

#1412 Trans People as Disposable Chess Pieces in a Despicable Political Game

Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left podcast in which we shall learn about the surge of anti-trans legislation coming from Republican-controlled state legislatures, the harm being inflicted on trans people, the trans-exclusionary radical feminists who have partnered with conservative coalitions to limit trans rights, and the world of sex-segregated athletics. A lot to get to.

Clips today are from Straight White American Jesus, the Majority Report, Democracy Now!, Consider This, What Next, Post Reports, a TEDx Talk from Hudson Taylor, and a TED Talk from Archie Crowley.

The Problem with the Focus on the Family - Straight White American Jesus - Air Date 4-9-21

DANIEL MILLER - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:00:41] What is gender dysphoria? It is the experience, the anxiety that comes from a kind of gap, is how I describe it, between the way that somebody experiences their gender identity, whether they experience himself as male, female, non-binary, fluid, whatever that is, and the gender they were assigned at birth, or basically the way that other people have seen them as in gender. And so gender dysphoria is listed in this big giant book called the DSM, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition. And for people who don't know what that is, it's the book that basically lays out the diagnostic criteria for mental health conditions that are used by psychiatrists and psychologists, and not just in the US but in other places in the world as well.

So the reason that this is as important, a few reasons, number one, sometimes you'll hear people on the right who say see, gender dysphoria is it's a mental illness. If you're transgender, you're mentally ill. See it's in this book. That's not what it says. In fact, the DSM 5 -- and that's the fifth edition, there've been four other additions -- is in my view really clear, even though clinicians I think don't always see this. It's really clear that gender identity is not pathological. In other words, if Brad Onishi is identified as Brad the little boy when he was born, and gets older and begins to experience himself as not a him, as a her, as something else, that doesn't mean that you're mentally ill.

It's that anxiety that's created that's considered a pathology. And why does that matter? So here's the first place for me, where it comes to the interconnectedness. The only reason people experience gender dysphoria, that anxiety, the only reason they experienced that gap is because of the world will not recognize them the way they feel themselves.

Gender dysphoria is one of these things that's like tragically, easy to deal with if society would just change, because if somebody sent me well, what do you do? How do you quote, unquote, treat gender dysphoria? It's really simple: let kids, in this case, express themselves in accordance with the gender they experience themselves to be, and respond to them that way. So you change their pronoun, you use the pronouns they want. If they want to change their name, you change their name. If it's growing out their hair, they grow out their hair. Or

they dress differently or whatever. And if it means that medical steps are warranted, you make it so that they can have access to those things, right?

If you didn't have this socially-created sense of gender, you wouldn't have gender dysphoria. It wouldn't exist. So that's like the first bit of interconnectedness that a lot of these people don't pick up on, is that it's not about choice. It's not about individual psychology. It's a social problem.

Which is why these laws are so dangerous because they perpetuate this.

The other piece of this I want to get into, and then I'll throw it over to you, is because of this sense of pathologizing gender identity, people within the LGBTQ community have really been divided about whether or not there ought to be a diagnosis of gender dysphoria.

I researched this some in my book that's coming out and, if you read DSM 3 and DSM 4, the prior editions, they do pathologize gender identity. It's pretty clear that if you don't measure up to a certain gender norms and so forth, that it's pathologized. And in other words, that they think there's something wrong with you, or you're abnormal.

That's gone in DSM 5 and that was by intention. But there was some of them said that doesn't go far enough. We've got this history of pathologizing, not just gender identity, but homosexuality and different kinds of things like this. It should just be gone. The argument in favor of it though, and this is an argument that I've found persuasive for a long time is, because it exists as a diagnosis, it means the doctors can treat it. Right? They can argue that there are medical applications of hormone blockers, or hormone replacement therapies for trans youth and trans adults who need those. It means that you can argue to insurance companies, you should provide insurance coverage for these kinds of things. And, this almost never happens with minors, but for people who are older, if their gender confirmation surgeries, that they should be medically covered as well. And this has happened.

