**RedZone Podcast Episode #100: Dominance Hierarchies | Leadership | Competition | Women with Dr. Joyce Benenson**

Bill Murphy: 00:00 To the show today.

Joyce Benenson: 00:01 Thank you.

Bill Murphy: 00:02 All right. Well, I know that we've had a little bit of time to talk before we jumped on here, and I think what a good way for my audience to learn a little bit about you is ... Well, let me first tell everybody how I met you.

I met you through a combination of different books that I was ... Because I like to bring the best leadership material to my listeners and through a lot of books that I read, actually reference the research of where they got their thesis from, or how they're building it into their thesis, and that's what led me to yourself.

I got it from book Top Dog, which was super interesting book, and that led me to yourself. Maybe just tell everybody about what you do today. Where do you spend the predominant of your time in your research, and if you could share that with my audience, that would be a great start.

Joyce Benenson: 01:00 Okay. Well, I'm really interested in the social structure of human beings because if you look at non-human beings, researchers are always documenting their social structure and what does that mean? It means within a community who associates with who, who competes against who, where are the bonds the strongest, where are they the weakest.

I guess I find it much easier to understand non-human primates. It's simpler, nobody yells at me and says, “Oh, but they're socialized that way because they're non-humans.” Even though there definitely is socialization, it's not through TV, or on social media, or anything. A lot of the researchers I work with studied chimpanzees, studied bonobos, those are our two closest genetic living relatives. I guess my life's work has been taking their findings and creating research paradigms, so I can look at children and adults, and see if what they're finding with non-humans also applies to humans.

As I mentioned, a lot of that has to do with what are the relationships that across societies humans generally form.

Bill Murphy: 02:16 The book that you wrote in 2014, the book Warriors Versus Worriers. How did that come about? Do you remember the genesis moment of, "You know, I've got to write a book about this."

Joyce Benenson: 02:32 Oh, it's interesting. Well, Warriors and Worriers came about because the people I was working with in human evolutionary biology at Harvard said, “You've got to write this stuff up. You're translating what we're doing with non-humans into humans.” It really is a completely different way of looking at humans to consider them as, oh yeah, one other animal species.

A lot of people don't like that, but, for me, it's incredibly useful as a framework to say, "Okay. Do humans do the same thing that non-humans might do?" Obviously, in some cases they do, and in some cases they don't, and I don't want to in any way deny the fabulous gains humans have made, and their intelligence and all that. Nonetheless, there's some very basic principles that apply across most species. When you see those principles, it's hard to believe that we are not as humans thinking that they might apply to us as well.

That's what this book was about, to try to say, “Wait a second. Here is what I find from childhood, and what people have found across cultures and into adulthood that fits really well within a primate social structure.”

Bill Murphy: 03:48 In reading your book, I was fascinated by that. Also, I loved how you broke down the differences that you observe with boys and girls. I know I have no direct path for my line of questioning here, but I find it interesting having a son and two girls that I was trying to see these patterns, and I was like, “Wow.” You were right on with some of these concepts, but maybe one of the interesting pieces is species that fight.

I know that you mentioned that it's not just the human species, or males in particular, that have this inclination to fight, but it's also the two other non-human primates. Correct? As they also will fight, but I thought it was interesting how they reconcile. You made this pattern of reconciliation that maybe you could explain to everybody or re-explain the way I've said it so that it's correct.

Joyce Benenson: 04:48 Right. Basically, when you look at bonds in a species, and they do differ where some species females who are relatives kind of are the core of the community, and they stay there their entire lives, and, at adolescence, males leave. In other species, males who are related to each other form the core of the community, and unrelated males join them, and the females leave at adolescence.

The majority of species are like the first kind where females, and their female relatives stay together their whole life, but humans are not. Humans and our two closest genetic relatives, bonobos and chimpanzees, males stay. Males form the core of the community, and the females leave at adolescence.

Getting to your question on fighting, males fight like crazy in just about every species. Mammalian species, males compete over females, and they can compete to kill themselves if it gets bad enough, but usually that doesn't happen. Females, they do fight, but not in the same way, so it's not this over aggression where you die if it's severe enough. What's so fascinating about chimpanzees and humans in particular is males are the ones overall, in general, who spend more time in the center of the community, who are less likely to leave and join another community, and yet males are also the ones that fight.

How do you put that together? I was that fascinated by this, and what is it that allows you to fight like crazy for what you want whether it's to mate with a particular female, or to get some territory that's really nice to sleep for that night, or to get fruit, whatever, if you're hungry. What allows you to fight like crazy and sometimes in a coalition, and it's really nasty, and then have to defend the community? What's so unique about chimpanzees and humans is there is this lethal intergroup altercation, which often times can wipe out a whole neighboring community. Not often times, but that can happen.

