



Illuminating the  
**SEX & GENDER**  
Spectrum  
**PART 2**



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## Illuminating the Sex & Gender Spectrum – Part 2 Transcript

Alaina Hardie:

So what it means to be male or female, be a man, be a woman, be a boy, whatever, in every culture is different. So I might choose to express that in all kinds of different ways to signify it, that there seems to be something about gender identity, the core me that seems very intractable and beyond kind of simplistic binary's, this felt sense. It seems very resistant to therapy, drugs, shock treatments. Once you've kind of coalesced around this identity that you have, it doesn't seem to go away, which I think is quite fascinating. And in many people that appears fairly young, like three, four or five.

John Berardi:

This is the Dr. John Berardi Show, a podcast that seeks important lessons in a seemingly unlikely place, amid competing points of view. In each episode, I look at fascinating, sometimes even controversial topics through the minds of divergent thinkers and together we tease out unifying threads from ideas that may feel irreconcilable. Today's topic, Illuminating the Sex and Gender Spectrum, part two. In part one, we covered the complexities of biological sex, discussing how, whereas in the past sex was viewed as binary, it's now viewed as more of a spectrum with if we need to make hard line categories, at least three of them, female, male and intersex. And we discussed how this spectrum is an example of biological diversity seen across many species in chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, external genitalia and hormone levels.

John Berardi:

Here in part two, we'll spend a little more time on gender, discussing where our felt sense of who we are as, "Masculine or feminine or both or neither comes from." And what we can learn from those folks whose biological sex never matched their gender identity. Along the way, we'll talk with a few interesting guests, including a male to female trans person who served in the Marine Corps, was part of Bill Clinton's security detail and who once bench pressed 738 pounds, the weight of a Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

John Berardi:

In part one of this series, Alaina Hardie helped us understand a little more about genetics and sex differentiation. Here, I wanted to bring her back with a proper introduction.

Alaina Hardie:

I learned to read it like two and my mom figured out that I was obsessed with reading. So literally every day after school starting in grade two, she would take me to the library and sit there while I read books and then the library would close and then we would leave.

John Berardi:

Alaina and I have been friends and colleagues for almost 20 years. By training and occupation, she's now a technologist and data scientist, but all those hours in the library and the diverse interests they brought, likely turned her into a polymath. She's a self-taught robotics expert and biochemist who built her own robotics and molecular biology labs in her own backyard. She also graduated from Singularity University and went on to become faculty there. One of the few without a terminal degree like a PhD, she's a black belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu. She's a co-author on the book, Genetics: The Universe Within, which my name is on also. And I have to tell you, stacked up against all that, her gender identity is one of the less interesting things about her. But our conversation really did help me learn more about where the science of genetics overlaps with the realities of personhood. I asked Alaina who transitioned more than 20 years ago, how she self identifies.

Alaina Hardie:

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I say that I am a queer transsexual woman. I think that means I have a very clear female gender identity, I have since I was two or three, it's never been in question for me. I am mostly attracted to other women with very few exceptions. My partner is another woman, a cis woman or queer trans woman. I don't know, you might feel this too, the older I get, the less I give a shit. I don't know how else to say it.

John Berardi:

So, you're not being a great activist here, but you're just like, I'm just trying to live my life.

Alaina Hardie:

I've done my activism. It's time for the kids, they're much better at it.

John Berardi:

Now again, when Alaina says gender identity, it means this deep sense of herself as a man or a woman. Here's how Dr. Krista Scott-Dixon, former professor of gender studies, describes the identity phenomenon.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

When I say identity, I'm talking about the felt sense of yourself as something. Now, how you express that will be much more culturally determined, right? Like what being a boy looks like and in one culture will be different. And when I used to teach, I used to use this great slide from pre-revolutionary France with male aristocrats, with wigs and lacy collars and high heels, a little frilly jackets and stuff like that. So, but they were mainly men, they had swords and stuff like that. So, they probably thought they were like the bomb back then.

John Berardi:

Look at what a man I am.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

That's right, because I'm the peacock of the species, right? Who knows? That was maybe the idea. So, what it means to be male or female, be a man, be a woman, be a boy, whatever, in every culture is different. So, I might choose to express that in all kinds of different ways to signify it. But there seems to be something about gender identity, the core me that seems very intractable and beyond kind of simplistic binary's this felt sense. It seems very resistant to therapy, drugs, shock treatments. Once you've kind of coalesced around this identity that you have, it doesn't seem to go away, which I think is quite fascinating. And in many people that appears fairly young, like three, four or five.

John Berardi:

This is almost precisely how Alaina describes her experience.