And the reason I bring all that up, it shows the interconnected of all of this, like debates about healthcare, debates about access to insurance, debates about social acceptance of LGBTQ people, debates about all these things flow together. Because what we're seeing is if these things, when in court, I would argue that they might not have, if there wasn't a category of gender dysphoria in this giant book of designation. So again, that interconnectedness that when we hear things like health coverage, when you hear things like healthcare, and it can sound abstract to us, or maybe if we're young people who are pretty healthy and we don't go to the doctor very often and we don't need to, and you think what's the big deal about people not having healthcare? Or we think only of people who are older, who might need health care, or we think of communities of color who are underserved by healthcare. We'll come back to that later.

It also affects kids, right? A kid who feels like they're a different gender than they were assigned at birth. And so these things are really important.

So all of this, it occurred to me it would be useful to situate how is this a medical issue. Why does the American Medical Association and the American Association of Pediatrics and all these other groups, why do they care about trans youth? This is part of why is because it is in fact a medical diagnosis.

But it gets to this point that you have that this individualistic frame that wants to reduce everything to matters of choice or preference. It's also a really consumerist frame and we can do a whole series of episodes about evangelicalism and consumer culture and all of that kind of stuff.

It masks all of that. And as you're highlighting, and as the book highlights, it's one of the things that is almost invisible within evangelical culture. The last point I'll make about that is a book written a number of years ago now, by a guy named Christian Smith, about American evangelicalism makes this argument, and he did social science data on evangelicals. And what he found was that evangelical Americans were a really individualistic lot, period. Like we have been since the United States was founded in the colonial period and so forth. But he found that white evangelicals are actually more individualistic in their thinking, less likely to see social systems and structures than other Americans. And all of this is just completely lost on groups like the legislature in the state of Arkansas when they pass these laws, and miss all of this interconnectedness. So I'm grateful in a way that maybe I haven't been in the past that there is a diagnosis of gender dysphoria that can hopefully help these kids when the time comes to go to court with these issues.

Debunking Myths About Trans People Part 1 - The Majority Report w Sam Seder - Air Date 4-10-21

CALLER EVE: [00:07:09] Earlier iterations of gender identity's various disorders in the diagnostic criteria were broader than the current diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria. And some of that can just be that you refuse to enact gender roles. It didn't require a child to state their own gender, for instance, which the current gender dysphoria requires like a stated, a statement of identity being necessary for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria. And there are problems with the way that gender dysphoria is presented in the DSM; there's problems with the DSM in general.

But it is not the case that any sort of treatment is being forced on kids all of a sudden. I don't know if your audience is very familiar but the sort of standard for treatment right now in states and developed countries that allow this is that if a child is prepubescent there is no medical intervention. You just let the kid be, there's pretty significant data that forcing them into a gender identity or gender-coded behaviors that they don't like is really bad for them. And so many psychologists will recommend just taking the child's lead and seeing where they go, supporting them and the activities they want, how they want to dress, what they want to be called. Fine. There's no medicine involved. After puberty starts, after what's sometimes described as like a natal puberty, after puberty that is not concordant with the gender identity of the child begins, then you can consult with a doctor, a specialist who may or may not prescribe puberty blockers. Puberty blockers are reversible; they've been used on cis people for decades. There is some possibility of very limited side effects, but they're far safer than almost any other medical intervention . . . , intervention that we have, just generally speaking. And so, you can assign puberty blockers to give the child more time to develop emotionally in their identity, intellectually, until . . . Usually, they are about . . . 15 or 16 would be the standard for if they are still insistent that they want to medically transition, they can start HRT. And no one gets bottom surgery until they're adults, until they're over the age of 18, and very few people get top surgery on trans men -- so like a double mastectomy

-- until they're over that age. That depends on the state, because we have different laws about consenting to surgery in different states. But it's never children. It's never little kids.

