

## **Transgender Inclusion in Congregations**

Transforming Hearts Collective

TRANSCRIPT: Session 3: Unpacking the Gender Binary

Hello everyone. We are going to begin this next session with a chalice lighting and an opening reading called "Marginal Wisdom" by Leslie Takahashi-Morris.

"They teach us to read in black and white.  
Truth is this -- the rest false.  
You are whole -- or broken.  
Who you love is acceptable -- or not.  
Life tells its truth in many hues  
but we are taught to think in 'either/or,'  
to believe the teachings of Jesus -- or Buddha,  
to believe in human potential-- or a power beyond a single will.  
I am broken or I am powerful.

Life embraces multiple truths,  
speaks of 'both' and 'and.'  
We are taught to see in absolutes,  
taught good versus evil,  
male versus female,  
old versus young,  
gay versus straight.

Let us see the fractions, the spectrum, the margins.  
Let us open our hearts to the complexity of our worlds.  
Let us make our lives sanctuaries to nurture our many identities.

The day is coming when all will know  
that the rainbow world is more gorgeous than monochrome.  
That a river of identities can ebb and flow  
over the static stubborn rocks in its course.

That the margins hold the center."

Ashe, Amen, and blessed be.

Thank you, Mykal.

Thank you, Alex, for lighting the chalice.

(laughing) I hope everyone enjoys my Florida chalice -- I'm traveling right now, so I don't have my usual chalice.

And welcome back! Welcome to Session 3 of Transgender Inclusion in Congregations. Today we are going to be talking about unpacking the gender binary. And just to remind you where we've been we started out with talking about Beloved Community and using that as a model for how we think about transformation and what we are called to do as people of faith, to create a world in which there is no "us" and no "them," in which all people are able to be their full authentic vibrant selves and bring all of who we are forward.

And then, last time we talked about patriarchy and we talked about how gender roles and oppression show up in our faith communities and in our world.

And so today we're gonna dig deeper into the gender binary and try to unpack it a little bit and talk about a more expansive understanding of how to view gender than what we've been taught, if we were raised in this culture. So, take away, Mykal.

Excellent. Thanks for that recap, Alex. It seemed fitting-- holding everything that we have talked about and reflected upon thus far-- it seemed fitting to begin with a bit of a reflection time. We want to invite folks to really hold those various pieces thinking about Beloved Community, thinking about welcome as spiritual practice, thinking about the ways in which patriarchy has impacted our lives and the gender roles that are rules, and rules that are attached to that system of oppression.

To hold these things and to think of a time when you were harassed, teased, or pressured about some way that you weren't feminine or masculine enough, or, another way of thinking about it, a time when you personally felt like you weren't feminine or masculine enough.

And we just want to give folks a couple minutes to spend some time really reflecting on that and thinking about that. If you are with a group of folks and you are reflecting together it might make some sense to spend some time on your own reflecting and/or writing, and maybe coming back together and showing some of that with each other before we come back to the videos.

So we're gonna invite you to take a little pause for reflection and then come back. Thanks.

Alright, welcome back! Thank you for taking that time to reflect.  
Yes.

And part of the importance of that reflection is recognizing, as we discussed last time, that these systems that oppress trans people oppress all people, and each and every one of us has been touched by that in some way. And that's a really important grounding to bring into this next time that we're gonna spend together.

So we want to dive in a little bit deeper and talk about the gender binary itself. So what is the "gender binary"? Well, a binary system, as you probably know, is a system that consists

of two distinct and disconnected parts. For example, computers are based on a binary system where all information is expressed by zeros and ones.

So the gender binary is a system of classifying all people into two distinct and disconnected forms with no overlap and no exceptions. All bodies, identities, roles, attributes, ways of being are assigned to one box or another, again, with no overlap, no other options. And it looks something like this.

(Mykal) Yes.

(Alex laughing)

- So you can see--

- That's right.

--If you're able to see the screen share you'll see two boxes. One has got some pink on it and a female sign, and the women's restroom sign, and the other box has got some blue on it, it's got a male sign and a men's bathroom sign. And you can also see that these boxes are taped shut.

(Mykal) Yes, they are.

