

## **Transgender Inclusion in Congregations**

Transforming Hearts Collective

TRANSCRIPT: Session 2: Gender and Our Faith Community

Welcome back, everyone, to Transgender Inclusion in Congregations.

Hey, guys! We're excited to welcome you to Session 2, which is going to be all about gender and our faith communities.

Again, I'm Alex Kapitan.  
And I'm Mykal Slack.

- Woohoo!  
- Woohoo!

And we have, again, an opening reading for you and a chalice lighting. And I'm going to do it this time. It's an excerpt from *The Last Generation*, which is a book by Cherríe Moraga.

Cherríe Moraga says, "The earth is female, whether myth, metaphor, or memory. She is called 'Mother' by all peoples of all times, Madre Tierra. Like woman, Madre Tierra has been raped, exploited for her resources, rendered inert, passive, and speechless. Her cries--manifested in earthquakes, tidal waves, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions--are not heeded.

But the Indians take note, and so do the women, the women with the capacity to remember. Native religions have traditionally honored the female alongside the male. Religions that grow exclusively from the patriarchal capitalist imagination, instead of the requirements of nature, enslave the female body.

The only religion we need is one based on the good sense of living in harmony with nature. Religion should serve as a justification against greed, not for it. Bring back the rain gods, corn gods, Father Sun and Mother Moon, and keep those gods happy. Whether we recognize it or not, those gods are, today, this day, punishing us for our excess. What humankind has destroyed will wreak havoc on the destroyer. Fried skin from holes in the ozone is only one example.

The earth is female. It is no accident then that the main grassroots activists defending the earth, along with Native peoples, are women of all races and cultures. Regardless of the so-called 'advances' of Western 'civilization,' women remain the chief caretakers, nurturers, and providers for our children and our elders.

These are the mothers of East Los Angeles, McFarland and Kettleman City, fighting toxic dumps, local incinerators, and pesticide poisoning-- women who experience the earth's contamination in the deformation and death occurring within their very wombs. We do not have to be mothers to know this.

Most women know what it is to be seen as the earth is seen-- a receptacle for male violence and greed. Over half the agricultural workers in the world are women who receive less training and less protection than their male counterparts. We do not control how we produce and reproduce, how we labor and love.

And how will our lands be free if our bodies aren't? Land remains the common ground for all radical action, but land is more than the rocks and trees, the animal and plant life that make up the territory of Aztlán or Navaho Nation or Maya Mesoamerica. For immigrant and native alike, land is also the factories where we work, the water our children drink, and the housing project where we live.

For women, lesbians, and gay men, land is a physical mass called our bodies. Throughout las Américas, all these 'lands' remain under occupation by an anglocentric, patriarchal, imperialist United States."

Thank you, Alex. Thank you so much. That was really powerful and meaningful, especially right now, it seems. And thank you for lighting our chalice.

So, welcome back, everybody. We really hope that the first session was a meaningful beginning to our time together, and an opportunity to open up to the fullness of trans inclusion in our congregations, in your congregations. We also hope that the resources added depth to what we shared in the last video, and that you've had some time to chat about it.

And just a reminder, if you have questions please don't hesitate to write them in the Comments section of our session page so that way we're able to respond to any questions or comments that you might have along the way.

Just to go over what we went over last week, to remind you of our grounding in this course, last session we talked about what is Beloved Community and we talked about welcome as a spiritual practice. And we even introduced a particular practice that can help practice Beloved Community, which is Compassionate Communication.

So we wanted to just remind everyone that the most important thing is to maintain your sense of openness and open-heartedness, alignment toward trying to practice Beloved Community and remembering what Beloved Community means to us as people of faith. So we invite you to continue doing that today.

Yep. Thank you.

So, let's get into it! We wanted to begin by talking, and spending some time talking about gender roles and patriarchy. So the first question would understandably be, well, what exactly are gender roles? Well, gender roles are a set of societal norms dictating behaviors that are generally thought of as acceptable and appropriate for people based on their actual or perceived sex.

So, for example (I'll give a couple), if you are assigned male at birth, people are going to buy you blue things and expect you not to like pinks or other pastels. Or folks might steer you towards certain career paths and not others. Folks might have expectations around how you will or won't express yourself emotionally and physically. And folks might presume that you, if you were assigned male at birth, might presume that you're attracted to women.