Trans Day of Visibility Activists Chase Strangio & Raquel Willis Demand Action on Anti-Trans Laws - Democracy Now! - Air Date 3-31-21

JUAN GONZALEZ: [00:09:55] Chase, to what do you attribute this sudden wave of legislation in various states across the country?

CHASE STRANGIO: [00:10:02] I mean, you know, this year is particularly egregious and sweeping, but this is something that has been the culmination of work from an anti-trans, anti-LGBTQ lobby for the past at least seven years. And, of course, we can trace this history going back much, much longer. We can look at the moral panic of Anita Bryant, of Phyllis Schlafly, and even just looking in hundred years in the past in the ways in which colonial powers used regulation and control over sexed bodies to exert power. So there's a long history here.

I think what we're seeing today in state legislatures is a particular effort to pivot from the anti-trans restroom bills into a new form of regulation of trans young people and trans bodies. And they have seen an opening, because they built alliances, even with some people who would consider themselves liberals and progressives, who have either remained relatively complacent or who have joined forces in the attacks on trans young people. So, right now we're seeing an escalation in supermajority Republican legislatures, where we are not countering that escalation with the appropriate level of resistance, given the magnitude of harm that is going to result.

JUAN GONZALEZ: [00:11:11] I'd like to bring Raquel into the conversation. Raquel, you tweeted that, quote, "The GOP continues to terrorize communities on the margins all across this country. This is why we must come together on these fights. ... As a Black trans woman from Georgia, it's not lost on me how these fights against people of color and LGBTQ+ folks are connected." Can you elaborate on that?

RAQUEL WILLIS: [00:11:36] Absolutely, yeah. You know, I'm from Georgia. And when I think about my life, all of my identities have played a role in the way that I've navigated society and, of course, the ways that I have been made a target. And so, when I think about the recent passage of voter restriction back in Georgia, I think about the ways in which it's all about policing communities of color. And that is completely tied to this fight and this onslaught against trans people. It's about policing our bodies, right?

And so, this is about us interrogating what power looks like and how it is wielded within our society. It makes absolutely no sense for these people to be trying to control the lives of vulnerable communities. And when I think about trans children, it is so horrible how they are being stripped of their childhood and not even looked at as the humans that they are.

AMY GOODMAN: [00:12:42] I wanted to ask Chase about one of the ACLU's clients, Andraya Yearwood, a Black trans student athlete. Andraya is a recent high school graduate who ran on her school's girls' track team. Let's go to her in her own words.

ANDRAYA YEARWOOD: [00:12:58] One of the issues that our community is facing, and has been facing for a while, is, I think, misinformation in general — who we are and what our community stands for and who our community is. And I think one thing to, I guess, combat that is, again, education and more education within our school system, so that people don't say, "Oh, that's a man," or, "Oh, that's a woman," and continue to misgender us. And I feel like education is very important in having people understand, again, like, what we, as a community, and we, as people, stand for.

AMY GOODMAN: [00:13:34] Chase, can you tell us about Andraya?

CHASE STRANGIO: [00:13:37] Yeah. So, I just want to start by saying Andraya Yearwood and Terry Miller, two young trans athletes from Connecticut, two young Black women, who have endured so many attacks simply for existing and participating in school sports alongside their peers, as they have every right to do. Andraya is a young person who graduated from high school. She was a track athlete. She trained every day for four hours, worked so hard, loved the sport. And how is she rewarded for that? She is the centerpiece of an attack campaign, with pieces on Fox News targeting her, a lawsuit brought by Alliance Defending Freedom on behalf of cisgender athletes trying to block her from running in her senior year — which, ultimately, all of their senior seasons were canceled because of COVID.

But the lawsuit continues, even though she has quit the sport altogether due to the ongoing harassment that she experienced. The lawsuit is continuing, because they are trying to strip her and Terry of their past titles, and any win that they have achieved, they are trying to get it erased from records, even records that are hanging in their individual high schools. They have been the subjects of so much misinformation and assault and claims that they have displaced cisgender athletes, when all that they were doing was running, consistent with their rights under state and federal law, winning sometimes, though they lost to cisgender athletes.