But there's a lot of killing of other members of other communities. There's lot of hatred of out-groups. Of course, as that happens in chimpanzees, it sounds so much like what happens in humans. Here, we have now tremendous fighting between males who stay in their community, and yet if they kill one another, they're going to lose when the neighbors who get along better come in to fight against that community because they're willing to kill them. When it's intergroup, it's much, much more often lethal than if it's a fight within your own community.

What we have is this remarkable mechanism that Frans de Waal has called reconciliation, so I'll use that term, but it's basically how do you have a huge fight with someone else, and really, really mean it, and be very serious about it, and then, in the blink of an eye, cooperate with them because you hear the neighbors are encroaching on your territory, and your whole community is in danger?

What I have been working on lately is just this notion of something that people don't study in humans, some people have looked at it with children, but just about no one has looked at it with adults. I'm trying to understand how do you have a competition, obviously I can't stage a real fight, and I wouldn't want to hurt anyone. But how do you have a severe competition, *meaning one person's going to get all the money, and the other person gets basically nothing,* and then come back together again, especially if you want to because you're friends? And how do males do this? And how do females do this?

What I have found is, in a whole different number of arenas, that ***males do this better than females***, which is really shocking, but theoretically is totally predicted because in chimpanzees, males do it better than females. Two chimpanzee males will fight even more, generally, than humans do. They fight all the time over access to mates. There's no marriages, so they're constantly fighting for mates, and yet they hug each other, they *literally kiss each other on the lips, they grab each other's bottoms.*

They make up very, very quickly. This means that if they need to go on a patrol, and they do go on patrols along the periphery of their territory either to prevent defensively any attacks or to attack the neighboring community, well, they have made up. Here is this person who was just their kind of major opponent a few minutes ago, in the blink of eye, they've kissed and made up literally, and now they can cooperate again.

I guess some of the work I've done has shown that the same thing happens in humans. Unbelievable, because I never believed it myself, but when I watched it happen, because I can do this experimentally, and I did it with a bunch of sports competitions that that paper, two years ago, brought a lot of press attention around the world that after a sports competition, or after a non-physical competition, males, they will fight like the devil. They care tremendously to win. Each one wants to be better than the other whether it's tennis, or it's boxing, or it's some kind of intellectual competition. And then they touch each other, shake hands, hug, whatever, that's what humans do, and then they're friendly again.

Females, meanwhile, and I include myself in this, if somebody has really tried to really hurt me in terms of winning whether I love tennis, and I like intellectual, well then, I'm really upset with that person. I can't help it, and that's something most women have said to me. I've watched now a lot of tennis, and ping-pong, and badmin, and boxing matches. Watch the end, and it's incredible.

These people in boxing, which is the most extreme example, knocked each other out, sometimes senseless cold. They'll get up, and they'll hug, and hug, and hug, and males hug for a lot longer than females do.

Bill Murphy: 11:15 Yeah, it's interesting. That's like we were talking before. I love bringing some of these concepts up that sometimes wouldn't seem to me to be very popular because people have a preconceived bias of the way they'd like it to be, or the way it should be. But, for example, I have a friend of mine that I work out with these Spartan competitions where he's probably 60 years old, and he still does rugby competitions, which is amazing to me. I mean, 69 and still doing rugby.

He tells me all these stories about how it doesn't matter whether the rugby opponents are coming over from England, or South Africa, or Australia. He goes, “Bill, we'll get in the most knocked down, drag out contest because after every contest, it's a tradition, we all get together as teams.” There's beer flowing, and they're all basically best friends after a pretty violent interchange on the field.

Joyce Benenson: 12:13 Yeah. That, to me as a woman, is very harsh to understand at an emotional level because I don't do that. I think many years ago, I did a lot of interviews with young children, and I mean from age 5 through 15. They reported what I've understood, which was that you have a fight with your best friend, well, that relationship's over. You're going to find another best friend because that's just too much, the friendship doesn't take it.

But men, or boys, who are much more group oriented, much more public and have lots and lots of individuals they know, they can have a huge fight they can forget about it afterwards. They can make up. They can find a third-party, they can make up later if they don't come across the person right away. They don't end the friendship. It is astounding to me what you describe and people who have interviewed me have described all kinds of things where boys ...

Literally, I had one person tell me that his friend was stabbed by his best friend, another best friend, and the two of them had been best friends, and they were playing football, and one stab the other gut, really angry at the way he cheated during a play. The one who was stabbed, the victim, was in the hospital for three weeks, but they made up. They made up, and I cannot imagine somebody stabbing me and making up with that person. It's just not something I think I could [inaudible 00:13:40].

Bill Murphy: 13:40 Yeah, it's fascinating. Maybe as a context, as a set up, I love your explanation of the frameworks you've noticed with girls and women. I'm not sure if you used the word dyad or essentially group versus one-on-one relationships?

Joyce Benenson: 14:02 Yeah, dyad is a good word. A pair, yep.

Bill Murphy: 14:06 Could you kind of set up for ... I think you set up the male side of the fence. I'd love for you to set up the female side of the fence for our conversation about what you've observed from non-human to the human traits that you've observed that are similar.