Alaina Hardie:

Part of this is not reconstructed from my memory, part of this is reconstructed from my parents retelling. I remember age five or six, couldn't figure out why people were calling me a boy, it just didn't make sense to me. And so, my parents or my mom just said that I was always like this, but I remember the thing that stood out to me was people calling me a boy and I was like, oh, I'm not a boy. I remember even saying that to some drunk guy at my grandfather's bar and then they made fun of me. Every time I would pop in to visit my grandfather, they would make fun of me for that.

John Berardi:

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This is a theme that's come up often in my conversations, the people I've spoken with who've transitioned realized fairly early that they didn't fit into the box that was checked on their birth certificate. That's very different from my experience, for example, I left the hospital designated male, from there I was treated like a boy and that felt normal and natural for me. So, I didn't have to think much about my own sex and gender, but trans folks have to think about it a lot, even when they aren't consciously wondering why they're different, the steady discomfort of feeling a mismatch between their sex and their gender weighs heavily. This raises the question of whether genetics, which we discussed in the last episode can help us understand why they're different. After all we have markers for things like breast cancer or colon cancer, eye color or hair color.

Alaina Hardie:

I think one of the things that people don't understand when they think about genetics is that they think of this code and I'm going to be able to look at this code and I'm going to be able to shine light through it and project it on the wall. And I'm going to see exactly what the person is going to look like. It doesn't work like that, switches are always getting flipped off and on and knobs are getting turned up and down. And I think it's really important to say, is this genetic? I don't know, the code is genetic, but there are signaling pathways that happen independent of this. It's just an incredibly complicated system.

John Berardi:

So what Alaina is saying is that there's likely no chance we'll find a single gene or even a few genes that tell us whether someone will be trans or not. Dr. Harley, who we talked to in the first episode agrees.

Vincent Harley:

The way the genetics is, it probably won't, it's like height. If you're in the range, we're never going to be able to predict height to the centimeter or the millimeter. The genetics is just one thing. You try an environment and then it's a societal environment and diet and all sorts of other environmental things that might come into play. It's never going to be a useful clinical marker, I don't think.

John Berardi:

Which might be a good thing. Sure, it might be easier if we could pinpoint in our chromosomes exactly where our feelings of gender come from. If we could do what Alaina said, project our genetic code on the wall and understand exactly why we are, who we are. I know a part of me always thinks that it might make us more accepting of people with sex and gender and orientation differences or as Dr. Krista deposits.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

Or would they try to fix it?

John Berardi:

This made me think back to the early 90s and the search for the "Gay gene." In a 1993 New York Times story, a spokesman for the human rights campaign said that this kind of research would increase public support for lesbian and gay rights yet Darrell Yates Rist Co-founder of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation had a different take. Here's what he said, "I don't think it's an interesting study. What do we gain by finding out there's a homosexual gene, nothing except an attempt to identify those people who have it and then open them up to all sorts of experimentation to change them."

John Berardi:

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As science tends to do it marches on in the name of knowledge and progress. I'm sure in a few years, this series will feel quaint and uninformed because scientific discoveries are being made at breakneck speed and will likely explain a good deal of how our brains develop our gender identity. One that either matches our biological sex or one that doesn't. And of course, social scientists will continue to help refine our understanding as we figure out how to situate these new discoveries into our evolving culture. One thing I was interested in, in the making of this series was the evolving terminology. Of course, words have power and have to change as our understanding expands. I asked Dr. Krista about the language used in modern gender conversations.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

Yeah. There's all kinds of different terms really that people use in all different contexts, gender queer, gender fluid, gender fucker, non-binary. If you're indigenous, maybe the term two spirit you feel as applicable to you. So, there's lots and lots of terms that generally in some way refer to the idea that you're not picking a side. It's not even so much that you're living in this weird void. It's more like you've identified another way to be that is equivalently resonant and real. And that means different things to different people. For some people that means being playful and not settling, for other people it means being more fluid, there's different connotations that individuals have.

John Berardi:

If this feels a little confusing, I get it. However, if you're not really sure the "Right words" to use for or with someone, you might consider asking.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

And so, this is where we get into the issue of really just asking people, how would you define yourself? What term would you use? And going with whatever terminology they use rather than me coming up to them and saying, well, I think that you should be blah, blah.

John Berardi:

Although we should all be a little more thoughtful about how we ask.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

When I was teaching at the start of the year, I would read out the attendance list. And I would say, please tell me how to pronounce your name. Because I mean, I taught at York University in Toronto which was very multicultural. Please tell me how to pronounce your name and tell me if this is the name that you actually want me to use, because the name that you enrolled in might be your formal name, maybe you want to go by something else. So, that's an example of when you might ask that kind of thing. If I'm just interacting with you and you're serving me coffee at the Starbucks or I don't know, you're driving my bus, you're engaging with me in some social role where me knowing your gender or your gender expression is completely irrelevant to me that I don't care. I'm not going to ask, it's not important.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

When it is important, so for example, let's say you are doing an interview and you want to know what pronouns to use or what name or how they want to be described, that's a great time to ask. If you're about to have sex with a person and you're curious about what you're going to discover physiologically, that might be a great time to be curious or maybe just wait to be surprised with time that's fun. But basically, I see it on a very need to know basis. And so, to circle back to when is it not okay to ask, well, it's not okay to ask a random stranger, whether they have a vagina.

