

Episode 246: Counting on Keiko

Jarrah: Hi, and welcome to Women at Warp, a *Star Trek* podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore intersectional diversity infinite combinations. My name's Jarrah, and thanks for tuning in. With me today are two very special guests. We have Livian Yeh and Michelle Franchini, and I'm going to get them both to introduce themselves in a moment.

But before we get into our main topic, we have a little bit of housekeeping. Our show is made possible by our patrons on Patreon, and today's topic, which is Keiko O'Brien, was actually our patron month poll where we asked patrons what we should do episodes on. And this was one out for the character that people most wanted an episode on.

And so, if you'd like to become a patron and participate in polls like that, you can do so for as little as a dollar a month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media to silly watch-along commentaries and all that good stuff. Visit patreon.com/womenatwarp.

And another way you can support our show and show your love for Women at Warp is through our podcast merch, which is on our TeePublic store. You can find that at TeePublic.com/stores/womenatwarp.

All right, I would like to start off before we get into the Keiko-ness of it all by asking our guests to introduce themselves and tell us a bit about their history with *Star Trek*. So, I'll start with you, Livian.

Livian: Yeah, so I'm a writer and editor currently in the Bay Area, and I'm Taiwanese American. I got into *Star Trek* because I used to watch them with my dad, but I definitely have holes in my fandom. So, I'm currently working through *Enterprise*.

Jarrah: Nice. And what about you, Michelle?

Michelle: Yeah, so my background is that I am a linguist, and I grew up watching *TNG* with my parents. Again, it was a family thing, and then kind of fell in love with *DS Nine* later on in life.

Jarrah: Awesome. Well, we are definitely going to be talking about both *TNG* and *Deep Space Nine* today when we talk about Keiko O'Brien. Keiko O'Brien, who is played by Rosalind Chao, appears in 27 episodes of *Star Trek* starting in *TNG* on *Data's Day*. And what—Well, we know, I guess, at a top line, some key things about her. She's a botanist by training, becomes a teacher on *Deep Space Nine*. She plays clarinet. She eats healthy, vegetable-based things. She participates in Japanese traditions. She's also married to Miles, and she's the mother to Molly and Kirayoshi.

What I wanted to do was to briefly touch on a couple of the key themes and things that you've both written about or regarding Keiko and then get into some kind of memorable Keiko moments and episodes. And I think that one of themes that's been written about, and I know that Rosalind Chao has been on podcasts like All the Asians on *Star Trek*, to talk about is the importance of Keiko in terms of Asian representation, as well as just, she's a role model to various other people for various reasons. Livian, I was wondering if you wanted to just give a couple thoughts about your relationship to Keiko in that aspect.

Livian: Yeah. During the pandemic, I wrote an article for startrek.com about what Keiko meant to me as an Asian American woman. And at the time, I was in my late 20s, going through a difficult time in my life, and I just really found Keiko to be such an inspiration on some level because like I mentioned in my article, I think jobs and professions are such a big part of *Star Trek*. Basically, we're following these people at their job. And it's like their

vocation and there's nothing else they'd ever imagined doing. And the fact that Keiko is like doing botanist stuff and then doing teaching stuff is kind of unusual for the show. So, that was a huge inspiration for me at the time.

And in terms of seeing Rosalind Chao on screen, I think there's something that I think on NPR they call it rep sweats. Like, every time as a person of color, you see someone who is also Asian on screen, you get kind of nervous because you don't know if they'll do an accent or there's that unpredictability of how that character will be presented. And with Keiko, there was nothing of that nature. I mean, her heritage was brought into the show, but she was just allowed to exist and engage with the world around her as a person. So, I felt like that was huge to me as well.

Jarrah: That's very cool. And yeah, I definitely have heard the piece about rep sweats. And I think when you look at *Star Trek*, I know that pre-*Discovery* especially, there were very, very few characters of Asian descent. And I guess it was basically Keiko and Harry Kim. Don't at me if I'm missing someone, but I think those are the kind of major recurring ones. Oh, Sulu, of course, of course, of course. But there was, I think, a bit of a feeling with both Harry Kim and Keiko, but particularly Harry Kim, of the whole kind of model minority piece where they both play the clarinet, notably. [laughter] And the piece about having a lot of pressure from your parents and being a really good student and those types of things that are kind of "positive stereotypes" but they're still stereotypes.

But Keiko does have a bit more nuance. I would argue Keiko's a bit more of a complex character than Harry Kim, but maybe open to debate on that. But we'll definitely come back to this theme as we talk about some of the key moments. Michelle, I wondered if you also wanted to tell us a bit about how you relate to Keiko in terms of linguistics as well as teaching.

Michelle: Yeah, for sure. So, when I first wrote that piece many years ago about kind of the discourse, interactions between Keiko and Miles in their marriage, I had just finished getting my degree in applied linguistics, and I was doing a big data analysis of it, like, "Let's get into it and see what's really there," because there was kind of this vibe on the Internet at the time of like, "Oh, they're unhappy and they have a bad marriage and she's the worst and this and that." And I was like, "Let's go see what actually the data says." And after I filtered out all the episodes where they're not themselves, where one of them has been possessed or one's a clone or Miles has been in fake mental prison for 20 years, it turned out that they have actually very positive interactions with each other.

And so, it was kind of this feeling of, well, if you go and look at what's actually in the data, then you see that we have this impression that they're not in a positive marriage, but really it is actually a very positive marriage. And even in *Data's Day* in his episode, he says he's doing analysis of what are the components of a successful marriage. So, that was kind of my feeling there.