(Alex) You cannot actually get out (laughing) according to this model. This is the model that, if you were raised in North American culture, certainly you were taught this model of how there are two forms of being in the world. So that's the gender binary.

- Right?

- Right.

And the gender binary is dependant on policing people to make sure that that tape stays put on that box, to make sure that people don't digress or deviate from the system in terms of appearance, anatomy, behavior, anything else, that we aren't able to leave these boxes or make other choices.

And also the reason why this system exists, because it's important, it's not just by chance that this system exists, the system was designed to maintain the power of people in one box over people in the other box. Because we have to be able to say, "These are the people who have power, and here's how they are distinct from these other people."

So the people in the men box are meant to be in power over the people in the women box. While simultaneously rendering everyone who doesn't fit perfectly into these boxes invisible or deviant, right? So that's sort of the purpose and the way in which the gender binary plays out. Do you want to add something to that, Mykal?

Yeah, I mean, it goes back to a lot of what we were talking about in the last session about patriarchy and why patriarchy works the way that it's supposed to work. Obviously anyone who doesn't fit within either of those sets of rules / roles is rendered invisible. And

ultimately it's a trap really because what many folks end up doing, and I'll speak for myself - I certainly know what I ended up doing-- was figuring out how I could possibly fit into one or the other box without acknowledging the fact that neither of these boxes actually fit.

So people are left pressured to make decisions about their lives -- about our lives -- that end up ultimately doing quite a bit of harm. And so it really is important to understand the significance of the system and the impact that it really has on a lot of people, on all of us, really. We can get placed in all kinds of boxes. And the one we happen to be talking about right now are those gender boxes. And so part of our work today is thinking about that binary system and how to unpack that a little bit, how to pull that tape off.

So perfect segue to what are we inviting you to consider instead? In order to unpack the gender binary, we'd like to ask you to try on a different idea, a different model for how gender actually works in the world. Because we know that the gender binary is a lie. We know that not everyone fits into those two boxes in the ways that we've been taught.

So I'm gonna share a different model with you in screen share, that... And you don't have to start taking furious notes because we're gonna provide you with this in the resource section. But the idea with this different model is that instead of there just being two boxes there are three major components, and there's other components too, but there are three particular major components that get squished together in those boxes.

And those major components of gender are biology, expression, and identity. And we're gonna talk a little bit about each of those components and how they are actually really distinct. even though they get squished together and married and wedded by the gender binary.

So let's start with that element that gets sort of treated as the be-all end-all of gender which is biology, or biological sex. So biology is the physical, chemical and genetic attributes that inform whether a person is male, female, or intersex. It's our anatomy, our chromosomes, our hormone levels-- that sort of thing.

And there is this myth and lie that there are only two sets of biology and that those two sets are super distinct from each other, when in fact, humans as a species are incredibly overlapping when it comes to the biology of sexes. There are other species where there are males that are twice as big as females and like completely incredible differences between males and females in those species. Humanity is not one of those species. For humanity there is an enormous amount of overlap, in fact, almost entire overlap, between what's generally considered male and female within the species.

And according to the Intersex Society of North America, in fact, approximately 1 in 100 bodies differs from what's considered "standard" for male or female. One in a hundred is enormous--

- It is enormous. Yes.

- It's an enormous segment of the population.

And these differences show up in lots of different ways. People have different hormone levels from each other, different chromosomes-- we're taught that there's only XX and XY, when in fact you could be XXX, you could be just X, you could be XXY-- there's lots of different things that show up in folks. And, you know, lots of different physical characteristics like maybe there are different bell curves when it comes to things like height or hairiness, or chest size, but, as we know, there's enormous overlap as well.

You can't just pick out a random member of the population and based on their physical characteristics be able to say definitively whether that person is a female or a male, right? It's not that simple.

So there's lots of overlap and there's lots of outliers when it comes to biology. Even when it comes to that, again, the be-all end-all in our society of what we consider to be the indicator of sex, which is genitalia, external genitalia, approximately 1 in 1500 people is born with ambiguous genitalia, according to the Intersex Society of North America.