Janae Kroc:

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I have a female gender identity, but I also don't fit neatly in that box.

John Berardi:

This is again, Janae Kroc, who I briefly introduced in the first part of this series.

Janae Kroc:

I also describe myself as being non-binary and gender fluid, meaning that I don't fit neatly within this binary system of gender between just male and female. And then gender fluid, meaning there's some degree of fluidity to my gender and how I feel on a day-to-day basis. And I know that all sounds like can easily sound to people outside of this like, oh my gosh, that's just crazy, this person's lost it. But I mean, my entire life I've known this since I was five or six years old and always had these issues with my gender. The thing is, as humans, we're incredibly complex, we're incredibly complicated. And the idea that we're expected to all fit neatly and in a couple of different boxes or that every male is the same or every female is the same is really ludicrous when you stop and really think about it.

Janae Kroc:

And I'm just someone who, however, my brain was developed or however my genetics worked out, but I'm just someone who doesn't fit neatly in one box. And I'm finally at a point in my life where I'm fully okay with that. And I just live my life in a way that makes me feel comfortable. And if people have difficulty understanding of that, that's fine. And I'll do what I can to help people understand, but I don't worry about being judged for that anymore.

John Berardi:

Maybe at this point, I should better introduce Janae. Janae Kroc is a transgender woman previously known as Matt Kroc. Now, if you don't follow power lifting or bodybuilding, this name may not mean anything to you. However, if you do, the name Matt Kroc is almost mythical. You see Janae was a legend in the sport of powerlifting known for her training intensity, mental toughness and ability to overcome numerous serious injuries. She was known for her "Manliness." As Matt, the legend began while serving as a US Marine from 1991 to 1995 and continued after being selected to serve as part of President Clinton's security team. Later on, the legend grew after squatting 1,014 pounds, bench pressing 738 pounds and deadlifting 810 pounds to capture the all-time powerlifting world record in the 220-pound weight class. These are of course, epic, superhuman numbers. There's even an exercise named after Janae called the Kroc row because of her legendary 13 one-arm rows with a specially made 300-pound dumbbell.

John Berardi:

The irony of course, is that Janae was a trans person operating in areas, the military, powerlifting that have historically taken the gender binary very seriously. To underscore this 11 years ago in 2010, an article ran on the most popular strength training in bodybuilding website in the world, T Nation. That article was titled simply, Matt Kroc is More Man than You and I have some history with that article. So, I want to start by telling you a story that you probably don't know. So, you're actually, single-handedly responsible for me meeting one of my most trusted colleagues and one of my best friends, Nate Green, I don't know, do you know where this is going or no?

Janae Kroc:

I'm not sure, no.

John Berardi:

Okay. So, it was 2010 and there was an article on T Nation by Nate Green which you might recall. And I hadn't met Nate yet. And the title was, Matt Kroc is More Man Than You. Do you remember this?

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Janae Kroc:

Oh my gosh. I do remember that article.

John Berardi:

Okay. So, we're going to unpack this in a minute, but after I read that piece, I looked for Nate's email and I dropped him a line praising the article, despite maybe ironic title, it was the first sort of esquire ask kind of character study that I'd seen done on T Nation or anywhere really like in bodybuilding and powerlifting magazines. And I was just super impressed with the storytelling and the writing, at that moment I was like, I got to work with this guy, Nate. And so, I reached out, I offered him a job. We met at a conference shortly thereafter, he took it. And then fast forward to today, we've been colleagues and close friends for a decade now.

Janae Kroc:

Oh, that's so funny and small world. I'm just like how paths cross and that's really cool.

John Berardi:

I've always been super curious, if you A, remember the piece and B, what comes up for you when you think about some of these old stories about the legend of Matt Kroc?

Janae Kroc:

It's interesting because the thing is at the time, that's how I was perceived, right? I was perceived as this uber alpha male and the reality of it is that is a part of who I am, I mean my personality. I mean, I'm hyper competitive. The funny thing is even being trans that environment, I was always very comfortable there and I did well in those scenarios, but I still had all the gender issues. And even that article came out, obviously I was well aware of being trans at that point and I was already out to a lot of people. And by 2010, I was already out to pretty much my entire family. I was out to Dave Tate and Jim Wendler elite and most of the athletes I competed with.