And I think an important clarification point here is that there are claims that cisgender athletes are going to be somehow displaced in scholarships by transgender athletes. No out transgender woman or girl athlete from high school has ever achieved or received an athletic scholarship to compete in athletics at the collegiate level, because there is so much discrimination. Terry and Andraya never once got a recruitment call, even though all of the cisgender athletes who are trying to block them from participating are currently on athletic scholarship in Division I schools. We have a serious conversation to have about how much discrimination trans people are facing, and yet they are still escalating attacks.

AMY GOODMAN: [00:15:38] If you can also elaborate on that, Raquel, and talk about, well, the piece the two of you co-authored for The Nation, "Visibility Alone Will Not Keep Transgender Youth Safe"? What will, Raquel?

RAQUEL WILLIS: [00:15:53] Yeah. I mean, I think a big part of the work that Chase and I have been partnering on over this last week, as we've expanded Trans Day of Visibility into Trans Week of Visibility and Action, is really getting people to be about that action. And so, that means we can't just rest on some of the social strides that we've made, whether it's in Hollywood or on different screens in these different sectors. Those things are powerful and great, and we definitely need to see more of our stories in media and in these ways. But we also need to be using that action to change our material realities and protect our rights. And so, this week has really been, for us, all about getting people mobilized, so that they can

contact lawmakers, let them know that trans people have a whole group of folks who support us, are behind us, who love us and want to see us safe and protected.

You know, when I think about trans youth, I think about two trans youth who actually really inspired me because of the ways that their lives ended just a few years ago. So, within months of each other, Leelah Alcorn, a young trans girl, and Blake Brockington, a young trans boy, died by suicide, right? And we know, based on the things that they said and the people who knew them, and, of course, a suicide letter that Leelah had published online after she passed, is that they felt like they were not being supported, that there was no future for them as openly trans youth. And I'm afraid that if we don't get involved and be active, we're going to see that trend continue.

As Anti-Trans Bills Advance, Trans Journalists Weigh In On 'Privilege' Of Reporting - Consider This from NPR - Air Date 4-9-21

ARI SHAPIRO - HOST, CONSIDER THIS FROM NPR: [00:17:38] I talked to one of those medical professionals, Dr. Joshua Safer, executive director of Mt. Sinai's Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery in New York City. And he told me supporters of these bills are just wrong to claim that puberty-blocking medicines have permanent consequences.

[SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED NPR BROADCAST]

JOSHUA SAFER: [00:17:54] The point of puberty blockers is that they're a conservative option and that they are reversible.

ARI SHAPIRO - HOST, CONSIDER THIS FROM NPR: [00:18:00] Not only that; he said doctors prescribe these medicines to some cisgender kids, too. They're used to treat some cancers or to help young people struggling with adrenal issues or early puberty.

[SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED NPR BROADCAST]

JOSHUA SAFER: [00:18:11] When we use these medications for transgender kids as well as for kids with precocious puberty, they're incredibly safe. And they can be stopped, and things will revert to how they were.

ARI SHAPIRO - HOST, CONSIDER THIS FROM NPR: [00:18:24] Safer told me he's also heard from doctors in other states where laws like the one in Arkansas are under consideration.

[SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED NPR BROADCAST]

Are they afraid for their patients?

JOSHUA SAFER: [00:18:33] They're afraid for their patients at several levels. They are certainly afraid for their patients being victimized verbally by their state legislators. And they are certainly afraid that their patients will lack access to care. So absolutely.

Debunking Myths About Trans People Part 2 - The Majority Report w Sam Seder - Air Date 4-10-21

MATT BINDER: [00:18:52] You said there's a lot of work that still needs to be done in terms of the data, but is there data that represents the conservative argument that there is this vast number of children or teenagers who think they're transgender, go through the treatments, and then come out later and say, they're cis? I'm just going to guess . . . I don't know, but I'm going to guess this is a scenario that happens less than the voter fraud epidemic that they're all worried about, as well. It just seems like something.