And to put that in perspective, because I know numbers can be a little tricky, approximately 1 in 2000 people in the United States is a member of a Unitarian Universalism congregation, 1 in 2000, which means there are more people with ambiguous genitalia than there are members of UU congregations in the United States, which is enormous, right?

- It's enormous.

- Clearly this is real, and we've been told that it's not. So that's a little bit about biology. You want to add anything, Mykal?

No, that was actually really, really helpful. I think-- One of the things that many of us come up against is this notion-- we're not talking about these things. These numbers that you offered are incredible. This is not information that we talk about. And so folks are left with the information that they may happen to hear, when there is so, so much more out there.

Even in my experience as a trans person, thinking about the biology as a trans person, having to have really deep and intense and difficult conversations with folks about what it means for me to be a man biologically there's so many things to talk about (chuckling) related to that, that we wouldn't even have time to get into all of it today.

But I think it really matters that we're able to-- to really do some of that unpacking and not make assumptions about what we think we do or don't know about biology. So I appreciated all that really helpful information; hope that's useful for all of you as well.

So the next piece that we want to talk about that you saw on Alex's screen share was expression. So we want to unpack expression just a little bit as well. Gender expression-- when we're talking about expression we're talking about everything that gets mapped onto biology by our culture. It's your behavior, your appearance, or appearances, your preferences, the roles that you play out in the world, speech patterns, occupations, so, so

many things. And also how they relate, how those things relate to culturally defined gender stereotypes and expressions.

It gets back to what we were talking about in the beginning around-- in previous sessions-- around who is supposed to hold particular occupations, who's supposed to do particular kinds of work. How you do and don't dress out in the world, Your mannerisms, how you are around other people, how you are around people of the same gender as you or genders different from you.

All of these things get mapped onto biology to do what often gets happened: categorizing. We categorize people based on these things. And expression can be feminine, can be masculine, can be androgynous-- which is the sense that it may be difficult to tell whether it's masculine or feminine, it's harder to label. And expression can be intentionally mixed. There are folks who-- they wake up one morning and make decisions about gender expression that have particular meaning for them and wake up the next morning and feel the need to express their gender differently. So it can be any and all of these things.

Expression is deeply culturally dependant and is affected by every other aspect of who we are. It's impacted by race, it's impacted by class, sexuality, geography, ability, age-- all of these things are impacted by gender expression, and expression is impacted by all of these things. Do you have other things that you want to add, Alex?

I would just say-- thank you for that and-- when you think about the ways in which gender shows up in the world this idea that there are only two ways to show up, and there's only femininity, and there's only masculinity, is so obviously flawed and so obviously wrong.

That's right.

Like Mykal was just saying, even if you just hone in on one way in which culture impacts this-- geography, let's say. When you look at what is considered appropriately feminine for a woman in rural Maine versus Manhattan-- I mean that's one coast of one country-- and then you start looking at the skinny jeans that the men are wearing in Italy and that's considered the height of masculinity.

And the different ways in which masculinity and femininity has shifted over time in our culture and over age -- what length of hair is considered appropriate and appropriately feminine based on your age,

- Yes, yes.
- Sometimes it's like "what? that doesn't..."

And then the idea that all of this is tied to biology, the idea that boys are just naturally inclined to be firefighters (laughing) and girls are just naturally inclined to be nurses,

- Yes, yes.
- it's completely flawed,

and there's been a lot of amazing research that has debunked this idea. And then the ways in which so many other options show up, so, like Mykal said, androgyny being the idea of intentionally having a lack of gender clues versus things like get called gender-fluid, gender mixed, genderfuck, which is an intentional mixing of gender cues instead and something totally different than femininity or masculinity.

So we're gonna include some more resources about that in the resource list, but I really just wanted to hone in on the fact that-- how culturally defined these things are.

Right. That's absolutely right. And before we go on, it just reminded me, all the more relevant and significant is this notion of being in relationship, and the time that it takes to be in relationship, as a spiritual practice-- to understand who folks are and who folks aren't.

When I gave you the example of someone who has a particular gender expression-- --who may have a particular gender expression on Monday that may be different from their gender expression on Tuesday or Wednesday. The way to understand that isn't to have a list of terms about gender expression.