John Berardi:

By the way, Dave Tate and Jim Wendler were running Elite FTS, one of the biggest strength training and power lifting equipment companies in the world. And Janae back then Matt was sponsored by them. Janae tells me that Dave and Jim used to get a kick out of these articles, the ones hyper-masculine icing their friend who was in the middle of a gender transition.

Janae Kroc:

So, it was known in the elite circles, I was very open about it as open as I felt I could be without completely outing myself. And the only reason for the people that aren't familiar with why I kind of stayed closeted is because of my three sons. We were worried about how that might affect them with their peers, their coaches or teachers at school. And I just didn't want them to have to deal with all that backlash. And other than, of course there was some concern about how are some of my sponsors going to react? How is the fan base going to react? But that wasn't as important to me as my sons were. And so that's why I was out to my friends and family and a lot of other competitors, but not 100% out.

John Berardi:

Now when listening Janae's story, one would be tempted to feel like there's some sort of irony between the very "masculine" stories being told about her and the very feminine aspects of her core identity.

Janae Kroc:

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I guess the interesting part though is that, that is part of who I am, even though my identity was always female. I do have very masculine aspects to my personality and still do in that environment. Even like being in the Marines, by growing up in sports year-round and all those things, those were always welcoming places for me in places I felt very comfortable. It's an interesting dynamics. So, all the different aspects of my personality and how that out, I was able to exist in that world and thrive there, but it was also very difficult for me knowing all of this and then hiding a big part of who I am. And it got to be a really big burden there towards the end. And then I got out in 2015.

John Berardi:

That's when someone posted a YouTube video showing Janae dressed as a woman, when most of the public knew her as Matt and it went viral, leading to her being dropped from a few sponsorships. It also led to a tremendous amount of vitriol and hate.

Janae Kroc:

I've been threatened online a number of times, there was a hashtag going around for a while, supposedly marking LGBT people for murder. And I had those hashtags appear on some of my social media stuff. People hash tagging my posts with it, then I had people threatened to kill me, harassing me in DMS and stuff like that and threatening to kill me and stuff like that.

John Berardi:

Just so you know, this is pretty common for openly trans people, we'll talk more about this in a few minutes. For now, it's important to realize that this is just one of the many trade-offs trans people know they'll have to make to live openly in a way that's consistent with who they are and how they want to live. And if they manage to avoid violence to stay alive, sometimes this dark cloud does have a silver lining, at least there was one for Janae.

Janae Kroc:

Initially it was a lot of turmoil and kind of turned my life upside down, but it was also, it took a big weight off my shoulders too. And finally being able to come forward and be out about everything it was really nice.

John Berardi:

Knowing the backstory here, I got to wondering prior to transitioning, was Matt Kroc, more of a man than me because, "Trying to be manly," was Janae's first attempt at dealing with a persistent, uncomfortable, non-conforming gender identity.

Janae Kroc:

The funny thing is it actually took me a long time to figure that out. I'm glad you brought all that up because that was the initially that was the thought. For being trans and to get hormone therapy and to have surgery and stuff, we have to get approval from psychologists. You can't just go out and say, oh, hey, I want hormones. At least not if you're going to purchase them legally or get them through a doctor. So, I had to start seeing a therapist to get access to hormones. And then that was the theory that was initially proposed. Oh, the reason why you joined the Marines, the reason why you're involved in all this uber alpha male type stuff is fighting against who you really are.

John Berardi:

But I get the sense that Janae feels this is a bit of an oversimplification based on the gender binary.

Janae Kroc:



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It kind of sounds plausible. And so, at first I kind of bought into that and I bought into this idea that, okay, if I'm going to transition, I need to be the kind of girl that social media and society pushes on us, stereotypically feminine, smaller, less muscular, all of these things. I had originally planned on dropping 150 pounds and doing all these things. And I just kind of accepted that I was doing all these things to compensate. Yeah. Fighting against, pushing this other envelope in order to hide who I really was.

John Berardi:

So, she figured she might as well go all the way girl.

Janae Kroc:

So, I dropped 72 pounds and yeah, there's certain things I like about it, but I'm really frustrated with all the strength I'm losing, all the muscle I'm losing. I've worked so hard for all these gains and then after getting on female hormones, watching my hips literally plummet like hundreds of pounds. I mean, it was just ridiculous. I could not believe how fast I was losing strength. There were certain aspects like it's nice, I'm down this many pounds, I'm wearing this now, I look more stereotypically feminine in certain ways, but I was feeling lots of frustration with all the loss performance. So, I was like wait a minute, what's going on here? If I'm a woman and this is how I identify, why isn't this making me feel better? So, then there was this back and forth, I started and stopped transition between how... I kind of think when that very first time I started hormones, I went back and forth like probably eight, 10 times or something over like the best.

John Berardi:

So, meaning that you started hormones and then stopped or you...?