Joyce Benenson: 14:23 Yep, absolutely. Well, I started my research, and I've done a lot of research with children, even as young as you can look, when children's try to interacting with peers. Girls are much more interested in a very intimate one-on-one relationship that's fairly isolated. This becomes more prominent by middle childhood, but it's not that girls don't have as many friends as boys, or aren't as sociable as boys, but with peers, girls want a certain kind of relationship.

It seems pretty universal. Again, I have to be fair. We haven't done a lot of non, what we call, [W.E.I.R.D. 00:15:00] society, Western industrial lives as [inaudible 00:15:02] societies, but what you see in every time I've looked is this real desire for intimacy, for closeness, and for equality with unrelated girls. This is a key thing, or unrelated women, if it's an older, this is a key thing because I think that across primate species, and even other mammals, you have females who are really, really invested in their biological relatives.

Number one, when they get to be a mother and their children, and, of course, in grandmothers who raised the mothers and will help raise the children. As a child, even as a young child, girls around the world, I've seen them in Uganda, are taking care of little tiny babies. Girls as young as four, they have the baby on their back, and they're walking around, and they like it. Girls are incredibly hard working, we do the majority of hard work unasked, often times, or with very little asking.

Boys, in contrast, don't like that. They're not as attracted to family, to family chores. They want to go off with their peers. Just to expand on what you're asking me, when it comes to peer relations, we have these dyads for girls, and they're equal. It's really important they're equal. Girls do not like competition because that can lead to unequal outcomes. It's very important we're the same in every dimension. This happens at work, and it happens in preschool, and it happens just about any context that you find women, which makes it hard, obviously, in a sports match when you loose, or sometimes, obviously, when you win too because you don't want to ruin the relationship.

But that's wonderful when it comes to family because then you can be really, really intimate. You can take care of others, and it's really clear by generation who's in charge. You don't have to compete because when you're the mother, you're not competing with your kids. You're much bigger, you're much older, you're much wiser, and you know everything they need to keep them alive.

What we have both ways is mothers and daughters, and daughters and grandmothers, and so forth, having these very easy, very tight, very close bonds. Even if a daughter might marry into another community, she keeps up. She keeps up, unlike chimpanzees or bonobos. We, humans, keep up with our natal families.

In contrast, males are not so interested in their families. They might maintain relationships with them throughout their lives, usually do, but both boys and men, as soon as they can go, they go. Who's the farthest from the schoolyard? I've never been at a school where it hasn't been the boys at the periphery. They're at the territory boundary.

When it comes to peers, peers are incredibly attractive. What they like to do in big groups, they like to compete, I've talked about this, form hierarchies, I haven't talked about that as much, and hierarchies change depending on who's good at the task, so skill is everything. Because these are not your relatives, you've got to be flexible, or it's not going to work because there's so much fighting. You've got to be able to make up and keep that bond going.

With female humans who are so close to their families, a peer is a little bit complicated.

Bill Murphy: 18:45 Did you say it appears complicated because the ...

Joyce Benenson: 18:47 Oh, sorry, a peer. Sorry. A same-age girl for a human girl is complicated because her number one tie, a girl's number one tie, a woman's number one tie, it's to our families whether we're three years old, five years old or 85 years old. The family is so important, and the amount of time, and energy, and investment we put into our children determines how they do, and that's really well documented around the world.

Yeah, so that's what I was trying to say, a peer. Not 'it doesn't appear', but a friend, maybe that's a better world. A female friend is kind of a distraction from our family. They can be wonderful, and we feel like we're in love with them. But the truth is if it's our female friend or it's our family member, we're going to go with the family member mostly because otherwise our family is literally not going to survive or thrive in the way we want them to.

So female friends are kind of secondary, and they have to be kind of equal because generation is what determine status for females, not figure out who's better at football, or who's better at some intelligence game or whatever. We're not into that.

Bill Murphy: 20:12 I find it really interesting because reading your book and the articles is that I've noticed it, and I think that's what struck me as I noticed it in my own kids, is as soon as my son got to a certain age, they're playing warfare games, finding things to throw, guns, squirt guns, Nerf guns, pellet guns, whatever. It wasn't like I was feeding him material, it seemed like he was just born that way. It was interesting to read your research on that, and sort of how you've observed that not just culture in the Western world, but also in Africa and others that you visited.

Joyce Benenson: 20:52 Yeah. I mean, I haven't done that much cross-cultural research myself, but I certainly read a lot of it. There's a wonderful book by David Lancy called The Anthropology of Childhood, which is, to me, absolutely brilliant, that Just looks across cultures. He is finding the same thing, which always makes me very happy because I want to know if I'm wrong, if things have changed, if it's different in some place.