- Yes!

The way to make sense of that is to be in relationship with that person. And then eventually maybe you'll begin to understand what their gender expression is or isn't on any particular day, but that comes with time, and it comes with building relationships. So I think that's an important point to raise.

Absolutely. So the third piece of gender-- --the third major piece of gender that gets squished together and lost when we put people in boxes, is identity.

- (Alex) Tada!

- (Mykal) Tada!

So, identity is super complex. An identity is your internal sense of self. It's your own personal understanding of what your gender is and how you describe yourself, how you make sense of all the other pieces of gender for yourself, and it includes all kinds of things. It includes woman, man, girl, boy, agender, netrois, androgyne, bigender, intersex, multigender, mixgender, two spirit, genderqueer, boi (with an i), grrl (with two Rs), MTF, FTM, trans woman, trans man, butch, femme, dyke, stud, aggressive-- these are all identity terms that all relate to gender in some way. And most people claim more than one--

- That's right.

--and claim different terms that mean something different in their different cultural contexts or different ages, even the sense that "girl" is a different gender identity from "woman."

- That's right.
- Those are identities.

And when you are young -- younger -- you're not gonna identify as a woman, probably, because age has a super big impact on your sense of self. So, again, this isn't about terminology, it's not about vocabulary, it's actually about being in relationship, like Mykal just shared, it's about being in relationship first and foremost with yourself, and your own sense of self and your own sense of identity and being able to claim language that helps describe that.

And there's a lot of controversy out there, and a lot of really heated conversation about labels. And the reason why it's so complicated and so controversial is because of a difference between putting a label on someone else and claiming that label for yourself.

That's right.

A label -- it's like Ani DiFranco said: "Every tool is a weapon if you hold it right." So either words can be weapons or tools for oppression or tools for putting that tape on that box or language can be liberatory when we're claiming it for ourselves and saying, "This is the language that works best for me and you don't actually get to choose that for me-- it's all about how we get to choose it for ourselves. So that's what's super real when we start talking about identity.

And the other thing that I want to make sure I mention with identity is that for some people trans, or transgender, is an identity term and for other people it's not, which is really complex. There's no single way of viewing a complex word like this. For some people trans helps them gain visibility. So for me for example claiming the word trans helps me gain visibility in a world that is likely going to view me as cisgender, which means not trans, if I don't tell them otherwise, right?

Right.

Most people when they look at me, they're either going to see a 14-year-old boy, they're going to see a young masculine woman who's attracted to women, probably, or they're going to be very confused. Those are the three things that often happen when people look at me. I haven't changed, but what they're bringing to that interaction changes. So when I say, "I'm trans," that's a way of visibilizing my identity and making it possible for people to understand me more authentically.

But for someone like my partner, Teddy, who identifies as a man, of transgender experience, or a man who has gone through a gender transition, for him saying the word trans actually calls into question his identity as a man in the world because some people will look at that and say, "Oh, you're not really a man because you were assigned female at birth." So for him it's not an identity. His identity is man. He's a man. And when he lives that



full identity out in the world, the fact that he went through gender transition is just a piece of his medical file. It's not actually an identity.

So there's really different ways that this shows up and has everything to do with authenticity and being able to be our full selves in the world and have that reflected back, and that's really huge.

How did I do Mykal?

That's really great; that's excellent. And thank you for-- thank you for the examples. I think it's really important that people understand the complexity of all of this because human nature is complex (chuckling) There are no right or wrong answers all the time to all of this.

-Yes.

And, again, it gets back to being in relationship, to understand the fullness of someone's identity, and expression. I know for myself, I identify as a man in the world and I identify as trans too because I think it matters as a person of faith and as a clergy person that I claim that for folks to understand fully that yes, trans people are people of faith and can be clergy. (laughing)

That really matters to me in the world, and I think that matters to other folks who are trans and non-binary in the world and so I claim that but that's not everybody's experience. And so it's really important for folks to be in relationship and to have conversation and to recognize when it's okay and not okay to ask those kinds of questions. Because it's not always okay to do that.

But being in relationship enables that opening. It helps-- it helps those conversations happen in deeper ways and that takes time. Which we spend a lot of time talking about-- The nature of time and significance of the time that it takes.