Another example, it's very similar, if you're assigned female at birth people might go out and buy you lots of pink things. And I have a 6-month-old child where that certainly has been the case, (laughter) even when requested not to do that. If you're assigned female at birth you might get steered towards certain career paths or not other career paths, very intentionally. There might be an expectation that you'll be emotionally and physically available to folks in particular ways. There might be an expectation that you want to become a mother, and there would be presumptions that you're attracted to men.

So these gender roles have particular meaning, deep meaning, in the world, and so much so that often folks don't even think about it-- it's just presumed that that's the way it is and should forever be.

Right, absolutely. And, as probably everybody taking this class and watching this video knows, or has experienced, gender roles aren't just roles. The word "roles" can lead you to think that these aren't rules, but they are. The way that gender roles get played out in society and in our lives is very much that they become rules about what is acceptable behavior for us based on the perception of our gender, basically.

We know that they are rules because there are consequences to breaking them. So if you don't follow the roles or rules, that's not seen neutrally in the eyes of our culture. An example of how these roles become rules can be seen in things like toy departments in stores and the fact that there's a pink aisle and a blue aisle.

And not only are things color-coded but if you're in the blue aisle you're going to find things like trucks and construction materials and bugs and rocketships, and all kinds of things designed for adventure and getting out there and being independent. And if you're in the pink aisle you're going to find all kinds of things like dolls and glitter and ruffles and baking, things that are designed toward nurturing or collaboration with other girls, and things like that.

And staying at home.

And staying at home, exactly. Absolutely.

So that's an example of how a role becomes a rule. Another really good example is how people are tracked into sports or not. Boys are expected to play contact sports and be individually competitive. Girls are dissuaded from playing sports, and obviously not that long ago literally could not play sports in schools--that was not allowed. There were no opportunities for playing sports.

And all that comes with that in terms of girls not only being dissuaded from sports but also being dissuaded from competition itself, from contact, things like this. So you just keep going on through life.

And another really great example of the way that a role becomes a rule is when you're in a particular career and the expectation is that there are only people of a certain gender in that career. And that then ends up being codified in ways that people don't even think about, such as being on a construction site and having only men's bathrooms-- just a thing that happens when we have an expectation that only men are going to be in that profession.

So these are the ways in which we experience the messages around gender roles and the expectations around gender roles. And, obviously, breaking these rules can lead to all different kinds of consequences depending on how egregiously you've broken the rule and who you are.

If you're a boy who wants to take dance instead of play football, there are consequences for that. If you're a girl who is assertive and competitive rather than being quiet, there are consequences for that.

And so everybody listening, everybody who's taking this class I'm sure can think of ways in which that has been true in your life, of the consequences that you've experienced or how you learned that something was a rule. We don't spend a lot of time thinking about gender roles and why they exist, we just know that they're present, and they show up in all sorts of ways in our lives as Alex pointed out. But I think it's important to understand why they exist as we begin to work to problematize and unravel these systems that we exist in.

So let's think about that for a minute. Why do gender roles exist? Gender rules. I think they exist for really two main reasons, and we could get into this a little more if we wanted to. But one of the reasons is it's a method of organizing and valuing bodies and behaviors. There's a way in which we feel like we need to understand, as people, who people are and why people do the things that people do and understand how we're supposed to categorize-- We categorize our lives in all kinds of ways, and so gender roles/rules are a way of organizing and valuing bodies and behaviors.

Another reason why these gender roles exist is it's a model that was meant to establish a foundational truth that was supposed to help uphold a system of power that really keeps women subordinate to men. This system exists. Folks needed to have a reason why it was okay for men to go out into the world and make money. And so obviously we need to establish some roles for women, to keep women at home.

In addition to these organizing principles, organizing and valuing bodies and behaviors, and also thinking about this truth that a gender binary system is the system that should exist for all of us, ultimately what it also does is suggest that folks who don't exist within either of those genders ultimately have to choose one. And so it also has a silencing and an erasure, an erasing mechanism within it as well, that you have to fit into this system in order to have legitimacy in all sorts of areas of our lives.

And so it's important to think about why those roles exist as we begin to reflect about our own lives and also the ways in which these roles impact what happens in our communities.