Since then, I myself have become a teacher. And so going back now to rewatch the Keiko episodes to prepare for this, I so relate to her as a teacher now. And I see how it feels to be starting out and talking to parents and trying to get them on board with what you're doing. And then when the school closes, that was my pandemic, was, "Oh, my gosh, I can't go to school anymore. I can't teach my students anymore." And I so strongly related to her. She's sitting kind of listlessly in their room, snipping her little bonsai trees, and she's like, "I don't know what to do with myself now. I used to have a purpose that's been taken from me." Yeah, I so strongly relate to that now.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. And yeah, I mean, I think that for folks who haven't read the article, it's on our website and we'll put the link in the show notes, and it's called Is Keiko O'Brien the

Worst? A Discourse Analysis. And I want to come back to that piece, which I think is part of the reason that talking about Keiko was the choice of our patron poll is because there is, at least in my experience, a disproportionate amount of hate for Keiko. I would say not quite as much as Dr. Pulaski, who we've also done an episode about all of the redeeming features of Dr. Pulaski, but certainly back.

I guess this would be like 12 years ago now before we started *Women at Warp*, I was doing analysis of the official *startrek.com* Facebook page, and there's been a significant shift since then, but at the time, there was essentially no moderation. The poll questions they put out were basically-- Well, there would be questions like, which *Star Trek* character would you most like to take to Risa? And so, it would kind of lend itself to people making just like sexist and bigoted comments. And no matter what, you would have folks that were in there trashing Pulaski, and there was a lot of ageism in those comments, and then Keiko and also other characters of color but Keiko, I think, got both the sexism and the racism, and it was just really disheartening as someone at the time who was kind of coming into the more public aspect of the fandom and seeing that the official venue for *Star Trek* discussion was so not manifesting *Star Trek* values.

And I think it's okay for something to not be your thing, and it's okay for people to be like, "I don't personally relate to this character," but people also should analyze whether that's a double standard they're applying or based on their own unconscious bias. And I think that Keiko gets a bit of an unfair shake in the fandom.

Michelle: Yeah, I totally agree.

Livian: Me too. Michelle, I loved your article because it's using scientific methods to really dismantle this real myth. And yeah, I just wanted to add that when my article came out on the *Star Trek* website, I was actually really surprised to see that there were a handful of comments on social media that were like, "Oh, Keiko's the worst. She's like my mom or my teacher." And this was in 2021, and I was really shocked. I thought that we had moved past this as a society. But yeah, it really revealed to me that, oh, people still felt like that and that they could share that on the internet publicly.

Michelle: Yeah, just when you think we've moved on. Although I will say when I see those comments crop up now, I see people responding and saying, "Well, no, actually, here's where you're wrong." And I think people are feeling more comfortable calling people out about that now.

Jarra: That's awesome.

Livian: That's good to know. Yeah.

Jarra: Yeah. I think it would be nice to kind of come back to this topic after we talk about some of the examples, because we'll, I'm sure, get into, maybe where some folks opinion comes from and where there's moments where Keiko maybe isn't written the best, but also all of her awesome times and the fact that even in some of the moments that maybe are not my personal favorite, I think that she is--

I mean, like you said, Livian, the whole thing about everyone in *Star Trek*, particularly in *TNG*, has this noble purpose, and they're following this path in a linear direction, making themselves better, showing leadership, and then having Keiko, she's still doing great at stuff, but she's doing different things, and she's kind of a rounded person, but she's also a flawed person, and I think that's really cool.

So, let's start with *Data's Day*, which is the introduction of the character. When you both were watching *Star Trek*, was this your first introduction to Keiko? Or, do you remember what the first episode you would have seen Keiko in was?

Michelle: Gosh, I've seen them all so many times now, it's hard to remember when would have been the first time. I think though that her sharing her family's food with O'Brien is my first impression of her, where she's like, "Oh, here's what I eat for breakfast." And he's like, "Eww, gross." I think that's the first time I remember her, is showing her family's food.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I know that's something that comes up a lot in the folks that I think there's this sort of sense, and it's established from this very first episode of O'Brien is the everyman, but also everyhusband. And it kind of falls into these sitcom tropes where it's like, kind of the slightly less, maybe not so emotionally intelligent, not so into cleaning up for himself, not so into being healthy everyhusband, and his wife who's maybe unfairly putting pressure on him. But I think the way that it's told through Data's lens and then it comes together at the end, that ultimately, it's a nice introduction to the character.

Livian: Yeah. *Data's Day* was my first time seeing Keiko, and at the time, I didn't do any research on her. And I just remember seeing her on screen, I was like, "Oh, wow," there's Rosalind Chao and there's this Asian American woman. And I was like, "Oh, is she going to stay on the show or this is going to be a one-off thing?" Yeah, but it was definitely a great introduction. I agree.

Michelle: And it feels like-- Going back and watching it, I feel like I should have already seen her. She's already a part of Data's life, and they have this whole backstory where he knew her before O'Brien, and he introduced them. And so, I always kind of feel like there should be more. We should have had a flashback or something, like how did they meet? How did she and Data become friends?

Jarrah: Yeah, that's a really great point, because being friends with Data is no joke.

Michelle: Right. [laughter] It's like her and Geordi. That's it. Yeah, I really wish we could have had-- They could have gone into the holosuite and solved mysteries. I don't know.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. I also know that the wedding dress is something we've talked about on the podcast before with some folks talking about how it's really nice to have those nods to heritage, and certainly, the designers, they tried to make it look a bit futuristic by making it like that shimmery fabric. But she's wearing a sort of more or less traditional sandals, the sort of the cut of the dress and the hat. And I know that can also be an important signifier for folks where-- while we might think that *Star Trek* is offering us this kind of egalitarian view of the future, because everyone looks like they're all dressing kind of the same and their quarters all look kind of the same, but when you--

What's problematic is that kind of standardization is still very based off of white western ideas and military standards and all of the views of what the future would look like from mostly white men that were writing it. So, it's nice having those moments where you see that those traditions are still important in the future and that it's not just kind of like everything's homogenized.