Generally, what I find is humans and chimpanzees have very similar relationships in terms of the social structure where you have females who are taking care of their offspring, and that's the number one thing they do, and, of course, that's true in most primates and mammals. But in chimpanzees and humans, we're not doing that surrounded by a whole lot of female kin. A grandmother might come in and help us temporarily so forth, but it's not like we live in our natal village. Generally, that doesn't happen. If you do, you're really lucky.

Sometimes chimpanzees, sometimes humans do, but it's a very different kind of social structure than males who, as early as I can see, are playing with weapons, playing war, concerned about aliens, concerned about their territory, thinking of things that the girls are like, “Why is it interesting whether there's aliens? I mean, who even thinks about that?” Or monsters in the sea, or the kinds of stories that boys tell. You get the sense that they're really preparing themselves, and they're only two years old, for any kind of attack that might occur, and that they're taking responsibility for that.

While the girls are literally in the kitchen, they're dressing up to perhaps eventually attract a man, they're cleaning. Literally, I just saw a girl two weeks ago, I think she was one year old, and she was dressing up in the nicest clothes. She couldn't speak yet, but she looked beautiful, and she was as sociable and dear as you could imagine for a little girl to be. But she already was interested in cleaning, she was interested in how she looks, she was really interested in the kitchen.

Of course, parents who are paying attention to this will see that they probably didn't do anything different with their son than their daughter, and that's what the research shows. They're not really doing anything different. Once children are doing something, fathers are more attracted to some things that their children are doing, and generally it's what boys are doing. Mothers are more attracted to what girls are doing, and girls help mothers a lot more with real tasks.

Bill Murphy: 23:29 It's interesting because my wife is a division one, I feel lucky I played at Penn State, and I was this well ... And it's been interesting watching my daughters compete. They're both very athletic and so is my son. It's interesting watching the inter-team dynamics from my 17-year-old between the girls, and seeing sort of these, I want to call alliances, but it's a very interesting piece.

Fortunately, we've been high-level athletes, so we can sort of help her. My wife in particular can help her navigate some of this. We kind of laugh a little bit about it because the same issues that she's going through don't affect my son. I don't know why, but it's probably somewhat related just to how he interprets the competitive experience versus herself.

Your book sort of make some of these points like a parent for myself, and what my girls and my son are going through because it's the competitive nature. Girls are competing a lot more now, and I think from a leadership point of view, if you're a coach, you really have to understand, I think, some of the pieces that you bring up in your book because it allow you to have a better team if you understand how girls and boys are different in that regard.

Joyce Benenson: 24:54 Absolutely. I love talking to people who have an intimate knowledge of sports, which it sounds like you do. I know I've talked to people here who are working with the Harvard basketball team, and both the men's and women's teams, and it is different. I mean, I think some of the things that boys naturally do, which is not to take things as personally, it's much harder for girls.

Girls are much more aware of what's going on in other girl's lives. They're much more affected and caring about bad things that are happening in their family's lives, in other girls family's lives. It's really, to me, very different, and people nowadays want to say, “Oh, girls and boys as interchangeable. We just socialize something that is called a girl differently than something that is called a boy.” Which makes no sense to me. If you look at children developmentally, you see so many things that are there even by age one or two.

This sports stuff is really interesting because I do think it helps build confidence for girls, but it probably also is a lot of experience with changing dominance hierarchies, competition, accepting non-equality, which is letting somebody else be better in playing anyway even though they're much better than you. Taking leadership from a captain, which I've done studies with six year olds where I just bring four girls or four boys together. I say, “Okay, just choose a leader.” and I videotape it.

Oh, boy. The girls really want to be the leader. It's not that they don't. They want to do it. Girls want to compete. They want to be good, but they are so uncomfortable. I don't know how many groups I had. I think it was 20 groups of girls, 20 groups of boys, and every single group of girl looked so uncomfortable. The longer the negotiations went on, meaning the more all the girls wanted to be the leader, the more uncomfortable they looked.

We had raiders who didn't know anything about what we were doing. We just had them raid all of the different groups. The differences were just striking. The girls are scratching, and closing their eyes, and hunching down, but they want to be the leader. They're raising their hand, “No, I want to be the leader.”

The boys are screaming, and yelling, and even pushing to be the leader. It's fascinating. I do think that if we really want to help girls do better, and I think this world needs a lot of help now, and I think women values, which are very tied to keeping people alive, are absolutely critical. Therefore, I think we need to help women somehow to accept not being the best and to accept not having a friend who is an exact equal, but being friends with people who are much more dominant.

I think politically, right now in the United States, women are playing much more of a role, at least that's true reading the paper. The question is, in their groups, my guess is everybody's an equal, but you can't be an equal if you're the congressperson or the senator. You actually are not an equal. You have a lot more power, so then can other people accept that?

Bill Murphy: 28:10 Oh, it's fascinating. That's why I look at some of the ... I love that you're actually talking about these concepts coming from a university as well because I imagine that not all things you say are probably not all that popular. Am I wrong with that?