Alex, do you have anything to add to that?

I would just say that one of the things that can be difficult is the fact that, for some folks, gender roles and dominant gender roles feel comfortable, and there's nothing wrong with that. If you are a woman, and you are more comfortable in a nurturing role, in being a follower more than a leader, if you like pink... There's absolutely nothing wrong with any of this.

What becomes problematic, like you were just saying, Mykal, is when these sorts of rules become a way of keeping power consolidated in the hands of men and keeping women subservient to men within that system. When we are all sort of forced to uphold certain rules and roles, that's when it becomes a problem.

And for some of us that's going to be less difficult than for others if those things feel comfortable, which is great. I don't think that what we're trying to argue here is that everyone should feel uncomfortable with these roles and rules that we've inherited and been taught. But the point is that there's so much more out there and that these roles and rules are, in fact, manufactured, that they are contrived for a particular purpose, several purposes, as Mykal just laid out.

And that takes us to the next piece of this, which is what is the basis, what is the truth involved in this system, in these rules? Is there any real biological basis for gender roles? Like this common assumption that boys are naturally more rambunctious than girls and girls are naturally more nurturing and mothering than boys.

And the answer is no. The answer is that is part of this enormous lie that we have been taught, is that there is a real biological basis, that sure, there's a range, and sure, some girls are tomboys and some boys are more effeminate than others, but really, at base-- boys like trucks, girls like dolls, boys like to fight and be independent and girls like to hang on their mother's skirts-- all of these things that we've been taught have something to do with biology, in some way.

And there's some really fascinating research that's been coming out in the last five or ten years that has completely debunked this-- absolutely, unequivocally debunked this idea that biology has a role to play in gender roles that we've been taught. And it is actually kind of terrifying when you start reading some of this research and you realize that previous research that has been done was specifically done in a way that was designed to uphold the biases of the researchers.

So this idea that people have tried to prove, in the past, that women are more nurturing and men are more aggressive, and so they do their research in such a way that will actually create the result that they're looking for. And the research that's coming out now is trying

not to do that, is actually aware of these biases in research design and is creating amazing results in terms of being able to really track back how our environment, and how the way we treat infants and people of all ages, leads to the sorts of things that we're expecting to see.

How male babies are very, very subtly encouraged when they are more active and when they are more vocal, and how female babies are very, very subtly, unconsciously encouraged when they're quiet, when they're pretty, and meek, and all the rest of these things. It may seem really out there if you have believed, as I did for many years, that there must be at least some biological basis to all of this. But it's true, there really isn't any.

And, again, that isn't to say that there aren't really rambunctious boys who are sort of ingrained to be super rambunctious. But for every really rambunctious boy there is a really rambunctious girl as well, and that rambunctious girl has probably been taught not to be rambunctious. So it's not that there aren't this amazing array of behaviors that people actually do exhibit in a way that feels ingrained, but how those patterns show up, in terms of gender, has everything to do with what we're taught and what these rules are.

So we will include more resources and more ways to dig into this deeper on our full bibliography at the end of the course, because I know that there's some really good stuff out there that I'd love to show you. But we wanted to just briefly touch on that and the fact that we have been sold a very large package deal when it comes to gender roles, and most of what we've been sold is a lie.

Right. And I think it's really important as we delve really deeply into this work to not only understand the systems that are in place, why they exist in the ways in which they do, but also to understand ourselves in it, the role that gender rules play in our own lives.

These are not often conversations that we have because the gender binary is so embedded in everything that we do. But it's important to actually have those conversations, to think about ourselves for a minute and to think about how gender has shown up, how we show up in our understanding of gender, and the impact that these gender rules have had in our own growing up and just existing in the world.

So what we want to do is invite everyone to have some time of personal reflection, and community reflection, if you're watching the video with your team. So we want to spend about ten minutes answering the following questions: "When did you realize that you had a gender, that you had a gender that there are particular roles/rules that were expected of you?" is the first question.

And the second question: "When did you realize that gender was going to have a particular impact on your life, and what does that impact look like?"

So we're going to ask you to pause the video and to really invest in this time of reflection, because I think it really matters if we're doing this work of understanding trans inclusion. It also is a broader question about understanding the impact of gender in all of our lives.