Livian: Definitely. And I think we were talking about All the Asians on *Star Trek* in the beginning of this episode, and I think in there, Rosalind Chao said-- Because, you know, she's Chinese American and the character is Japanese American, and the costume designers were like, "Oh, should we change it?" And she's like, "No." So, they went ahead with the existing costume, which I think is beautiful, but also a sign of the times, maybe,

because I feel like these days, they would probably do something more ethnic specific. But yeah, it was definitely interesting to see--

And Keiko, was it in *Data's Day* or--? I think she did have chopsticks in her hair, which was like, you know, also, I don't think it's something we would see so much now. Yeah, but I think she-- It was a form of representation that felt really revolutionary at the time.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Do you think that now, if this was being made today, they would do it differently? Just like you were saying, based on the understanding that-- So, there's this kind of pan-Asianness in the character in terms of some of the costuming and the fact that the actress is Chinese American, as well as some of the things that she likes to eat and stuff like that. But again, would you say this holds up, or is it something that was really revolutionary at the time, but maybe they'd be a little bit more nuanced today?

Livian: I think it still holds up, and it is nice to see someone getting married not in their dress uniforms, I think. Yeah, but I do wonder if we get another scene like this in the new *Star Trek*. Yeah. I just wonder if they would update it a little bit.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. And actually, earlier on when I was mentioning the kind of pre-Discovery, and then that was part of the reason people were so excited about Michelle Yeoh in *Discovery*. And other than the ship being named the Shenzhou, they kind of kept ethnic racial identity, like not super central to her character, unless I'm really forgetting something.

Michelle: She does use the chopsticks.

Jarrah: Oh, yes. [laughs]

Michelle: Speaking of chopsticks.

Livian: Oh, that's right. I forgot about that.

Jarrah: But, I mean this echoes Uhura had in her quarters in the original series some African art. Sisko obviously has a lot of African art and clothing, and there's certainly other characters that we see pieces like that of them, and it's kind of neat.

So, let's move on to *Violations*. Although now I'm realizing, I'm like, "Oh, gosh, there's so many other ones we could talk about." This is the only other *TNG* one I have on the list. But we could also talk about *Disaster* where she gives birth with Worf. There's the one where Miles and Troi and stuff are all possessed by those aliens and they hold them hostage. But I had *Violations* down because there's this kind of nice moment where she is undergoing a telepathic memory probe, and she remembers helping her grandmother with brush calligraphy. Any impressions on that or any other kind of big *TNG* moments that you wanted to highlight?

Michelle: Truly the nicest moment of that episode, of a truly upsetting episode. It's like, "Oh, but then there's Keiko, and she had a nice moment." Wasn't that nice. Anyway.

Livian: And then, Troi, of course, had a terrible time. So. Yeah, that was the highlight.

Michelle: Yeah. Such an upsetting episode all around. But then, you have this nice moment for Keiko.

Livian: I was just thinking about the *TNG* episode where we see young Keiko. I can't remember the title.

Michelle: Oh, *Rascals*.

Livian: *Rascals*. Yeah. I love that episode. And I love that she was one of the ones turned into a child. Yeah, that was a lovely episode.

Jarrah: It's so awkward that her [laughter] in that episode. I love that episode too.

Michelle: Yeah. And she's like, "What? What's the problem? I'm still me." And he's like, "It's a big problem."

[laughter]

Jarrah: Yeah, you can definitely see both sides there.

Michelle: Uh-huh. Another *TNG* episode I wanted to bring up. She's not in it, but she's very briefly mentioned is *Imaginary Friend*, which I had forgotten about. And, yeah, I went searching through for mentions of her his time it's the little girl who has just moved on to the enterprise and she's got an imaginary friend. And then, of course, the beings from the Nebula embody the imaginary friend and hijinks ensue. But she mentions briefly that she's helping Keiko in the arboretum, this little girl who's been having trouble fitting in. She says, "I'm Keiko's special helper in the arboretum today and so I need to go and help her plant these plants and I can't go off with you, weird, imaginary alien friend girl."

So, that kind of jumped out at me as Keiko as teacher where even back then in *TNG*, they kind of envisioned her as helping out this girl who was struggling to fit in and giving her a little job to do so that she felt included. I'm like, "Aww." I mean, she could have been in it. They show scenes in the arboretum. I'm like, "Why isn't she there? She should be there." But I guess they couldn't have her in any of that for some reason. But yeah, I thought that was lovely that they gave her a little name drop there as like even back then she was reaching out to kids who needed her help.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Actually, that also just reminded me because throughout they call her Mrs. O'Brien. And just interesting that she chose to take her husband's name. Not passing a judgment on it. But it was something where I know that this was-- It's something that it just happened in *Star Trek* because it was the convention until pretty recently and then you finally ended up when Troi and Riker got married, they got to keep their names but that's probably also because the characters are so established as those names. Yeah, anyway, just noting that and there is a lot of her being referred to as Mrs. O'Brien.

Michelle: Yeah, for sure.

Livian: I did wonder, does she have a degree? Could she be talked to Dr. O'Brien? We don't know. I think she's Professor O'Brien at one point. Someone calls her Professor O'Brien once, but--

Jarrah: Yeah, that's a good point. She certainly-- She's the head of the botany thing on *TNG*. Then, she gets appointed the head of this botany thing on Bajor later which kind of implies that she has pretty advanced education or at least really advanced equivalent experience in botanical research. So, yeah, very good point, especially given like the kind of newer discussions about women who have doctorates that tend not to have that title recognized just as a matter of course whereas men tend to.