CALLER EVE: [00:19:25] The general rate of regret for medical transition, depending on specifically what procedures you're talking about and which studies you look at, the general rate for regret and detransition ranges between 5% and 0.3%, depending on the specifically how you're framing what regret means and what detransition means. Which is lower, for instance, than the number of women who regret having children, another long-term, life-changing . . . So it's it's relatively, compared to other significant medical procedures, it's overwhelmingly the case that people don't regret it. It also shows a very [inaudible] sociological and psychological well being. People who undergo these treatments tend to show reduced distress, reduce anxiety, reduced depression, reduced prevalence of eating disorders, self-harm, suicidality, all these things reduction in dysphoria.

MATT LECH - PRODUCER, THE MAJORITY REPORT: [00:20:17] I was just going to say, my understanding that some of the regret factors are people not accepting what they've done basically, too, and the sort of social ostracization. Is that right? That, that actually, if we were just more accepting of people, some of those regret numbers would be even lower.

CALLER EVE: [00:20:35] Yeah. So, the data is pretty limited in that regard, but the current data does suggest that. That more than half of the very small percentage of people who do regret it or do detransition, more than half of those people detransition due to oppression, prejudice, loss of family, abuse and violence and harassment they receive, and another chunk of them, also because they can no longer access medical care. They don't have the option to maintain the treatment that they need so they find that their only option is to live in their assigned gender.

A National Wave of Anti-Trans Bills Part 1 - What Next | Daily News and Analysis - Air Date 3-3-21

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:21:15] A lot of these bills have a single source, a legal advocacy group called the Alliance Defending Freedom.

KATE SOSIN: [00:21:21] So the Alliance Defending Freedom is a long standing extreme anti LGBTQ group. They're labeled a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. And to give you a sense of why for a number of years, they claim that LGBTQ people are pedophiles and they've advocated for the forced sterilization of transgender people in the European Court of Human Rights in 2015, they are probably as extreme in their stance on queer people as you can get, and they often are behind a lot of these bills.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:22:00] You've pointed out that they actually created a website where you can just point and click and out pops a bill.

KATE SOSIN: [00:22:08] Yeah. So they have teamed up with the Heritage Foundation Family Policy Alliance, also anti LGBTQ groups and like statewide groups. And you can actually just enter as if you were to like, you know, sign up for a mailing list, like I want anti trans legislation. Here's my name, here's my district. You know, send me a bill on sports and they will generate a bill for you.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:22:36] To me, when I look at these bills, they seem like nonsense, but. It's interesting to look at the arguments that anti trans groups are making and sort of see the DNA of previous movements, movements that have been more successful, like I look at these sports bills, which are sort of the newest iteration of anti trans legislation. And they really tap into this zero sum dynamic, this idea that a trans person could replace your child on the sports team. It reminds me of the argument that an immigrant could come take your job.

KATE SOSIN: [00:23:24] Yeah, it's so easy to fear that we don't know. Right. Like, I thought about this so much when we saw Rand Paul questioning Dr. Rachel Levine for her confirmation hearing to HHS.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:23:39] Dr. Rachel Levine would be the first trans person appointed to HHS, right?

KATE SOSIN: [00:23:44] Yes. To a Senate approved anywhere is historic. And and he asked her, like, do you support, you know, basically giving children hormones to transition?

RAND PAUL: [00:23:58] Dr. Levine, do you believe that minors are capable of making such a life changing decision? Is changing one sex?

DR. RACHEL LEVINE: [00:24:05] Well, Senator, thank you for your interest in this question. Transgender medicine is a very complex and nuanced field with robust research and standards of care that have been developed. And if I am fortunate enough to be confirmed as the assistant secretary of health, I look forward to working with you and your office and coming to your office and discussing the particulars of the standards of care for transgender.

