

Episode: *Author Interview: “Performing Clarity, Sincerity, and Endurance”*

Guest: Teddie Bernard

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Teddie Bernard, a recent graduate from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with a bachelor’s degree in fine arts and a previous intern with the *AMA Journal of Ethics*. They’re here to discuss their cartoon, *Childless by Choice*, in the February 2025 issue of the Journal, [Pain Management in Non-Labor and Delivery OBGYN Procedures](#). Teddie, thank you so much for being on the podcast.

TEDDIE BERNARD: Thank you.

[00:00:46] HOFF: So, to begin with, what is the main ethics point of this editorial cartoon?

BERNARD: Yeah, for sure. So, when I created this cartoon, I was interested in kind of what the line is in protecting a patient who-is-able-to-give-birth’s fertility and also the patient’s needs and desires with their body, right? Obviously, care providers are trying to work with patients with their best interest in mind, but when a patient says they’re not interested in having children, where is that line drawn, right?

And I think, too, it’s a question I have especially as a younger person, relatively, right? People my age, in their early 20s, are more likely to have pushback on the idea that they don’t want to be fertile, that they aren’t interested in children because you never know, right? But on the other hand, then, is that something that if I was 20 years older, I wouldn’t be facing as much pushback for that, right? Is there some sort of ageism at play there? There’s also some kind of questions about race, class, gender, sexuality, and how they play into how a care provider reacts to someone who is able to have kids saying, “No, no, no, that’s not for me.” And how can we make that the way that a care physician decides to react to that person less judgmental and assuming based on their different characteristics, right? Like, if someone says, “I don’t want kids,” what more do they have to do to prove that point than say that?

[00:02:28] HOFF: And for the sake of folks who are listening to this and not looking at your comic in front of them, can you please briefly describe it?

BERNARD: Yeah. So, the comic depicts two people in what looks like a doctor’s office. One is a patient, and one is a care provider. And the patient is wearing a tuxedo, a top

hat. They're in this fabulous pose. There's fireworks going off in the background, and they're holding up a sign that says, "I do not want kids!" It's like the end of a Broadway number in this doctor's office, right? And the care physician says, "Well, you don't know. You still might change your mind." And it's just kind of juxtaposing, right, that fabulous theatrical moment with this very undercut statement, which, again, assuming the care provider has the best intentions. But if someone is going out of their way to say, this is really not what I want, are those intentions actually supporting the patient?

[00:03:28] HOFF: And so, what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to be taking from this cartoon?

BERNARD: For sure. I was kind of thinking about this earlier, and I think it's that not every patient is going to have the quote-unquote "traditional" wants and needs of someone of their demographic, right? Especially when it comes to fertility, being open to the fact that people who remain childless aren't just waiting for the right time or the final convincing moment necessarily, right? For me personally, I'm genderqueer. I'm also kind of a lesbian-adjacent person, so I don't have a way to conceive children. But I also don't have any desire to. However, my gender and sexuality aren't the reasons for that, and sometimes I have to bring them up to get care providers to back off because of stereotypes they have about those groups. And that's not fair to people who are lesbians who do want kids, and it's not fair to me either, right? How can we see people for what their needs are outside of demographics or what we traditionally assume about them?

[00:04:40] HOFF: And finally, if you could add something to this piece or to the description that accompanies it on the Journal's site, what would that be?

BERNARD: I think the thing that I wish this piece could touch on—and of course, for listeners, this is a one-panel comic, so there's not a lot of space for a bigger discussion—is how this conversation about believing patients for what they want in relation to their fertility or not wanting children becomes a much heavier and almost darker conversation in the context of Roe v Wade being overturned in the United States and the attacks we're seeing on health care, especially around childbearing, right? If someone says, "I don't want kids," and their care provider says, "Well, maybe you'll change your mind," and they live in a state where abortion is illegal and they get pregnant and they still don't want kids, that decision has been made for them. They no longer get the choice to say, "Well, I didn't want kids." Right now they either have to seek an illegal abortion, cross state lines, or carry this child to term, and so that autonomy has been stripped from them before any child was conceived. And so, I think that kind of adds an even heavier note to this conversation that I was not able to tackle in a one-panel cartoon but is something that I think is really important to think about in this conversation. It's not just one person in one doctor's office who hasn't conceived a child. It's millions of people across this country who are losing the right to choose what they want to do with their body. [theme music returns]

[00:06:18] HOFF: Teddie, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today and for your contributions to the Journal, both through your contribution this month and your internship.

BERNARD: Yeah, of course. Thank you, Tim.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.