Joyce Benenson: 28:24 No, you're absolutely right. Nobody wants to hear what I say. They try to bury it. They look green. Even people in my field, they can't stand it. They want it to be that everybody is great at everything. For whatever reason, people want the two sexes to be exactly the same.

Bill Murphy: 28:24 Exactly.

Joyce Benenson: 28:44 I don't know why this is. I mean, the one thing I can say is men are dominant to women in this world. In every society we look, I know there's one or two exceptions, but, I mean, it's just so, so strong. It's the same with most mammalian species. I think there's about eight where females are equal or more dominant to male out of thousands.

That's true. Therefore, we have men who are harassing women, boys who are harassing girls, and it's horrible. Girls and women suffer terribly. My question is, “OKay, how do we get the girls and women to get together to share their experiences and to stand up to the boys and men?” Because I know we want to get boys and men to stop doing this, and awareness is being raised, and that's really important, and it would be great if they stopped doing that.

But if you believe, as I do, that there is something biological that makes the bigger member of the species dominant, or even at age four before boys are much bigger than girls, they're still dominating the girls. If you want to do that, I really think we need to raise girls consciousness and women's consciousness about how we maintain the dominant hierarchy, which probably is biologically rooted, but can always, as humans, be overturned.

It just needs women and girls standing up for each other, and that's hard to do when you have children at home who need you, and you have elderly parents who need you. We take care of some many people, and it's just hard to do everything.

Bill Murphy: 30:22 I think there is a fear for when someone brings up a concept like you are, and it's not politically correct, which I love. What I think is really great is that when you become self-aware, and we bring some concepts that aren't popular, it actually helps us. This, to me, is incredibly positive for my daughters because if they're aware of how things can play out and don't have to be unconscious to it, then they're not at the mercy of 200,000 years of biology. They can sit there and go, “Huh. Maybe I'm going to make a different choice here, and I don't have to go with this kind of default, but maybe I can try to craft a different way of approaching it.”

Is that how you are ultimately thinking that this might shift?

Joyce Benenson: 31:15 Yeah, absolutely. I think knowledge is power. I totally agree with you. I mean, the one thing that somebody recently said to me, who has worked with a lot of basketball teams, is for girls teams, or women's teams, you have to choose the players so they get along with each other from the start more carefully. The boys and men's teams, they find it easier just to get along with whoever happens to be there.

Not to say there aren't men who hate each other, but generally you can play really well with somebody you hate if you're male. It doesn't disrupt the quality of the team. You can make up even if you had a huge fight or disagreed vehemently over something, and it's much harder for girls and women.

Now, knowing that, if you can focus on the team and be aware it's harder for you to do that than your brother, that can be really, really positive. Here's someone you hate her guts, but nonetheless, she's a really good player, she's a really good member of the team. If the team can become the focus and not your relationship with that person, that's the power. Because, obviously, how well the team coordinates, and how efficiently they do things is going to determine victory.

Bill Murphy: 32:38 You know what's interesting? I just had the author of, it's called The Man Watching. It's about Dorrance Anson. He won 30 championships for the women's soccer team of North Carolina. He wrote this book. It's a great book because he actually coached men and women to start 30 years ago, and so he reverse engineered. He found out, “How was Dorrance able to get these ladies for such a long period of time?”

I mean, and not like second, third, fourth, fifth place, but I'm talking number one position, all United States, women soccer. All the major athletes that we knew in women's soccer came through his program. It's just stunning. What he did hough was, I'm going to really super simplify this, but he figured out that he had to related to them as human beings, so he couldn't say, “Let's go charge the hill.” He actually had to know ...

He spent time writing, for example, every senior, regardless if you sat on the bench for four years, or if you were a major contributor, got a letter and a rose at the end of every season publicly in front of all. They were one-page letters he wrote. He spent all night along writing to every single senior, and basically say why you're so great. Why the experience here was so great for the coach, and for the team, and for school, and then present it. It was a rose ceremony.

Joyce Benenson: 34:10 Oh, that is so nice. That's putting in some equality there that for us, females, it's just treasured when we're with unrelated females whether they're-

Bill Murphy: 34:10 Yeah, it's a-

Joyce Benenson: 34:23 ... Yeah.

Bill Murphy: 34:24 ... It didn't matter whether ... Yeah, exactly. If you were kind of on bench and just came there, but just couldn't quite raise your performance. But then he created these really intensely competitive situations that were very public, meaning that you got points throughout the week for how you did in a variety of different exercises, but it was very public, and it was very binary.

If you got 10 points, if the starting 11 people were all based on who had scored the most points throughout the week, and he used different drills, and exercises, and such. It was very competitive from the sense that it wasn't like he played favorites. I guess that was a major thing, is that he didn't say, “Oh, well. These are the 11, but number 15, you had an off-week. You're going to bump off number 8.” It was all very binary, but then he had the human relationship piece, which was the rose piece.