Livian: I think that also makes her frustration in moving to *DS9* all the more understandable, like what we were talking about, I presume that Keiko went to Starfleet as well to work on the

enterprise and then for her to be on *DS9* where There are no plans. Yeah. I'm like, "Oh, yeah, of course she's mad."

Michelle: Yeah. Yeah. That's true. It's not like they were married before, and she just went with him on the ship when he got assigned. She was already assigned there. That was already her job, yeah.

Jarrah: I think she's still supposed to be a civilian, but also O'Brien's technically supposed to be a civilian. He's supposed to be an enlisted officer and not someone who went through the academy and got this higher rank. That's a whole confusing thing that many other people on the internet have talked about better than I can. But regardless, she has this important professional standing, and she is, yeah, understandably frustrated to just be kind of stuck in this place where there's no arboretum. It's like our Cardassian station, they're rebuilding. There's uncomfortable beds with weird triangle pillows. There's no school. So, that's maybe a good segue *In the Hands of the Prophets*, where she starts the school.

Michelle: Yeah, very-- still so, so relevant even today. And I've seen articles from like ten years ago, like, "Wow, this is still relevant 20 years later." I'm like, "Guess what? It's still relevant 30 years later. It's going to stay relevant." Yeah, watching her stand up to Winn, who's not even Kai. It's just Vedek Winn. It's just I see in her so many teachers and librarians that I know today, standing up to people coming in and trying to impose things upon them. Yeah, it's still, she's so-- She was the first one to stand up to Winn, the big bad. She clocked her right away. She was like, "This lady. No, mm-hmm. We're not going to bend over, mm-hmm."

Livian: The episode is relevant absolutely. And I think I'm just really, every time I rewatch it, I'm blown away by just how good Rosalind Chao is. Like, when she's confronting Vedek Winn, and she just simply says no. It's just so straightforward, but you can see so much of the strength of this woman. And yeah, to what you were saying, Michelle, in thinking back on the episode, I'm also thinking about how little institutional support that Keiko actually has for her school. I mean, yes, she has her space and Jake is there, but as far as I can remember, Sisko was not really able to just support her in that moment. She was on her own for a lot of that confrontation with Vedek Winn.

Michelle: Yeah, she built that whole school. When she's talking to Rom about it, she's like, "I'm developing the curriculum. I've got computer." Like, she wrote the curriculum. She had nothing. She had no support. And she just kind of built it up from nothing. And, yeah, when she goes to Sisko for support, he's like, "Well, I support all philosophies on this station," and that's just kind of a non-answer. [laughs]

Livian: And it was her idea to have children of different species study together. If it were up to Sisko, they'd all just be learning with a computer still.

Michelle: Yeah, truly at home with their tablets. Yes.

Livian: Yeah.

Michelle: And she's like, "No, they need to be interacting socially." She saw a social need for it. And then, here's another thing that I noticed on my rewatch. There's a whole episode about how Rom is-- or not Rom, Nog is acting out of because he can't read. And again, Keiko's not in that episode. She's away and O'Brien is the substitute teacher, and they're acting out because of that. But then we find out that no, actually, Nog is actually having trouble reading and Jake ends up helping him. But it's Keiko who really set that in motion. And I can't believe that I forgot that because I'm a reading teacher now. So, it was really lovely to go back and see that and be like, "Wow, she really put him on a different path." And

we know how his whole career turned out and he ended up going to Starfleet and later in the comic book seasons, he's a captain. It's lovely.

Jarrah: Yeah. I think that just when you mentioned O'Brien being the substitute and the institutional support makes me think she wasn't-- She didn't have training in pedagogy before this. So, one level, I think this is one of those things that happens in *Star Trek* and in pop culture where it's just like, "Anyone can be a teacher." And actually, it's maybe that undermines the fact a bit that it's a really hard job. But I think this episode mitigates that because it shows it's a really hard job. I mean, this is a quite extreme situation of ideological challenges and the bombing and things like that. But it still does show those challenges that you have working with kids. And so, then the idea that you put Miles in there when he also doesn't have training in being an educator, although later he gets to teach at the academy, I think.

Michelle: Yeah. Yeah.

Jarrah: And it just is kind of baffling to me how weak of an education system Starfleet has or Bajor has. You get that they're in a period of reconstruction, but that they have essentially no standards or milestones people have to hit particularly. I guess it's like, like you're saying, if you're conflating things on the computer but I think *DS9* does a good job of showing that it is actually important to have someone who can guide you and see how you're doing and that's really hard for a computer to accomplish.

Michelle: Absolutely. Yeah. The whole social interaction of it is crucial. [laughs]

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. I also think that Sisko's in a pretty difficult position here. And I really like the scene he has with Jake where he's kind of trying to talk with him about how you also need to respect the tradition of the Bajorans, which I think just given the context they're in, the episode is trying to make a distinction between people that just happen to have spiritual beliefs and then people like Vedek Winn and her more extremist followers that are willing to resort to violence because they feel that's so threatened and that Keiko's pleas-- her statements of her philosophy and her responsibility, I think, are really powerful. That she says, "My responsibility is to expose my students to knowledge, not hide it from them." And that her job is not to teach Bajoran spiritual beliefs. It's to open the childrens' minds to history, literature, mathematics, science, etc. And yeah, it's like, picked up on your job pretty well. I really like it.

Michelle: Yeah, I love that line where she says that "It's not my job to teach spiritual belief. That's your job to win." She's saying, "I don't come tell you how to do your job, so please don't come tell me how to do mine." Ah, love it.