Yes. And, you know, just to agree with you a little bit, we're taught in this world to make a snap judgment. When we immediately see someone we are taught that within a second we need to be able to categorize that person as either a woman or man, as either female or male. When you think about how people interact with babies--

- Oh my goodness, yes.

- So that's a reminder that this takes work, it takes time. You have to actually get into relationship and that's not easy.

It's not. And we have to be willing to do that. If we're truly gonna be in relationship, if we're truly gonna understand who we are across our differences about those things that make us uniquely who we are in the world, it really does take time, and it matters to take that time. Spiritual practice, all of that.

- Spiritual practice.
- Spiritual practice! (laughing)

So the next that we wanted to share with you all, just to sort of illustrate how this shows up in the world-- we've just now started sharing a little bit about examples and personal story, and we want to share a little bit more and we want to invite you to think about how this applies to you too, this expansive model of gender, as opposed to the boxes, gender binary model.

So we're gonna take turns sharing a little bit about for us, how we see ourselves in terms of this model and how biology, expression, and identity show up for us.

- And I think I'm gonna go first?
- Yep.

So for me when I look at this model, when I look at the bubbles (laughing) of biology, expression, and identity-- In terms of biology, I was assigned female at birth when I was taken out of my mother-- because I was a C-section-- the person who did so looked between my legs and said, "Hey, it's a girl."

And so in that moment that person took a biological assumption about me and it turned that into an assumption about who I was gonna be. And the idea that I was gonna be a girl, that I was going to have a certain expression of that identity. And it didn't really work out the way that that person expected. (laughing)

So in terms of biology I, like most of us, don't really have a very clear sense of a lot of the things that are going on inside of me. I can see what I can see on the outside, I know that I was blessed with a small chest, which I give thanks for because if I'd gotten slightly different genes, like my sister, I would have a much different time struggling with what that brings when that shows up in the world.

I am a tenor. I was gifted with a relatively low voice, which I also was grateful for because it helped me express myself in a way that was authentic. It would have been very different for me with the identity that I have if I hadn't been given these sort of attributes.

And I don't know what my chromosomes are-- I have no idea, I've never had them tested. I don't know what my levels of testosterone and estrogen are-- prior to a couple years ago I'd never gotten them tested. So, you know, there are the sorts of things that are true for most of us. Unless something terrible happens at the Olympics, most of us don't really have a chance to get to know our biology on that deep of a level because it doesn't really matter that much.

We know what's true externally-- we know what's true in terms of that sort of stuff and sometimes we get to know different pieces differently depending on what we're trying to do with our bodies. But that's what's true for me, and a year ago I started taking

testosterone. So taking testosterone changed my biology, which is one reason why it's really not true to say, "Well, a trans man is actually female, is actually biologically female."

Because that's not true. If you are able to, if you are blessed with the ability to take intervention steps with regards to your biology, if that's something that you feel like you need to do, that changes your biology. So now I'm much more, you know... hanging out in the middle, if there were a scale from female to male, then I was when I was born because of being able to take testosterone, which is wonderful for me. It helps my biology align with who I am.

In terms of expression it has super, super shifted and changed over the course of my life. When I was a kid, I was-- I was a princess I was The Little Mermaid [cut off] and I was all princess dresses and pink, and pigtails, and so happy with that. I was even more feminine than was considered appropriate for a girl child and I would get made fun of for how feminine I was because I was wearing princess dresses way longer than any of my peers. (laughing) when they were all wearing jeans I was like no, I'm a princess. And so that was who I was.

At the same time I only had friendships with boys. I loved playing with bugs, I'd pretend to be-- when we played make believe we made believe we were dinosaurs like house didn't make sense to me, tea? what? that doesn't make sense, none of that was a thing that I was at all drawn to.

So later in life when my mom was struggling with the fact that I didn't identify as a woman, she was like, "but the pigtails!" and I was like, "mom, I was a boy in a dress basically, like that's the closest thing I can really articulate for you."