Janae Kroc:

Yes, I started stopped and stopped. It would lose weight, gain weight, lose weight, gain weight. And what actually helped me a ton was after I came out, I started getting closer to a lot of the women in the strength training world. And I had known a lot of them from competing in the same competitions, but I wasn't really close to any of them. But then after I was out, I got to be real close and had a lot of good conversations with a lot of different girls. And it was like light bulbs, it was like, oh my God, they feel exactly the same way I do. There was this struggle between wanting to be bigger, wanting to be stronger, wanting to increase their performance and all of this pressure from society, from your friends, from all the people around you, oh, don't get too big. Oh, you look manly. Oh, that's not ladylike.

Janae Kroc:

And so, there's all these other pressures going against what you're passionate about and what you really enjoy. But finally talking with them, it was like, oh my God, now everything makes total sense. Yeah. I have a female gender identity, but I'm just someone who's also passionate about strength and strength training, the same way these girls were, certainly yeah.

John Berardi:

So, they weren't necessarily struggling with gender issues, they were struggling with society's forced expectations around femininity and appropriate pursuits for women and...

Janae Kroc:

Exactly. Mm-hmm (affirmative). So that really helped me come to terms with everything on my own. And beyond that, I just realized too I don't fit neatly in one box.

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John Berardi:

When I spoke with Alaina, her experiences were a bit different.

Alaina Hardie:

So, I'll talk about me as a trans person and my kind of trans people. So, there's a concept called dysmorphia, which is an internal mismatch in your mind with your body and people have that in all sorts of different ways. I think most people probably have it to some degree, the way they perceive their body is not the way their body is or vice versa.

John Berardi:

This is well-described in the literature actually. You're a thin woman for example, but you can't see yourself as anything other than too large or over fat. You're a muscular man for example, but you can't see yourself as anything other than thin and weak.

Alaina Hardie:

Imagine moving through life with this intense sense of dysmorphia all the time, you can never get away from it because you can't leave your body. Right. You're there. So, you develop a disconnect as a survival mechanism. It's not one of those things where you can just tell people, you should learn to love your body because that's like stop being depressed. This doesn't work like that. I think one of the things is understanding that there's all of this standard body angst that people have plus this extra layer of body angst. I transitioned long ago, but I had my final surgery 10 years after that, which was still whatever, 20 years ago. I did not realize, I was just telling my partner this a couple of weeks ago, I had this surgery, the final surgery and I woke up and my anxiety was gone.

Alaina Hardie:

And if you had asked me before surgery if I had anxiety, I would have said, no. There was this baseline of anxiety that had existed since I was a child that 100% disappeared with this surgery. I bring this up specifically to say, this is a real thing. The way people feel about their bodies is a real thing. So that's one of the things I would say, the anxiety thing is another thing, there's this constant, like you're in a bad relationship for example, or you hate your job and everything else in your life is going to suffer because of that baseline of anxiety or discomfort or displeasure or depression or whatever. Once you remove yourself from that job or from the bad relationship, suddenly things open up to you.

John Berardi:

To be honest, I'm not sure I can imagine the gender dysmorphia that Alaina is describing. Most people probably can't, but I can imagine what it's like to be in a destructive relationship. And when a friend or family member is experiencing that or a terrible work environment or suffering existential angst, because I've experienced all three, my instinct is compassion. Yours probably is too, yet do we both show up that way when hearing stories like Alaina's or Janae's? When meeting people who don't conform to typical gender roles or presentations and if not, I've been wondering how can we do better? We'll talk more about that after the break.

John Berardi:

Okay. We're going to take a little break here so I can talk about one of our sponsors, Precision Nutrition, the world's largest nutrition, education, coaching and software company. And I wanted to start by telling you that Precision Nutrition is kind of different, that's because their programs uniquely address the needs of individuals across the sex and gender spectrum, as well as the age spectrum, ability spectrum and more. Their core philosophy is centered around something they call deep health. This is the idea that one can't truly be "healthy," unless all dimensions of health are in sync. So, it's not just about how we eat or move although those are important. It's about a multi-dimensional thriving of

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the whole person in the context of their whole life. If it sounds deep, well, that's the point and it's what's made them the biggest nutrition coaching education and software company in the world.

John Berardi:

So, if you'd like to learn more about Precision Nutrition's renowned coaching program for clients or Precision Nutrition's number one rated nutrition certification program for fitness, wellness and health care professionals, please visit [www.precisionnutrition.com/jb](http://www.precisionnutrition.com/jb) my initials, where you can check out PN's programs and because you're a listener get early access and a nice discount. Again, that's [www.precisionnutrition.com/jb](http://www.precisionnutrition.com/jb).

John Berardi:

All right. Back to the show. One thing we've sort of glossed over so far is that it's hard to be a gender nonconforming person in 2021. Of course, we did talk about some of the hate and harassment that Janae got when being outed in 2015, but for someone trans it's ongoing.