Jarrah: There's definitely some more episodes in the *Deep Space Nine* one. The next one I had was Cardassian's where they sort of adopt/foster Rugal, the Cardassian boy. But also, I just wanted to note because previously you just mentioned the episode where Miles is possessed by the prisoner with Troi and they kind of hold people hostage, including Keiko. There's also a little bit of that where Keiko and Molly are kind of held hostage in *If Wishes Were Horses* with the Rumpelstiltskin thing, which also-- So, I'm just like, that's an irritating dynamic there.

One of the reasons that I think a lot of people appreciate Keiko and Miles is that there's so few married couples or long-term couples in *Star Trek* that this is one of the few examples that we have. But while Keiko also has some slight stereotypical elements to her character, Colm Meaney was constantly also having to fight over the showrunners wanting to have him have a nightmare about a leprechaun and things like that. So, man, that whole family just gets it.

Michelle: Yeah, there's a lot of Keiko in danger. She's injured. She's in danger. She's possessed. Yeah, there was the whole thing of like, "Oh, O'Brien must suffer." But I'm like, Keiko does a lot of suffering herself. Like, she goes through it.

Jarrah: And it's hard to be the partner of someone who is suffering too. So, even she has direct suffering, like in *The Assignment* where she's possessed by a Pah-wraith but she also has the indirect suffering. She's constantly kind of having to do things like pretending she doesn't know Miles is replaced by a duplicate or convincing people to investigate his apparent death. So, she's really rising. She's experiencing challenges. She has to also be separated from him for an extended period of time because of the war. So, it's not like she just has a cakewalk while Miles is doing all the work.

Livian: They live a very high stress life, and they have kids. It's kind of incredible.

Jarrah: Yeah. So, I mean, in *Cardassians*, you have this thing where I think it connects a bit to Keiko's both teaching and maternal instincts. And it's kind of resurfacing some of O'Brien's xenophobia towards Cardassians. And it's a pretty powerful episode.

Michelle: Yeah, for sure. She has a great moment with O'Brien where she says to him, "You just said a very ugly thing and you need to rethink your position on this." I think too though, she does have a bit of a misstep with the blue goopy stew that she makes for them. That, to me, I mean, I know they wanted to have a funny moment where it's like, "Ooh. Again, she's trying to make him eat something gross, eww." But I just don't see her looking at this knowing what's going on with this kid and being like, "Yes, I will make him Cardassian stew. That's what he would love."

Livian: I totally agree, Michelle, because we were talking about representation and I was like, Keiko, of all people would know that your heritage and your-- I feel like I'm not using the right words right now, but she's Japanese American on the show, but it doesn't necessarily mean that she loves Japanese food. So, yeah, I feel like that's a nuance that she would totally understand.

Michelle: Yeah. Yeah. I think she missed the mark with that one. But then, O'Brien and Rugal had a chance to bond over hating this stew. So, I guess that was the motivation there. But yeah, that always bugged me.

Jarrah: There's definitely some other fun Keiko moments. In *Rivals*, she gets to coax Miles in racquetball against Bashir, and you get those amazing racquetball outfits.

Michelle: [laughs] So fashionable.

Jarrah: I do think that probably it's worth mentioning that *In the Hands of the Prophets* is a bit of an exception, but partly because she's there as the wife of a main character, we don't always see a lot about her relationships with women as friends a lot, so not a ton of Bechdel-Wallace test passes for Keiko. But it's still-- I guess, like, the question is, I would say I feel like she has enough of a character that's not the only thing about her. It's not like the only thing we can say about her is that she's Miles' wife. But it would be nice to see her have more other relationships.

Michelle: Yeah, they're kind of hinted at but not on screen. So, they'll be like, "Oh, Keiko and Dax were like—" She's going to tell, if you tell Keiko this, she's going to tell Dax and they're friends. And when Miles is leaving, he asks Dax to check in on her. So, there's kind of an implied relationship there, but we never see them, yeah, sad. They never get dressed up in the medieval cone hat outfits. [laughs] She could have gone there. Looking back there, I'm

like, there's so many opportunities they could have put her in. "She could have been there. She could have been doing this."

Jarrah: I love that. What would you like to see--? If we could just insert Keiko in another scene? We have the sort of Camelot holodeck thing. Other things we'd want her to be in *Deep Space Nine* that we didn't get to see?

Michelle: I mean, maybe she's sporty. Maybe she could have played some sports ball. I don't know.

Jarrah: Yep. We also, I don't know, could have seen more of a resurgence of her little—the mini-- I don't know, was it--? Is she in like a wind quartet or like a mini orchestra thing? She could have taught music in addition to teaching-teaching.

Michelle: Truly, yeah. We never see her with her clarinet ever again. But yeah, I do feel like she has this kind of rich, off-screen life that we can kind of-- We get bits and pieces of it and they name drop her every now and then just to remind viewers that, like, "Yeah, she's not featured in the episode but we assure you, they're still married and she's still around."

Jarrah: Another thing they could have done would have been some sort of botany-related mystery where they have, I don't know, a transporter accident and she has to use her botany skills to figure out what happened.

Michelle: Yeah. Well, and again, she could have been in *Clues* in *TNG* where the whole thing where they realize they've lost a day is because the plants were growing, and they made it be Crusher's experiment. And she's like, "Oh, my plan--" And they're like, "I didn't know you were into botany." And I'm like, "Well, you have a botanist. Why wouldn't you use her?"

Jarrah: This is like how everyone gets to be the counselor except for Troi.

Michelle: Yeah, [laughs] for sure. And they do even mention her because Miles has hurt his arm trying to hang up a plant for her. And that's a recurring theme too, is where she's keeping-- She's always trying to help him learn how to grow plants and he's always killing the plants throughout. But yeah, she's mentioned in that episode. I'm like, "There are plants that are a big part of the storyline. Why on earth was she not the one growing the plants?" Alas.