Joyce Benenson: 35:19 That's lovely. He took some of that out of his control by just saying, “OKay. This is how we're going to do it, and it's very, very fair.” Yeah, that makes sense. It really does, [crosstalk 00:35:31]-

Bill Murphy: 35:33 It sounds like it does kind of match to what you were observing.

Joyce Benenson: 35:36 Well, I mean, what you're describing, from my perspective, is a way to work with groups of girls or women and make it so that it's not so painful to have some kind of dominance hierarchy. That's what you're doing by putting an equality through the roses and thank-you letters and by saying, “Okay. This is purely not my decision, who's going to be on top, and who's going to be on the bottom. It's coming from you, so it's really out of my hands, and I appreciate each one of you for who you are. I wouldn't have you here if I didn't think you were really good no matter where you stand.” That's really, really great.

Now, whether men and boys coaches do something also, because, of course, not being a male I can't know the clinical motion of it, but I'm sure it feels bad to screw up and to not be in close to the top, or to be at the top and then lose your position. Sure, it feels bad, and I don't know the dynamics, but I would guess that there's something going on there with men. That, at least the one's I've talked to, they say respect really, really plays a big role in how they accept not being the top or even being at the bottom.

If you respect the skill of the people who are there, if you respect your coaches, and you respect the team, if it's even a one-on-one match like tennis or boxing, and somebody's killed you or even just beat you by a little, you respect them because you've done your very, very best, and so you can be both the winner, and you can be the loser, and that's okay.

That, I think, comes more easily to boys and men very early on, and maybe you can put it in there something that adds, puts the software in it if the hardware isn't in place for girls and women. By the same token, a lot of people, I should add, are saying, “We'd like men and boys to show their feelings a little bit more and not bottle up their problems.” They're trying to say, “Why don't they become more like girls and women?”

I think that's true to some extent. If you're having a hard time, women are more likely to get help, accept help, and so forth. Boys and men clam up. Of course, if there's a war, we don't want to be out there crying and terrified.

Bill Murphy: 38:08 I don't know what you think about this, but I'm of the philosophy I'd rather figure out a way to build, using the strategies that you're uncovering, and other neuroscientists uncovering, and different other examples of coaching, and success, and creating kind of meritocracy, but also respecting the unique piece that can create women that are high performers.

I mean, it's not that women aren't high performers. They're incredibly actually higher performing than men. I think the issue is not to bring men down, or to change, but just how do we change and build women into leveraging their skills so that we can ... Because it's really in the male leader's best interest to have high-performing teams, so if they don't-

Joyce Benenson: 39:03 It is though it's so shocking. Yeah, I mean, I do have to say I think women are much more conscientious than men overall. I think women are less impulsive, everybody knows they're less likely to take risk, which, again, can be good or bad, but they're much more reliable than men.

If I had to depend on somebody to do something really need it done, I much rather have a woman. That's why girls are the caretakers at home because, at least across societies, mothers say they ask their sons and their daughters to help out, but who's reliable? Who's more conscientious? Their daughters, so the heck with the sons because they don't want to waste their time, and it's too important.

The issue of female leadership, which is critical because women do have tons of skills, and it's, to some extent, a different skill set than men do, and certainly a different set of values, which is really important for the world maybe now more than ever for the world to survive, climate change, and wars, and so forth. We need women, but the problem is I do think it is zero-sum game.

Somebody is going to be the leader, and that means somebody's not going to be the leader. I do think it's hard to get away from hierarchies. The question is, for a woman who wants to be a leader, a lot of the other women don't want to be led by a woman. They much rather be led by a man because that's the dominance hierarchy, and women don't naturally like inequality with unrelated other women.

Men, of course, they want to be on top too, and they're feeling really bad right now because in school they've never done as well, from grade school up, as girls and women. But, at least, men have a lot of skills, and they're more skilled, in certain areas, much more skilled than women. That's really important. I mean, I still haven't had a female handyman come fix my drain, and I need that. That's really critical.

There's a lot of things men know that women don't too. It's like I don't know to say that's not true. That is true, but the question is, it is a zero-sum game who's at the top, and if in almost every species, males are the ones that are dominant, then probably there's something built into our brains that makes women and girls say, “This is not that important to me. If he wants it, all right, let him have it.” Whether your three years old or 50 years old CEO, that you just don't think that's that important, who's going to be the dominant one. You just want things to go well. But men and boys do care who's the dominant one. It is really important to them to be in that position.

I think people are neglecting to think about the biology of the fact that in chimpanzees, every single adolescent male makes sure he becomes dominant to every single adult female in the whole community. It happens a little bit with adolescent males in humans too. They want to be better than the women, so if there is a little bit of the biology, you have to admit that, I'm even frightened saying this because I know how many people would disagree with me on this, but it's true in every other species.

It's very unlikely, when we see the same patterns in humans, that is not true enough, so then it's like, “Okay. We're aware of this, but we're going to override because we can, because we're humans, and we're really smart.”