Janae Kroc:

All my IDs have been changed over to a female. And but yeah, that's always a concern, right? It's for me, anytime I travel, I try to make sure I'm as, "passable" as I can be just so I don't get to hassle the security, just so I don't get hassled if I have to use the bathroom at the airport, which I pretty much always have to. And there's a lot of trans people who part of their daily strategy just for living life is to use the restroom right before they leave home, plan their stops, plan their time so they don't have to use the restroom just so they won't have to be either harassed or assaulted. It's this stuff that most people never have to think about, but being afraid to even use a restroom because you'll be assaulted.

John Berardi:

The word that Janae uses here, passing, it's a loaded word. It's a term of convenience, but no one seems to like it. It's used to mean that when she's out in public, she can "pass" for female, that her appearance looks conventionally female enough to not warrant a second glance. She hates the word though.

Janae Kroc:

Passing is used as a term to mean that you can blend in, that if I'm out on the street someone would see me same as a cis female, wouldn't know that I'm trans.

John Berardi:

Now in case you're not familiar, the term cis that Janae uses here is the opposite of trans. These terms come from Latin, where cis means, "On this side." And trans means, "On the other side." In other words, if your biological sex and gender are on the same side, you're cis, if your sex and gender are on opposite sides, you're trans, but back to passing.

Janae Kroc:

And I hate that for a couple of reasons. One, because that reinforces the idea that in order to be a woman, everyone has to look the same, be the same. And we have to fit this stereotypically feminine ideal, I mean which is not only harmful for trans women, but also very harmful for a lot of women. If you're not someone who looks that way, but then also this idea of passing, because what's the opposite of passing? Failing. So, if you don't pass, that means you're failing at being a woman. Obviously that brings up a lot of other issues.

John Berardi:

So, say you're a non-passing trans person, woman or man.

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Janae Kroc:

You can be subject to violence on a daily basis, it can be a very dangerous world. And then on top of that, the things that I really hope to be able to help with are like parents abandoning their children, kicking them out of their homes, throwing them into the streets and saying, "Don't come back until you're not trans anymore." As if you could just snap your fingers and change that. I'm just hoping that every time I do a show like yours or every time I'm into anything that's in the media, that even if there's just one mind that changes because of that, then it's all worth it.

John Berardi:

The most dangerous places for trans people are in Central and South America nowadays though in North America, the number of trans people murdered is on the rise.

Janae Kroc:

Yeah. I do think being big and muscular still has offered me a lot of safety. I did have one incident where I had five guys follow me into a parking garage a few years back late at night after leaving a club, I was alone that night. The scary part was I had no idea they were even there until I got to my car and I literally had stepped inside and just shut my door. And there was a guy right in my window. I'm sure he could have grabbed me before I hopped in if he'd wanted to. And then there was four other guys right behind him. Anybody who's been in the circles like have been in fights or I mean, I grew up in poor rural area in and grew up getting into fist fights and stuff at school and it was a totally normal thing.

Janae Kroc:

And I know that how people look at you when they're looking for trouble. And these guys were definitely looking for trouble and I just quickly locked my doors and pulled out and they just kind of all stared me down as I pulled away but they never said anything. The crazy part was, I didn't know where they came from. I didn't see them, I didn't know where they followed me in from. I had no idea they were even there. And that was the first time in my life I ever realized like, oh my gosh, I'm a target now too.

John Berardi:

So, she's always on the lookout.

Janae Kroc:

Even in the back of my mind, there's always that little bit of I try to be aware of my surroundings, kind of read the crowd and just pay attention to if anybody's acting weird or sketchy or something seems off because you never know, there could be that person out there that is looking to harm you.

John Berardi:

And for trans people just living their lives, there's always this specter of discrimination, trans people are likelier to live below the poverty line and face unemployment and homelessness. They face discrimination in health care too including refusal of care and mistreatment. Bills have been passed to make it harder for trans people to have equal access to resources, serve in the military and more. It's no wonder the trans community suffers higher than average rates of clinical depression, anxiety self-harming behavior, substance abuse and suicide. Think of it this way, if everywhere you turned it was made crystal clear that your kind don't belong here, you might experience some of the same things too.

John Berardi:

I come from the health and fitness industry. So, I often look there for examples that then can be applied more broadly. So, I asked Alaina how some of the discrimination we just talked about might show up in that space. So, I imagine a

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scenario where you go to a gym, let's say for the first time and you're asked to fill out a form that doesn't recognize your sex or gender identity. Right. So, you're like, oh, okay, got to check male or female here. Then you got to go to the bathroom or get changed and there's nowhere for you to comfortably go. And then you go to meet your coach after you navigate this or just don't go to the bathroom. They don't really understand your experiences and icing on the cake, they use gender terminology, that's a mismatch.