Jarrah: Yep. I feel like that connects well to. There's certainly a few more episodes that I want us to get through. But when you're talking about the thing about him hanging the plants and some more of these-- Well, we were also talking about the whole friendship thing and I guess-- One of my pet peeves are the episodes where they really lean into that whole sitcom couple vibe. And so, there's a bit in *Hippocratic Oath* where Miles wants to set up a workshop in their bedroom and she's having none of this. But I'm thinking particularly of the episode, *Accession*, the one with the guy who thinks he's the real emissary and Kira's sculpting and shit. But in that one, that's the one where Keiko comes back from Bajor and she's pregnant.

And there's this whole thing where O'Brien and Bashir have just been playing the Alamo or something in their quarters and the quarters are a complete mess and he has to clean up because Keiko is coming home. And there's this whole thing that's like, "Well, women expect things to be tidy and that's not like in men's nature," is kind of like the subtext there.

Michelle: Uh-oh, mommy's home.

Jarrah: And then, he's super excited because they're going to get to bone. And then when she gets off the runabout and then Molly tells him that she's pregnant, there's this whole sad trombone kind of moment where it's like, "Oh, I guess daddy's not getting any," but completely ignores the fact that pregnant people have sex all the time. But it's like this whole idea that's like, "Well, we don't talk about that on TV."

Michelle: Mm-hmm. Yeah, it is very womp-womp. Yep, for sure.

Livian: In the future, don't you think they would have an automatic cleaner or something that should keep your quarters tidy? I don't know.

Michelle: Right. Yeah, that drives me crazy too, like, "Oh, she has to put his socks in the automatic cleaning thing." I'm like, "Okay, he could do that." Ugh.

Jarrah: There's also this thing where-- I forget which episode it is, but they have to basically pass kind of passive aggressive messages back and forth through other people because they don't want to just straight out say what their issue is with each other. Oh, right, I think it's like Keiko's really worried about Miles and so she's trying to encourage him to get out with Bashir. And I think this is when-- I forget if it's like she's pregnant with Kirayoshi or if it's after the baby's been put into Kira. But Keiko has other work to do. O'Brien feels guilty and he needs to be around all the time. So, they're kind of concocting these schemes to deal with what should be basically a straightforward conversation.

Michelle: Yeah, no, that's *Accession*. It's the same episode where she shows up pregnant and he's like, "Oh, I guess I can't play with my friend anymore." And so, she's like, "No, I need you actually out of my hair. Can you please go play with your friend? But I can't just say that." So, she's like, "Oh, I think he misses you. You should check on him." And then, she's like, "Hey, Julian, I'm worried about Miles." Yeah, yeah. It's a whole thing. Yep.

Jarrah: Yeah. So, that's not my favorite episode for that reason. But I know I've also heard people say that, on the other hand, that is realistic. A lot of people don't have great communication skills, and so it's not out of the realm of possibility that people who are even in this more utopian future are still going to have issues communicating basic things in a relationship. But I'm like, "I just want them to be better."

Michelle: Yeah, for sure. I mean, I definitely get accused all the time of being too indirect with my communication. I could not have been more clear. And it's like, "No, actually, I guess I could have been more clear." But yeah, I definitely would go the convoluted route if I had something like that.

Since you've brought up the Bashir of it all, I did go back to my discourse analysis roots, and I did kind of a-- I guess it's kind of a reverse Bechdel-Wallace, where I'm like, how many times did Bashir and O'Brien talk about Keiko when she was not present? So, the absolute opposite of Bechdel. Because I wanted to see, I have this impression that they're always talking about her behind. Like, "Oh, she's such a nag. Oh, she won't let us play with our toys. Oh, my gosh. This and that." And yeah, the vast, vast majority of the times that Keiko is brought up when she's not on camera is O'Brien and Bashir talking about her. Truly, the vast majority of the times. It's very rare for other people to be talking about her. Most of the time, when O'Brien is talking about her to someone else, it's an even balance of positive and negative. But when he's talking to Bashir, it's actually more positive than negative because Bashir talks about her more negatively than positively.

Livian: Oh. Hmm.

Michelle: So, it's like this reaction where Bashir is like, "Oh, your wife, am I right?" And he's like, "No, actually, she's great, and I love her." And he's like, "Yeah, but really though?" And he's like, "No, but for real."

Jarrah: Go, Miles.

Michelle: Yeah. So, he kind of amps up the positivity whenever he's talking to Bashir about her. So, I thought that was interesting because you do get this impression that it's kind of both of them talking negatively about her. But really, Bashir's kind of stirring the pot.

Livian: Yeah. There was that whole episode where Bashir and Miles were kidnapped, or they were, like, stranded. And Bashir keeps being like, "Is marriage worth it? Your old ball and chain?" And Miles was always like, "Marriage is great. I love being married." So, that's definitely the dynamic.

Michelle: Yeah. And that's the one where she realizes from the video, she's like, "No, this has been faked. They're still alive." And then, they totally undercut her at the end where she's like, "I know this is fake because he would never be drinking coffee at 3 o'clock in the afternoon." And then at the very end, they just had to throw this in where he's like-- And it's a total sitcom moment where he's like, "I'll have a coffee." And she's like, "You don't drink coffee in the afternoon." He's like, "I sure do." [imitates a trumpet] And then the episode ends. [laughs] so, they took away this moment of her like, "No, I know my husband. I know him so well. I know that he's not dead." And then they just totally ripped the rug out from under her. Oh, it makes me so mad.

Livian: But then, when the Pah-wraith took over Keiko, she's like, "Oh, your wife knows you so well. There's no one who knows you better."

Michelle: Yeah, that's very sweet in a very creepy way.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Michelle: Where she's like, "I see what you're doing. Your wife sees what you're doing. Therefore, I see what you're doing." It's like, "Aww."