Alright! Now that we've had a chance to reflect on that a little bit, we wanted to move into the second part of this session, Session 2, which is talking specifically about how patriarchy and gender rules and roles have played out in faith communities, and specifically in Unitarian Universalism, but faith communities in general.

And, again, if you are not a Unitarian Universalist that's totally cool. This next section is going to talk a little bit about Unitarian Universalism in particular, but the questions and the discussion that we are bringing up is definitely applicable to every faith tradition. So please just use that as an opportunity to reflect on your own faith if you're not a Unitarian Universalist.

So the first thing that we wanted to chat about in terms of this question about patriarchy and faith goes way back to the roots of Christianity becoming one of the major religions of the world. And we're looking specifically at Christianity because of the fact that Unitarian Universalism has its roots there, and also in terms of the role that Christianity has played or that the leaders within Christianity have played in furthering patriarchy in many parts of the world.

So, first of all, a big piece of history to keep in mind is that, way back before Christianity was a dominant religion of the world, there were lots of different ways in which people practiced earth founded and grounded traditions and matriarchal matrilineal spiritual traditions in many parts of Europe and elsewhere, parts of the world that Christianity ended up touching, and that as Christianity, as men within the religion of Christianity started to try to expand the reach of that religion and their own power as leaders within that religion, that faith was used as a tool of violence against other religions, specifically against matriarchal and matrilineal religions.

So most folks in this country have heard of the Salem Witch Trials, and most folks in this country have not heard of the much more impactful and horrific burnings of women at the stake that happened in Europe, earlier than the ones that happened in Salem, Massachusetts. And there were thousands of women who were killed over the course of several hundred years because of things like practicing traditional medicine and traditional spiritual practice in traditions other than Christianity.

And this way of killing women and killing women leaders, in particular, in that part of our history of Christianity was very much a way of trying to destroy female leadership, and was very much a way of trying to consolidate power in the hands of Christian male leaders. And that's a really big piece of this whole puzzle, so we wanted to make sure that that was where we started.

And then the other big piece, biggest piece in my mind, of how patriarchy has been upheld by the powers that be within Christianity, historically, is really all religions that have used the Bible as a holy text, there has been an incredible trend of using that holy text as proof that women should be subservient to men and finding ways to use the Bible to prove that there is something about women that is innately inferior and really trying to base that in a

way that ends up being based in religion in ways that is-- There have been a lot of really great scholars who've talked about the different ways that you can interpret the Bible to not come to that conclusion, and that, like many things, uses selective reading of that holy text. But the impact of using that holy text in that way has been incredibly profound.

Again, as most people watching this have probably personally experienced or at least know of the ways in which women have been kept from having leadership positions in the Church and the ways in which gender rules and roles have been upheld by that way of viewing the Bible and the "right" relationship of women to God or men to God or the authorities of the Church.

So that's a lot of history that is a lot of baggage for pretty much all of us, I would say, who are trying to find ourselves in our faith traditions of today.

Right, yeah. Thank you for that, Alex. This has historically been true when it comes to any number of marginalized folks. The Bible was used to justify slavery for as long as slavery existed in these United States. Folks still refer to-- I have, in the last five years, heard folks refer to I think it's 1 Timothy, in the second chapter somewhere, about basically that God doesn't allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.

Folks are still using those texts to justify mistreatment, to justify discrimination. We could spend many many sessions talking about the ways in which sacred texts of all kinds, not just the Bible, but sacred texts of all kinds have been used to denigrate queer and trans folks. So there is a pattern. There's a pattern here.

And that pattern, however many folks do or don't still utilize these texts and utilize these understandings of their faith, has had deep, deep, deep impact. And I appreciate the fact, Alex, that you said it has had deep impact on all of us, because it really has, and in ways that we aren't even always able to point to. It has only been very, very recently that any of this has begun to shift.

There was a study done, it's called the Faith Communities Today National Survey, in 2010, and this was a survey of a pretty representative, multi-faith sample of 11,000 American congregations. And in that survey it found that 12% of all congregations in the U.S. had a woman in senior or sole leadership as an ordained person. If you google "first woman pastor," you'll find in the last 5-10 years that there's been the first woman pastor at a number of major congregations throughout the United States. And that's just in the last five years.