Alaina Hardie:

Yeah. And I would say, I mean, I appreciate you pointing this out because I have what's referred to as passing privilege, which is that you wouldn't know that I was trans unless I told you. All of these things like checking female on a form, even before I formally transitioned was not a big deal for me. I almost never got mis-gendered, that's just not a thing that happened to me. So, I appreciate you pointing that out because that is 100% something that people experience. It's just so far out of my recent experience that I forgot all about it.

John Berardi:

Let's say someone out there is listening and they're just like, hey, I want to do a better job to create a more sex and gender inclusive environment or friendly language or just be a more sensitive and decent person. What is sort of next for them? What are some things they can do?

Alaina Hardie:

Well, trust that when people tell you something about themselves, that it's true. If they tell you something about their identity or who they are or how they want to be called, if someone shows up and their name says Reginald and they're like, please call me Reggie. You're not going to say, well, I'm sorry you wrote down Reginald, I'm just going to call you Reginald. Why would you do that with trans people? It's the same thing. Think about, letting people define their own experience. And then the other thing is, reality matters. The way that things really are matters. And that is what you should be using to make decisions.

John Berardi:

Here she means, the evidence, the kind of information we're trying to explore in this series.

Alaina Hardie:

Everybody has an emotional context that's wrapped around this understanding. It's a product of your experience. It's a product of your current mental state, how much you've slept, how much you've eaten, what your relationships are like, all of these things affect how you perceive things. But the way that things are matter, what is the evidence? Maybe the evidence is, I don't know. And we have to be okay with, I don't know, none of the second half of that was about trans people. It was about looking at the world and I think that's really important.

John Berardi:

I also spoke with Dr. Krista about why it might be important for coaches to give some thought to these issues because I've actually heard people say, I don't know any trans people. I don't plan on working with trans people. So, this isn't really for me.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

Well, I mean, if we just think about straight up numbers, the number of people in the world who would identify as any of these categories that we're talking about is increasing as more people feel comfortable to come out and be honest about who they are and what they're experiencing and how they want to live their lives. As a coach, even if you're

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coaching who you think is the squarest, most boring banal, normative population, if you coach long enough, you're very likely going to find a client or have a client that somehow falls into these groups that we're describing, it's just going to be a thing.

John Berardi:

What about as an environment? Let's say you run a gym or some kind of coaching environment, nutrition coaching center, whatever, what are the environmental things?

Krista Scott-Dixon:

Yeah, that's a great question. And I think we don't often consider the issue of space and how people experience space and how that might affect people's perceptions of things. Examples of what can make all kinds of clients feel more welcome are things like, are there places where someone can go and change by themselves? This isn't just for trans clients. This can be for clients who maybe are a little bit more shy or people of certain religious faiths who have some kind of prohibition against getting naked in front of other people, right? In a locker room or something like that. Are there individual shower stalls? Can people have a level of privacy for whatever reason that feels appropriate to them? That's one really fairly easy piece. Are there little individual changing styles or are people forced to kind of differentiate themselves and then expose themselves publicly? Or are there places that they can go to discreetly do whatever they need to do with some level of dignity?

John Berardi:

Next, Dr. Krista talked about how in general things are getting a lot better.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

The older generation really suffered under these limitations and the pressure and the fear. I mean, there were very real risks to people, but now, I mean, my niece is six and her teachers are already high-fiving her and like good for you. We're going to support your individual unique expression.

John Berardi:

In our interview, Dr. Krista talked about how her niece generally shies away from typical little girl stuff and instead leans toward little boy stuff.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

What a massive change. And the other thing that's happening with younger people is they're really exploding the range of identities that you can have which I think is awesome. I mean, I'm very much like let a thousand flowers bloom on this one. I would never aim to go back to circle back to our earlier conversations, why only have three categories? Even three is constraining.

John Berardi:

But aside from social acceptance, she also talks about systems and the structures using disabilities as an analogy.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

My mind goes to what people might call a critical disability analysis, which is that there are a wide range of disabilities that people can have. And in many cases it's not so much the physical incapacitation that's there or the intellectual incapacitation or disability or limitation or the whatever the degree of it is. It's the lack of accommodation, culturally and socially. And so for example, think of Paralympic athletes, right? Some of the spectacular things like wheelchair

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basketball blows my mind. That didn't exist 50 years ago, right? But we always had people with disabilities, especially active young people who might've been coming back from a war, who might've had some kind of injury or accident. So 50 years ago or more, let's say you would have people coming back from various wars who might've still been young. Might've been young guys still present in lots of ways, but maybe because they're missing a body part, society was like, well, sorry, I'm dusting off my hands here on the gesture like, you're all done, sorry about your luck buddy.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

But now it's like, hey, listen, there's a whole world that awaits you. And now we have this category of adaptive athletics, Paralympic sport, all of a sudden people with different bodies have all kinds of opportunities to do awesome shit that they never had before, so that's a... It forces us to radically reconsider. Now the injury might be the same, right? You might still be an amputee, right. But it forces us to really think what's possible. And so in many respects, what limits a person is not so much any intrinsic factor that they have within themselves, but it is the opportunities that they have available to them or the structures, the social infrastructure that's there to support them.