Jarrah: That's such a creepy episode. I mean, it's sort of-- It's a different version of the-- It's got a little bit messed up tropes about women. It's got the indirect damsel in distress because the real Keiko is being held hostage in her own body and forced to throw herself off the promenade and things. And then, it also has the femme fatale where the Pah-wraith is taking over her and then trying to scare but also seduce Miles.

Michelle: Yeah. And at the beginning, he even thinks it's some sort of like, "Oh, are we role playing here? What's happening?" She's like, "I've taken control of your wife." He's like, "Oh, really?"

Jarrah: Yeah.

Michelle: "No, for real though." [laughter]

Jarrah: Yeah, that's totally cool if that's your thing, but yeah. Okay, I watched that episode way too many times because when I was a kid, it was one of the episodes that we had on VHS tape recorded over the summer when there was no new *Star Trek*. And I probably only had like three episodes, and that was one of them. So, I probably watched it like 30 times.

Michelle: Yes, that's very real to me. There's certain videos that you just had, and those are the ones you have and those are the ones you watched.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. But super traumatic. And also, it's another good example of a thing we've talked about in *Star Trek* before about the whole-- I mean, this obviously happens to Miles over and over again where you go through a trauma and then you're fine the next episode. And this is one of Keiko's examples.

Michelle: Mm-hmm. Yep. Again, both of them, they're both really put through it in both seasons. I don't know. And then, yeah, they're fine. The whole him being in the prison in his mind for 20 years, the next episode, he's just fine. And it seems like that would be maybe for the rest of his life, he's traumatized by that, and it could keep cropping up, but no.

Jarrah: I mean, they do have the thing at the end where he tries to kill himself and there's this whole thing where you know that Keiko and Molly are going to have to cope with the fact that daddy's not okay until the next episode. So, they do acknowledge it a bit better in *Deep Space Nine*, I think. But they still are kind of stuck in the storytelling pattern where they need to reset things.

Michelle: Although he does have his recurring trauma from the Cardassian War where anytime that gets brought up, he has to go through it.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. There's another rough episode for both of them is *Time's Orphan*.

Livian: Oh, gosh.

Jarrah: Where Molly just walks through a portal and comes out and is a feral adult.

Michelle: Mm-hmm. At least this time they both get to suffer together instead of just one of them. I don't know. Yeah, it's so traumatic. Again, it's like she's such a strong mother. She's protecting her child. She doesn't want them to send her back and essentially kill this grown-up version of her daughter. She's like, "No, this is my daughter. This is who she is now. We're going to deal with it." But yeah, it's a lot.

Livian: And poor Molly. I can't imagine growing up on the station with the war and everything, just everything that's happened to them, to this family.

Michelle: Yeah. Yeah. I would love to have a novel about her or something. I mean, maybe there's one out, there's so many novels. Like, what was that like for her to be like a military kid living through this?

Livian: Yeah. Or even like Kirayoshi, who we don't see as much but also went through a lot of trauma. It's definitely a traumatized family.

Jarrah: Yeah. And I mean, in *Time's Orphan*, there's the part where before Molly gets put back in time where they are talking-- Basically, Molly wants to-- Basically says, "I want to take the cat if we have to be sent away again." And then, Miles says he won't. And Molly's basically like, "We're never going to be separated again." And Keiko's like, "You might not be able to promise that." And Miles is like, "I will put in for a transfer before I do that again." And yeah, it's nice to see them working together.

Then, of course, in this episode, they also have conflict over just how to manage the situation and kind of there-- I think it shows how they're both having sort of different instincts and trying to cope with this and they're trying to work together, but also when you're dealing with that level of stress and fear about your child, that it puts strain on you.

Michelle: I was going to mention, since you mentioned Yoshi. Kira shows up and takes him off. Keiko's like, "I'm going to stay here. We're going to figure this out." And Kira shows up because Kira is part of their family now. And I think that's super cool that Yoshi basically has two moms, and she sees herself as part of their family. And of course, then there's the whole sitcom of it all where it's like, "Oh, no. What if O'Brien has feelings for Kira now? Oh, this and that." And of course that comes up a lot. And Bashir stirs that up a lot too. He's often the one being like, "Oh, Kira lives with you now, I see." But I think it's lovely, their little family unit that they've formed, their little non-traditional family. I think that's great.

Jarrah: Yeah. The thing with Kira, and Keiko and Kira also have a bit of a tense relationship at first. Well, I think Keiko is trying really hard and Kira feels really awkward about it. And Miles certainly feels awkward. Keiko is the one that really wants to make sure she's there in the quarters and that she's behaving in a way that gives the baby the best chance of success and being healthy and stuff. And then in *The Begotten*, you have Kirayoshi being born and the whole thing where like, O'Brien refuses to not be present for the birth, but then him and Shakaar are fighting with each other.

And I do enjoy when Keiko just tells Miles to stop being such an idiot because of the way that him and Shakaar are behaving because he's jeopardizing their chance to actually see their baby be born.

Michelle: Yeah, she finally just boots him out. She's like, "You simply must get out." But yeah, it's her and Kira being like, "No, you guys have to go now." But yeah, I think they have a strong bond by the end. And again, we could have seen them hanging out.

Jarrah: Totally. I did just do like a quick scan through my-Bechdel Wallace test results. And in *Looking for par'Mach in All the Wrong Places*, there is a moment where Keiko and Kira discuss Kira's new uniform. So, that implies they have a friendship.

Michelle: There you go.

Jarrah: It's not like maybe that much of a step to be like, they're talking about a man to they're talking about clothes, but still, it's something. It's a part of friendship.

Michelle: Love that. Love that for them.