Bill Murphy: 42:36 Absolutely. 200,000 years is a long time, I've read that in your book. I've seen it quoted different numbers, but I'm assuming that we've been around in our human form, in our human biology-

Joyce Benenson: 42:47 The Homo form, yeah.

Bill Murphy: 42:49 ... Am I accurate there? Okay. But it's not a resignation of defeat, what you're saying, it's a resignation of a different strategy would be needed moving forward.

Joyce Benenson: 43:01 Yep.

Bill Murphy: 43:02 I think it's sticking our head in the sand, is to fight against about current ... It's like, what's the new strategy moving forward? I think we've talked about some of those that people are developing. The title of your book is Warriors and Worriers, first of all, do you think there's a gene that is ...?

Joyce Benenson: 43:30 No, this is, to me, when biologists look at the genome, there's thousands and thousands of genes that are different in the brains of males versus females. I mean, people don't want to believe that, but that's true. David [Reich 00:43:44] has a new book on that it's on many other things, but that's one of them, and it's like, “What are people thinking? This is not a gene. This is very complex neuroanatomy.”

Of course, every female is different than every other female, the same with males, so there's overlap, and there are people who are born with the gender ... Their anatomy doesn't fit with how they feel, so there could be a part of the brain that makes you feel a certain way, and they don't always line up. I've taught a lot about how that can be different and how hard it is for kids, and now people are finally talking about transgender and being accepting of that. That's a fight, and it's wonderful because people can do that. They don't have to make fun of somebody who it does not fit together. There are differences within all females and within all males.

Nonetheless, I think overall men do like to fight. It's not just one-on-one or within a small group, it's also in intergroup fighting, so there's two different kinds of fighting and one is the dominance hierarchy within the community, and the other is against another community. That's what men like to do.

Honestly, it's not that interesting to women. It's terrifying if there's another group that's going to come in and trying to kill us. I mean, we're terrified, and we want the men to do something about that. Some women are willing to do something about that, but the fact is, in the end, if you have children, if you're going to put anything above those children, the children are not going to do as well.

You can decide, “Okay. Well, I'm not that good of mother.” A lot of women feel like this, “Therefore, I'm going to hire somebody who I think is really, really good and take care of my kids.” If you chose the right person, that's fine. That will work if you have the money to do that. A lot of women don't, so then everything they do that's outside of their children's life, when their children are having a hard time, it's going to just make it harder.

The worrying part of my title is women usually are at work thinking about their kids, and men are usually at work not thinking about their kids, but more likely to think about another company that they're competing with, or somebody in the office they're competing with, or something like that, or maybe their phantasy football league and how it's doing. I mean, that kind of thing, which it's not to say there are not women that do that, or girls, but the differences are huge.

They're just huge, so I think there's thousands and thousands of genes that are different between men and women.

Bill Murphy: 46:28 The reason I brought that up was more because I'd read somewhere someone was referring to this COMT gene of some sort that they found some gene that was really the two, the warrior versus worrier instinct. So I just wanted to-

Joyce Benenson: 46:42 Yeah. I mean, I don't think that it could possibly come down to one gene. It's too complicated for that, but, again, I don't know that kind of research. I'm not a geneticist, so I don't know, but my intuition strongly would be that there's many factors that lead to an interest in warfare, including risk-taking and the ability to reconcile really quickly with somebody in your side, the enjoyment of the fight, of hunting. Now it's modern missiles going long distances into others territory and so forth.

I don't think most girls and women are just interested in that. There's tons of studies that show across cultures, boys are just not as interested in the crying baby, or a vulnerable family member who is really sick, or something sad that happens to you. I mean, it was very interesting because I was just talking to some friends, and the one woman who was talking about her divorce. She's been talking about this divorce for 35 years, the same divorce, and we're used to it now. That's really something she's had a hard time with, but I was talking to some men that two out of four of them had gotten divorced, and they went for a really long walk.

Actually, Sebastian [Junger 00:48:07] is the one who told me this. He's well-known movie maker and writer, and he said, “You know, nobody ever mentioned the divorce.” And they were together for three weeks night and day hiking, and this is not something that came up. It's a legitimate question, when you have a really bad problem, should you go to a therapist and talk about it for hours, and hours, and hours?

I just think it's very fair to ask, “Should you?” Well, one the one side, you could say, “Yeah. You need to get it out. You need to be in touch with your feelings. You need to look over it.” On the other side, you can say, “You know what? There's some things you can't do anything about. Maybe distraction and time are the best things you can do, and just going over, and over, and over is an opportunity cost when you could've been doing something else that was more valuable to you.” So there's just another example.

Bill Murphy: 48:56 No, I think that's fascinating. That plays out in so many ways, and you just think about how just even in a short mount of time from 100 years ago, 150 years ago, forget 200,000 years ago. Just we didn't even have air conditioning up until a certain amount. It was a very different environment. We were either very comfortable or very uncomfortable most of the time.