John Berardi:

So it really this is sort of an analogy for how acceptance happens. In other words, for society at large to become more accommodating of, let's say, trans individuals, this isn't about individual people being nicer. It's probably about broader accommodations.

Krista Scott-Dixon:

Yes. And systemic changes. And with the black lives matter and I don't want to draw false analogies here. I want to be really careful. I'm not saying these disabilities is exactly the same thing as trans issues is exactly. No, we want to be super careful about not saying that, but I think what a lot of these conversations around systemic racism, indigenous rights, land rights, essential workers in the face of the pandemic, so many of these conversations that have been occurring in 2020 have revealed that what we're describing here is systemic and it's structural. And it's the things that make up our everyday life and even things like I look out my window and there's a sidewalk. Are there little curb cuts in the sidewalk to allow wheels to go over them? When you're crossing the street, the sidewalk kind of dips down, so you can push a stroller, you can push a wheelchair, you can push a shopping cart, right?

Krista Scott-Dixon:

That's a little thing, but that's an example of these little structural things that make huge differences. So I mean, of course, individual people being nicer to each other is always a good goal. But what we're really describing is I fundamentally conceptualize this as a human rights issue. And am I as part of a society enabling other people to live and thrive with dignity and to express their fullest potential. And if there are systematic instructional blocks of that, what are they and how can we clear them?

John Berardi:

And that probably doesn't happen until people are educated.

Janae Kroc:

I want to be able to educate people that don't understand and I want to be able to hopefully inspire or at least offer a story to people that can relate to and for people that are like me. So it's really those two things.

John Berardi:



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If someone's never met a trans person before Janae is willing to be the first, she does a ton of this kind of outreach and was even the subject of an award-winning documentary, *Transformer*, all about her transition and how it played out in her personal and family life, as well as her role in the powerlifting community.

Janae Kroc:

I mean, as cliché as this kind of sounds or maybe a little Pollyanna, but I just want to help make the world a better place for trans people.

John Berardi:

I asked why she does it, put herself out there, subject herself to ridicule and hate.

Janae Kroc:

I think the biggest positive out of all of this was being able to reach other people. And when I get messages or emails from people telling me that I helped them come to terms with who they are and try to say something, so I'm getting emotional, but having people tell you that they didn't commit suicide or a father reaching out and tell you they didn't disown their child because of hearing your story. It's just like, when you hear things like that, how can you not be open about everything? How can you not want to bring visibility and want to help educate people? It's just, when you realize that impact you're having and things like that have been amazing. And I feel fortunate to be in a position where my story can help other people.

John Berardi:

This is where I'd like to end this series. Nowadays, we hear a lot about gender pronouns, whether to use he or she or they, we hear a lot about whether trans women should be allowed to compete against cis women in sport. We hear a lot about gender reassignment surgeries, puberty blockers. And from my perspective, it's simply too difficult to have a good opinion or even an intelligent conversation about any of these things without some fundamental knowledge of the basics of sex and gender. It's hard also to have a good opinion or intelligent conversation without a hearing from different people, fellow humans, across the sex and gender spectrum. So again, that was my goal here, to upgrade my own knowledge and to pass on what I learned to you. Hopefully after learning these things together and hearing these stories, we'll both be more equipped to have better opinions and better conversations for the benefit of everyone, including ourselves and the people we care most about.

John Berardi:

Before we end, I want to make sure you don't miss out on something. Editing this show was sad for me because I did in-depth interviews with each of the guests. Most of them lasting 90 minutes or more and we had to whittle them down, which means a lot of insights were left on the cutting room floor. However, we're making those full interviews available right now for you totally free at the Dr. John Berardi Show website. These interviews really are treasure troves of information and to access them as well as the transcript of this main episode, just pop over to [www.doctorjohnberardishow.com](http://www.doctorjohnberardishow.com). Also, one more thing, if you like what we're doing with the show, please consider reviewing it on Apple podcasts, clicking that little subscribe button on Apple or Google or wherever you listen to us also makes a difference. So reviewing and subscribing, it helps a lot. Thanks for considering.

Before signing off, I'd like to thank our production team, Marjorie Korn and my research partner and co-writer on the show, Martin DeSouza our producer, Dylan Groff who edited and sound designed this episode. And thanks to you for listening.