Jarrah: Are there any other *Deep Space Nine* moments that you would like to highlight?

Michelle: I did notice in the very last episode, *What You Leave Behind*. Keiko's there at the beginning and they're talking about, "Oh, he's got to go tell Bashir that they're moving back to Earth and he's going to go work at the academy." But then, she's not at the party in the holodeck where they're all-- And Quark even says it's the "goodbye to Chief O'Brien and several other things" party. She's not there. And I couldn't believe it was true because I was looking at the transcripts, I'm like, "Is she there? And she just didn't say anything. She's got to be there." And I went and looked, and she is not there.

Jarrah: That's a very good point.

Michelle: [laughs] Like, they could have got a sitter. They get sitters. they mention getting sitters all the time.

Jarrah: To me, it's odd that they would make the point of having her in the first, part but it probably came down to something like the actor's availability, at the time they were filming or

the budget for the season and the fact that it's technically two episodes or something like that. But yeah, it feels weird that you would not be at your husband's going away party.

Michelle: Yeah.

Jarrah: Especially when you're ostensibly friends off screen with all of these other characters.

One question that we could discuss if anyone has any thoughts. Keiko has been in a lot of beta canon like comics, novels, etc. I'm not super familiar with it, but certainly with-- There's one more season of *Lower Decks*, and if she's not in it, there's nothing we can do about that. But with *Lower Decks* and *Prodigy* and some of the other shows, they've had characters come back or be referenced. Is there an opportunity that you see to feature Keiko in one of the other shows that's on now or to reference her in some way that you think would be cool?

Michelle: I will say I haven't watched *Prodigy*. I need to. It's on my to-do list, but I know it's about younger characters. So again, her as a teacher, I think that would be so cool if she could be somehow referenced in that or maybe she wrote a textbook or something that they're using or something like that.

Jarrah: Yeah, that could be cool.

Livian: Yeah. I also haven't seen *Prodigy* but they did reference O'Brien in *Lower Deck*.

Michelle: Oh, yes, the statue. [laughter]

Livian: The most important man in Starfleet. Gosh, it would be amazing to have Keiko referenced or appear in some way.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. I'm thinking about you could have-- in *Strange New Worlds*, you could have one of her ancestors be featured somewhere, I guess, great grandparent or something? Maybe meet her grandma that she paints with later, but like as a small child, I don't know if my math is totally off on that, but there could also be in the shows that are set farther in the future, could be the Keiko O'Brien Botanical Institute or something like that.

Livian: Yeah.

Jarrah: Or that they could discuss a discovery that she made that was really cool.

Michelle: That would be cool. Yeah, I checked out one of the *DS9* novels that she's featured in, the one about Cardassia, how they're trying to rebuild after the war.

Jarrah: Oh, yes. That's such a good one.

Michelle: They're once again trying to do science, and the politics and religious factions just will not let her do her science.

Jarrah: Is that the *Worlds of Deep Space Nine* Cardassians thing by Una McCormack? That's so good.

Michelle: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Jarrah: Oh, I feel like I read another one set on Cardassia partly post finale of *Deep Space Nine* that she has so-- That's very cool and I like that. In that case, it's like Miles is going with her because this is her role and then he's been given another role as well. But yeah, she's

navigating all of these politics and he's supporting her to excel in her career by reassuring her that she has diplomatic skills she just never even realized.

Michelle: Yeah, she is so good at it. Again, we saw it in her confrontation with Winn. She gets the barbs in. She knows where to strike. She has the instincts and not everyone does, but she doesn't think of herself that way.

Jarrah: And the whole thing about Miles having the statue even though it's kind of a joke in *Lower Decks*, it reminds me of the whole thing around Zefram Cochrane having a statue but no one even knowing who Lily Sloane is in the future. And I think that from what we've seen Keiko has a significant professional impact on the world of *Star Trek*. So, it might be another kind of Rosalind Franklin-y situation where her husband gets the glory, and her scientific things are eclipsed. But we can always hope that there's other stuff and they just haven't shown it on screen yet.

Michelle: You can always imagine what might be happening off screen.

Livian: This has been so fun, and I feel like I'm definitely thinking about Keiko in a new light now. And I don't actually know a lot about the expanded universe, so I'll have to check out that novel as well.

Michelle: I agree. This has been so fun, to go back into it and see just how present she was throughout, even though she wasn't always on screen. Yeah, it's been really cool to talk with you guys about it.

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. Thank you so much, both of you, for coming on the show. So, that's about all the time we have for today. And so, I will open it up for you to plug anything you'd like to plug, starting with you, Michelle. Where can people find you on the internet or elsewhere?

Michelle: So, I don't have a huge internet presence, but much like Keiko, I am myself a reading teacher, and I have an online tutoring business. So, if you know any Nogs out there who need reading assistance, my website is t3-tutoring.com, and I would be delighted to help.

Jarrah: Awesome. And how about you, Livian?

Livian: I am also trying to stay away from the internet, but yeah, my website is just livianyeh.com. Yeah. And I wonder if I could plug the episode of Rosalind Chao on *All the Asians on Star Trek* because she really gave a lot of. Yeah, a lot of insight on playing Keiko and, yeah, just like all that she went through during that time.

Jarrah: Totally. I will link to all of those things in the show notes. And listeners, encourage you to definitely look up that podcast. And it's also just generally a delightful podcast.

All right, and I'm Jarrah, and you can find me @trekkiefeminist.com including my detailed Bechdel-Wallace test results for *Deep Space Nine*. So, you can see every time Keiko talked to another woman about something other than a man.

Now, to learn more about our show or to contact us, visit womenatwarp.com, email us at crew@womenatwarp.com or find us on Facebook or Instagram @womenatwarp. Thanks so much for listening.

[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]