And as I got older, I became much more actively gender fluid, I really felt like my sense of self shifted from day to day and so my expression shifted from day to day. Some days I would wear skirts or dresses and other days I would wear button-down shirts. Some days I would wear both. (laughing) which was an interesting style statement.

But I was trying to be able to express that was true inside of me, which brings me right along to identity, which, again, has shifted and changed over the course of my life. When I was a kid, I didn't have language to describe my sense of self. I wasn't like super thrilled with the idea of being a girl but I didn't have any other options.

And then when I was a teenager, I really started to struggle, when it came to being able to express who I was. I didn't feel like the term woman really applied to me but there weren't models out there for non-binary people at the time at all. And so I just sort of made do the best I could. I started trying on different language to see what felt right.

And eventually I was able to find a sense of ease in the word genderqueer, in the term gender fluid, being able to start to express who I was in a way that gave voice to the fact that I don't identify as a man or woman.

And now that I've managed to sort of get to the point where I'm at in my life now, I'm a little less gender fluid, which doesn't mean that that was a phase-- it wasn't, it was just who I was at that time. And now I see myself very much as an effeminate flaming, queer, genderqueer, non-binary, boi (with an i). I'm sort of transmasculine but I'm femme.

So that's kind of who I am. (laughing) And a little bit about where I got here.

Awesome. Thank you. (laughing) This is why I love Alex. All of those things, each and every one.

So just a little bit about my understanding of myself over the years. In terms of biology I was assigned female at birth. Similar kinds of things -- this is what happens with all of us, right? A doctor or someone in the health profession looks between your legs and makes a decision about who you're going to be forever and all time.

So I was assigned female at birth and lived my life growing up as a little girl child I didn't have particular struggle around that. I felt okay being who I was in the world. The one thing that was always fascinating for me I had a very active imagination as a kid. And so I used to always imagine myself as a little boy, not as a little girl, and that was what I understood for myself.

And I knew enough, and it's amazing what happens in the minds of children I knew enough, even at the tender age of four or five, that I couldn't talk to anybody about that. Like I knew really clearly that as much as I understood myself to be a boy in my head, I couldn't say that out loud to another human-- adult or child -- and I didn't.

And that felt like an existence that I figured I could work with. Because I had a very active imagination, and that was great, I was a little boy with girl friends and I had jobs as a teenage boy growing up like this was my little dreamings and envisionings of myself. I had kind the kinds of work that boys and men do. (laughing) But I didn't attach those things necessarily to my understanding of my biology,

I didn't understand much about my biology. All I knew was who I was and how other people were labeling me only because of my biology. That's what I knew about biology as it was supposed to be used to label me a girl.

And so that's how I existed for many, many years. And at some point-- gosh, in my thirties-- I had come to a much clearer understanding of who I was by then and began taking testosterone, on Thanksgiving Day, I'll never forget it, 2006 I began taking testosterone, and that changed my body dramatically, my voice became much deeper. I was a solid alto -- I've been singing for most of my life. I was a pretty high alto for a very long time, and suddenly over the years I've become a baritone, which I'm not upset about. (laughing)

This was all a part of my dreamings as a little kid-- that I would have a very deep, commanding voice. (laughing) And so testosterone shifted my voice certainly. It shifted how my body looked, shifted what was going on inside of my body.

Ultimately in terms of expression I too, like Alex, kind of grew up with lots of lace and long flowy pastel-colored dresses and all of that. People made it very clear that there were certain things that I could or couldn't do based on the fact that I was a girl out in the world. Over time, probably around my teenage years, when I was at a point when I could have my own jobs and I could have my own money and make my own decisions about how I dressed, I was making some different decisions (laughing) because it was my money to make those decisions with, which distressed my parents very much. (laughing)

And at one point I was probably wearing some really baggy shirt and probably some really baggy jeans and my dad actually asked me the question-- because only certain people wear certain things-- he actually was pretty frustrated with me in that moment and asked the question, "What are you trying to do? Be a man in the world?" Like he actually asked me that question-- I was probably 17 years old and, again, I knew full well what I would get support around and what I wouldn't without ever even talking about it.

And my response to him was "no." I lied. (laughing) Because I pretty much knew-- I didn't have language for it but I knew what was going on. But I lied because I wanted to feel supported and I didn't want folks to call into question who I was trying to be in the world because those rules have that kind of impact on all of us.