So clearly there's been impact. And I think it's important and worth noting that many of these studies and surveys that have been done are really only talking about people who identify as women or men in these surveys. No one's asking the question how many trans folks are ministers in congregations across the United States.

So it's important to understand the impact of this history on all of us, how we show up in faith communities, what the expectations are for people of different gender identities. It's



really important information to hold as we're thinking about what welcome looks like and as we're thinking about the impact of leadership of various kinds on that welcome.

Yep. The interesting thing about Unitarian Universalism is that we, as a religion, are very proud of not aligning with that particular trajectory that Mykal just shared, in terms of religion in general in this country, because of our historic stance on things like being involved in the suffrage movement, ordaining women ministers earlier than many other Protestant religions.

And actually the very first woman ordained in the United States was a Universalist, Olympia Brown-- 1863, she was ordained. But what can often happen when we try to focus on the firsts, like Mykal said, or the broad brushstrokes, is we lose the details of not just what the stats say, but what the real experiences are of folks on the ground.

So, for example, despite the fact that we ordained a woman minister in 1863-- and there were, I think, about 70 or so other women ministers who got ordained over the course of the next 30-40 years-- the experience of those women in the late 1800s was controversial and their professional status was "ambiguous," as some people have said, because they were called to only-- this is a quote from *Prophetic Sisterhood*, a fabulous book-- "They were called to only the smaller or shakier congregations that men would not take, and they were regarded by the denominational leadership as a blotch on their image and best kept on the organizational sidelines."

So that was the experience of those first women ministers. So we can be proud of that history, but we also have to really look at the fullness of that history and how that has showed up and continued to play out in the course of this particular denomination's history.

The other thing that's true is often we lose the middle, in terms of a lot of these narratives. So we have this narrative that's like, "Yeah, we were the first ones that ordained women, and now we have more than half of our ministers are women. Isn't that awesome?" But what we forget, often, or don't mention, is that when Unitarianism and Universalism first merged there were only 2% of our ministers who were women.

Two percent of our ministers were women in 1968, which was a couple years after the merger. In 1978, that number had increased to 6%, and then by 1988 it was 25%, thanks in large part to second-wave feminism. And also because of second-wave feminism a 1977 General Assembly resolution that specifically named this as a situation, as a need within our religion-- the need to actually pay more attention to women leadership and women's rights and experiences.

So now, today, like we mentioned, more than 60% of our ministers are women. So we feel like, "Great! We made it! We put a lot of work into it, and here we are, and isn't that great!" And yet, we still have never seen a female president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, despite the fact that in the last three presidential elections there has been a

woman on the ballot. So presumably that will change this June, because there are only women on the ballot for this next presidential election.

And is that what it takes? That's what a lot of people are asking. Is that what it takes to get a woman elected to the presidency of this denomination, to only put women on the ballot? Is that the only way that we can make this happen?

So the larger question in all of this is not just numbers, but, again, experiences and expectations, and how do these gender rules and these gender roles end up-- and this baggage and this history from our Protestant past around the expectations of women in the church-- how does all of that show up? And what are the expectations that are made in terms of how women ministers will behave and how women ministers will minister in comparison with men? And also what other leadership roles are available to women? Is there an expectation that women will be directors of religious education, will teach Sunday School, will teach religious education classes? How does that all show up?

And that's the larger question, is how do we keep ourselves from being able to make-- to really welcome the fullness of each and every person instead of having these expectations that we've been given around how people will act based on their gender and their perceived gender? And it gets down to the examples that Alex just gave. It gets to the heart of the matter.

Because the thing that has always been true about communities of faith, of any faith, is that we show up-- in our church or our fellowship or whatever name we choose to give that space-- we show up in those spaces carrying all the same stuff we've been carrying in every other aspect of our lives. So some of the same ideas about gender, many of those same gender rules play out in church in ways similar to how they play out in the workplace, at school, and maybe even at home. So folks show up having a particular understanding about how men are supposed to show up in those spaces and how women are supposed to show up in those spaces.

Ask yourselves for a moment-- and there are certainly exceptions-- but ask yourselves things like who makes up the facilities team in our congregation? Is it primarily men? It might be. That is often the case. Who heads up any hospitality team, or folks who show up to prepare meals or be in the kitchen to do certain things? Is it primarily women? It could be. That often is the case.