That has to have an impact in how we processed the issues of today just weren't the issues of 150 years ago. I'm not sure we would've had the same access just to go to a therapist and stuff like that. We probably processed it by our hard work and by our having to constantly ... We had to go find things to eat and to survive. It's almost like a shock to our biology right now.

Joyce Benenson: 49:53 Right, right. No, that's true, but I also think part of that is in hunter-gatherers societies, and there are still a few extant communities like that. You have family around if you're a female. You may be living in husband's camp more likely, but nonetheless, you can go to your mother, or to your grandmother, to your aunt, to your sister. You can talk to them, and you know they're supporting you, so you're not all alone where there's a husband who can make or break your whole life and there's not that many other supports around.

I do think some of this is women being too alone. I mean, we shouldn't be so alone with our kids. We should have support of our own mothers or other female relatives. In some ways, even though you're saying, “Oh, look at all these great strides that we've made.” And that's absolutely true. I can't also add, “But look at what we've lost that would've made women more comfortable.” And that's true too, that women live in these houses separated from each other.

I mean hunter-gatherers, they couldn't get that because they really like being with each other, and being with their family members, and taking care of one another's children because they're their relatives, and then it's easier. You can trust them.

Bill Murphy: 51:11 Joyce, this has been fascinating. I want to respect your time. I know we're coming up on the hour, and I really enjoyed reading your book, and your articles, and really your parallels to the modern world we live in versus the parallels to biology to our nearest non-human counterparts. It's fascinating the conclusions, and the links and parallels that you're drawing.

Joyce Benenson: 51:47 Great. I'm glad it's useful.

Bill Murphy: 51:47 I think the more aware we are as people, as leaders, and as human beings, I just think that we can use our greatest cognitive skills to really understand where we are, and so we can map our pathways individually out and around.

Joyce Benenson: 52:02 Yep.

Bill Murphy: 52:03 Well, thank you. Is there anything else that you want to share with my audience before we go? Anything that you were dying to say that you wanted to leave with?

Joyce Benenson: 52:14 No. I mean, I guess the one that I've been thinking about just the last few weeks is that so many things women do like putting ourselves down, and apologizing, and so forth, probably has some kind of biological root that keeps us subordinate. If women can learn not to do that, it's terrifying, they can play a greater role in society, which I think would be really useful for the whole world.

Bill Murphy: 52:41 It's funny you said that because I've noticed, and this is, I'm perplexed with it, but my wife and I talk about it a lot. My oldest, and it's just for different challenges, is they're growing, of course, but as a 17-year-old, you sit there, and I'm stunned at the amount of time spent with her and her peer group on how she's perceived by others.

Joyce Benenson: 53:05 Yeah. Yes.

Bill Murphy: 53:07 It's funny. In the modern workplace we actually ... In the modern world, it's almost like sometimes some of the people that we most admire are the ones that really don't give a shit as much about what others think of them. It's almost like they have blinders on to really caring about the fact that they made a risky move, or they made a decision on something, and if you don't like me, too bad.

I so much want my daughters to have that ability, but I sit, and I certainly say it, but it's like, “Oh, dad. C'mon now.” I say, “Listen, there's another way of looking at this. This could be a good thing. We don't have to worry about what other people think of us.” “Oh, dad. C'mon, of course I do.” it's like it's not getting through.

Joyce Benenson: 53:55 Yeah, but I don't like so much this idea of not caring how other people think about you. It's wonderful if you have it because you suffer a lot less, but we are a social species. In order for us to get along, we do have to care about how others think about us. It's just women spend so much time putting themselves down, even when they're really good at whatever is going on. I think it might be kind of biologically based, and so it takes a lot to overcome that tendency. I think you're right. It's great, particularly boys and men just don't care as much. But I think that's partly because they get along with other boys and men because they have higher status, because they are focused on their own skills, and their skills are [inaudible 00:54:47] valued, and so they just look at that. On the other hand, a lot of boys and men aren't doing very well, and they would be wise to change course, and we need them. It's complicated.

Bill Murphy: 54:59 Well, I appreciate the conversation. It's really fascinating. I know my audience is going to love this, and I'm going to have links to all of your articles, your book, and, I mean, your college, of course, that we share a history around. At least my mother and my grandmother do.

Joyce Benenson: 55:19 That's great. I have to tell the president. That's wonderful.

Bill Murphy: 55:21 Which is great. I love it. Is it still all ladies?

Joyce Benenson: 55:26 No, no, no.

Bill Murphy: 55:26 No?

Joyce Benenson: 55:26 It went coed, I believe, in 2004, something like that, around then.

Bill Murphy: 55:31 Okay. Okay. Well, fantastic. Well, I appreciate you for coming on the show today. Thank you, Joyce.

Joyce Benenson: 55:36 Okay. Thank you, Bill. Bye-bye.

Bill Murphy: 55:36 Okay. Bye-bye.