So my gender expression started to shift quite a bit in my late teens and twenties to the point where I've been called preppy, I've been called all kinds of things, but, you know, jeans, button-downs, those kind of things. I did have a moment in college when I started wearing skirts again but for me that had to do with being gender fluid and playing with gender, not because I felt at all like I was a woman and so I played with gender expression in all kinds of ways over the years.

And in the last five to seven years or so I was even playing around with drag and having some fun. (laughing) Drag is probably the most fun I've ever had being a male-identified person, putting on make-up and dresses and knee-high boots and being silly and playing with drag and having a beautiful time-- and I love it! because it's all a part of me and all a part of who I am.

In terms of identity, like many folks in my generation I didn't grow up with language or even understanding the significance of identity we all get told who we're supposed to be. (laughing) And that's how I had existed-- until, again, it was probably in my mid-twenties that I actually encountered someone who was trans, and that was a very clear identity for them, and it opened up my whole world.

And so I began identifying as trans very quietly, and over the years, much more loudly and very clearly, and so for me it matters-- that the fullness of my experience as a person matters. And that's me, right? So I'm very clear that who I have been as a female-identified person in the world has deep meaning for me. I haven't tried to erase any of that for myself, but that's for me, but for myself I'm male-identified now and also a man of trans experience and very clearly out in the world identify as a trans-- --as trans clergy, because, as I

mentioned earlier, it really has impact and matters to me in my life as a person of faith to be able to do that.

So that's just a little bit about me.

Thanks, Mykal.  
Yeah! Yay!

So as you can hear in our stories, I think the thing that -- the real take-away that I hope for, for you watching this is the take-away that none of these things are static--

- That's right.

--and none of these things actually determine each other, when we're talking about biology, expression, and identity the mythology and the lie of the gender binary teaches us that because you are female you will express yourself femininely and you will identify as a woman or a girl and then a woman. That's the lie.

But, in fact, all three of these things inform each other because you can hear, like, there's tendrils that weave... throughout our stories of each of these three elements. They inform each other but they don't dictate each other. That's the real thing, is -- thing #1, they don't dictate each other and thing #2, they shift and change, and they shift and change for all of us, our sense of self, our way of expressing that sense of self, and our biology-- none of these things are static.

We want to close out, if it's okay to close out, Mykal.

Mm-hm.

We're running low on time here--

We want to close out with an invitation to you to engage in some reflection about how your life and your sense of self would show up if you were to try to map it in terms of this model that we've introduced today-- biology, expression, and identity-- and how those things have shifted for you over the course of your life as well.

And also reflect on how the other elements of your identity, for example your age, your class, your race, ethnicity, your sexuality, your ability, your geography, these sorts of things-- how do these other elements of who you are impact your gender?

- Yes.

- How do they impact your sense of self and your gender over the course of your life?

So that's our invitation to you, to engage in one final piece of reflection. Pause the video to do that and then we'll come back and just do a closing reading to close us out. Thank you.

So, welcome back, everyone. That was some really beautiful and amazing conversation and reflection about biology, and expression, and identity, and so what we want to do now is

just close with an incredible quote from Janet Mock, who is a remarkable Black trans woman who wrote Redefining Realness so we're gonna read a quote from her as we close, and as Alex extinguishes our chalice.

"There is no formula when it comes to gender and sexuality. Yet it is often only people whose gender identity and/or sexual orientation negates society's heteronormative and cis-normative standards who are targets of stigma, discrimination, and violence. I wish that instead of investing in these hierarchies of what's right and who's wrong, what's authentic and who's not, and ranking people according to these rigid standards that ignore diversity in our genders and sexualities we gave people freedom and resources to define, determine, and declare who they are."

- Amen.

- Amen.

Thank you, Janet Mock.

Indeed.

And thanks to all of you for continuing to be with us on this journey. It feels good and right to be with you and to be having these conversations and doing this work especially now, in this particular moment that we find ourselves in, in this country. So thank you for doing the work and for showing up and being present.

Thanks, everyone. See you next time.

See you next time.