's not talked about enough for sure. In terms of the process of how research or writing or, or anything really, comes to be able to be published in the first place. It's kind of hidden and mystified. And there's definitely people behind that and feminist commitments behind that.

**EN:** Oh, absolutely. You know the word that comes to mind, I guess it's probably too, in most people's mind, but the care work that goes into the publishing process. And I think, thank goodness for robust naivete on the part of graduate students to do things like this, because it's terrible advice, to not encourage people to publish. I mean, the worst that can happen, I would say, is that you get a rejection, and that's a normal part of the process. The idea that you might be ashamed or disagree with your previous work, I mean, that is how a writing and researching life is made—that we actually have to contend with the fact that we can change our mind at any time. We just happen to live out lives that are public and on the page, should we want to explain our thinking about changing our minds. But it's strange advice. And I love that your reaction as a trio is to create your own journal. I'm curious about your relationship to writing, creative or otherwise. Is writing an active part of your life these days?

**EP:** Writing...it's, it's been hard. It's hard when you have so many commitments, obviously, when teaching and mentorship and service work becomes the main part of the day, if not the only part of the day, it's hard to have any energy left to write. I would think that I have a robust research agenda that continues into the future, but a lot of projects just haunt me and follow me around because although the idea generation is happening, that setting aside of time can be hard; there's not always time for it. And the metaphor I've been using lately is that it feels like scaling up a mountain. And as a rock climber, I know it's possible to scale up a mountain, but it's still very hard sometimes. So it's been feeling difficult for sure. I don't belong to the group of people that can build writing into every day. I belong to the group of people who do bursts of writing when it's possible, and who work towards a deadline. Which is like, in terms of writing hygiene, is like really, really bad I've heard. But it is the model that I follow mostly due to time constraints. And I've also heard the great model of slow academe. I've never been able to do slow academe. My academe has always been very hustling based and fast-paced. And I wish I could do slow academe. But I think, especially before I got a tenure track job, one of the reasons I ended up doing such polydisciplinamorous work was because—I mean, I had many interests and many directions, I wanted to pursue that in—but also there was an element of thinking about while the asexuality studies work, which is important to me, is not resulting in a

job and thinking about how I could combine that with other areas to perhaps lead towards a job. And I know this is like a weird thing to think about, and it doesn't sit well with the erotic aspect we've been talking about. But in reality, for people who are from backgrounds where you're not expected to be in the professoriate to start off with, you're not expected to land a job, you're advised against pursuing academic work, even though that's what you want to do. People who just have vis-a-vis their families, and vis-a-vis their relationship to universities, that are historically and in the present very ableist, very much based on norms of success that are based on discipline and rigor, rather than care at all. And the history of universities also as a space that historically was directly linked to enslavement, especially in the US and that came into universities coming into existence. As Craig Steven Wilder discusses really well and so comprehensively in his book, the existence of universities was settler-colonial and enslavement-based from the beginning. People without direct relationships to academia, whose parents aren't professors, who don't have an aunt or an uncle who's a professor, whose families might not have gone to universities, or who come from other backgrounds where suddenly whatever university education one might have had, or one's family might have had, becomes illegible because of the new context. And even for undergraduate students who are from populations that are not traditionally students, the reality is that part of every decision you make in your educational career is going to be thinking about having...guaranteeing some sort of future for yourself because there isn't anything to fall back on. There isn't mommies and daddies with money or, you know, a backup career or getting a job here or there. So there is a lot of hustling work I think that happens. And of course, I have a tenure track job now and it changes everything again. You can think about a future that lasts past the next year or two, you can think about dating someone in a more committed way, you can think about building community without expecting that it will no longer be there in a year or two from now. So I think a difficult system has been created. And a lot of people with PhDs are not able to navigate it because it's set up to not be really navigatable, unless you're of that special group of people who have been enshrined with the knowledge you need by the other people who believed in you. And I hate to talk about this so much, but it affects everything, it affects the life conditions for being able to write and think and maintain that erotic sense of commitment.

[Music: Ascending, bright, twinkly, uplifting, electronic]

**EN:** My guest today was Ela Przybylo. You can find more of Ela's work at [przybyloela.wordpress.com](http://przybyloela.wordpress.com), that's p-r-z-y-b-y-l-o-e-l-a.wordpress.com. You can follow Feral Feminisms on Twitter [@FeralFeminisms](https://twitter.com/FeralFeminisms).

*On Being III* is researched, recorded and produced on the traditional, unceded and treaty lands of Indigenous peoples across what is now contemporary Canada where each of us on the show is grateful to live and work. Please visit our website to learn more about our relationships with the lands and the peoples who live on them.

This show is produced by Emily Blyth and Coco Nielsen, and executive produced by me—Emilia Nielsen.

Prince Shima creates all of the music you hear in our show. You can find him on bandcamp at PrinceShima

If you liked this episode, check out more at [EmiliaNielsen.com](http://EmiliaNielsen.com) or wherever you listen to podcasts.

If you'd like to get in touch with us, please write to [OnBeingIIIIPodcast@gmail.com](mailto:OnBeingIIIIPodcast@gmail.com). We'd love to hear from you.

And finally, a big thank you to SSHRC, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, who funds this work through an Insight Development Grant. And to York University's Department of Social Science, where I am a faculty member. And lastly, to my colleagues and students in HESO, the Health and Society Program.

Until next time, let's create, converse, and crip the system together!

[Music rises in crescendo then fades out]

**[End of transcript]**

#### References

Jones, C. E. (2016). The pain of endo existence: Toward a feminist disability studies reading of endometriosis. *Hypatia*, 31(3), 554–571. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12248>

Kafer, A. (2013). *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana University Press.

Lazarus, R. (Writer), & Mehchi, N. (Director). (2022, March 18). Not having it (Season 1, Episode 2) [TV series episode]. In F. Fjorito & N. Mehchi (Executive Producers), *The big sex talk*. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Loveless, N. (2019). *How to make art at the end of the world: A manifesto for research-creation*. Duke University Press.

Lorde, A. (2000). *Uses of the erotic: The erotic as power*. Kore Press.

Przybylo, E. (2019). *Asexual erotics intimate readings of compulsory sexuality*. The Ohio State University Press.

Przybylo, E., & Fahs, B. (2018). Feels and flows: On the realness of menstrual pain and crippling menstrual chronicity. *Feminist Formations*, 30(1), 206–229. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2018.0010>

Wilder, C. S. (2014). *Ebony and ivy: Race, slavery, and the Troubled History of America's universities*. Bloomsbury.