And, again, there are certainly exceptions. And it's important to pay attention and to be mindful of what folks come in expecting and understanding for themselves and to even be willing to push back on that a little bit and invite folks to reimagine what those gender roles are supposed to mean and whether or not they have to be what folks expect that they do in those settings.

And I really appreciated what you offered, Alex, around also thinking about how ministers are supposed to show up and what the expectations are around that. And, yeah, I think it will be really important as we're looking more deeply at moving beyond this binary system

of gender to understand how those roles show up as they are and how to shift culture around that,

- which we'll certainly be talking about.
- Absolutely. Right.

And that's sort of the whole point of doing this second session, the way that we've planned out this course. You may not have expected us to talk about gender roles and feminism and patriarchy in a course about transgender inclusion in congregations, but Mykal and I really feel like we have to start here. We have to start with how-- Before we can talk about how to unpack gender roles and the gender binary and make more space for trans folk and other people who really don't fit into any of the boxes that we've been taught, we also have to talk about the boxes first.

We have to talk about what have we been given to work with by this culture and how has that framework impacted all of us, not just trans people, because it does impact all of us. And how does it show up in our churches? Because that's what this course is really all about. So thanks for sticking with us, and really being willing to dive into this first, starting point for how to talk about gender more expansively in our congregations.

Speaking of which, we would love to invite you to take time for another reflection right here, and just spend some time for yourself reflecting on how gender roles show up in your congregation, if you have a congregation currently. Or, if you'd rather, you can think about how gender roles have shown up in faith communities that you've been a part of in the past.

But if you have a current congregation, please think about how do gender roles show up in your congregation? And try to get deeper into it than just numbers and who does what, but literally thinking about those sorts of deeper expectations for how women and men behave, or the work that we do, or the ways in which we show up for each other, that kind of thing, and how does that play out in your congregation.

So please pause the video here and take about 5 or 10 minutes to reflect on that. Thanks.

Welcome back, everybody. So as we're winding down this session we want to talk a little bit about a faith grounding, grounding ourselves in our faith when we understand that we are called to dismantle patriarchy. What does that look like and mean? Why does our faith have anything to do with dismantling patriarchy?

Well, it's important that we go there, because we have to understand the impact that gender has on how our leadership is developed and understood. We have to understand how we participate, however unwittingly, in systems of oppression. These systems have been bearing down on us in all sorts of places and in all sorts of ways for a long, long, long, long time.

And so we can't say to ourselves, "Well, we're not being impacted by these systems." Of course we are. And so to not only do a new thing, but to be different people and to reimagine what these systems can look like. To reimagine how we can show up in space can be really scary, and it can be hard, because we're used to what we're used to, and we like what we like, and we're comfortable with what we're comfortable with.

And our faith is what can help us understand that even though we might not have the full picture of how all of this can ultimately look, when we begin to reimagine and we begin to refocus and we begin to make space and make room for that which we might not otherwise understand or be unclear about. Our faith tells us that even though we don't have the full picture that we trust that good things will come from that exercise.

And so it really matters that we ground ourselves in our understanding of spirit and spirituality, Ground ourselves, if this matters for us, ground ourselves in our principles, understanding how to put action to those words that are principles that matter. We may not fully understand where we're going, but what matters most is that, ultimately, more people are going to be there once we get to whatever that thing is, and isn't that what we want?-- to open our doors wider, to draw the circle wider, as we like to say.

So it's really important to understand that we're not engaging in this work, we're not doing this work in isolation, that it is really at the heart of who we are trying to be as faithful people, to understand and engage in different ways. Because my freedom is bound up in yours; your liberation is bound up in mine. So we wanted to make that clear, and to really try and invite folks to invest in understanding that in deeper ways.

So we've included a number of different resources this week to dive deeper into some of this, and some of the history of how patriarchy and oppression have shown up in faith communities. So please do take some time to read through those resources, and we're really looking forward to any questions that you might have. Remember, you can use the comment option on that course page to be able to engage with us on it.

And we really look forward to next time, when we'll be really talking about unpacking all of this and talking about this in new and more expansive ways.

So, with that, I think I'll go extinguish our chalice.  
Alright.

Thank you so much for being with us, and we look forward to being with you next time.

Bye, friends!  
Bye bye now.