RAND PAUL: [00:24:30] The specific question was about

KATE SOSIN: [00:24:32] and she was like, I will talk to you about the best medical practices around transition because you clearly don't understand them.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:24:39] She was trying to not say that you don't get it.

KATE SOSIN: [00:24:43] Yeah, but like, he just kept driving home this point. And a lot of people will do that. They'll say, like, you're helping kids transition when it's the opposite is true, right? Like you just give kids puberty blockers and then you're like, OK, just we're just we're going to prevent you from going through puberty. Because if you if you go through puberty, like the chances that you're going to feel extreme mental duress are very high, you might become suicidal. So we just give you this. You write it out. And then when you're old

enough, you make the decision with your health care providers like. Right. And we leave it at that.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:25:25] And we should be pretty clear that there is good research showing that giving puberty blockers decreases the risk of suicide and trans kids.

KATE SOSIN: [00:25:36] Yeah, it does. But when you're thinking if you don't know the facts and you're saying we're giving all this medication to children, we're transitioning children. And like, if that's what people are telling you, that sounds scary and weird, right? Like we don't we don't know. Like, we only know what we know. And so it's really easy, right? If you've never looked a trans kid in the face like that is. It's hard to imagine what does a transgender child look like? It's like, oh, they look like a child or just like a cute kid.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:26:10] They say the reason these laws keep appearing is because of the increased visibility of the trans community, and that creates a push and pull is confident that public opinion is turning in favor of trans Americans.

KATE SOSIN: [00:26:23] The Human Rights Campaign did a lot of polling right around the election and found that in swing states among Trump voters, they overwhelmingly supported LGBTQ rights and even when it came to trans issues and some of these issues like allowing transgender people to, you know, live freely and openly and access affirming medical care, and they asked, you know, do trans athletics like rank for you is as a campaign issue. And pretty much everyone was like, no. And so the data shows that for the most part, conservative voters aren't too concerned about regulating transgender people. So there is a question about why are all these bills, you know, being used to sort of galvanize the Republican Party at this moment? Bills like this are just generally unpopular. And so they've historically been very unsuccessful. North Carolina passed an anti trans bathroom measure in 2016 and faced enormous economic losses. And they had to quickly repeal it because the writing was on the wall so quickly. And ever since then, people have been really hesitant to pass another anti LGBTQ bill because they know that the country is going to punish them for it.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:27:52] So you made a good case for the fact that there is a ton of anti trans legislation out there, but then at the same time. A lot of it isn't succeeding, so it's becoming this. Weird thing that exists, but it's really unclear to me is this becoming mainstream Republican orthodoxy now or something else?

KATE SOSIN: [00:28:22] There is a real reason why this is happening. I mean, one is, yeah, there are these extreme anti LGBTQ groups who are gonna fight this no matter what. This is something that they believe in. They're going to push it into state legislatures. They have a lot of money and a lot of power. The other piece of this is Democrats control Congress and the White House. But the Supreme Court is a six three conservative court. And so if one of these bills now, you know, the Idaho bills were were challenged in court and didn't go anywhere. But if one of these bills, you know, gets elevated to the right circuit, these groups, I think, feel like they have a real shot of doing some real damage on on LGBTQ rights laws. And and I think that's a real possibility. So so this is not like, you know, this is a total waste of time. And whatever I think there is, there's a real strategy here to to flood the courts and to see what can happen now that there's a six three conservative Supreme Court. You know, we

saw statements from justices that they wanted to overturn marriage equality. So there is there is for sure a strategy. And it's not just a culture war.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:29:36] Hmm. It seems like a dangerous strategy, though. Like I remember reading an article last year about the gubernatorial election in Kentucky and how it was being used as a test case for anti trans advertising. The argument they were making was the Democrat, Andy Beshear, wanted boys to be able to compete on girls' sports teams and ton of ads went out and then the Democrat won. So it just made me wonder, like, OK, you could get this to the Supreme Court, but do you want to do that? Do you want to give people a reason to not vote for you?

KATE SOSIN: [00:30:21] Yeah, I think that I mean, it is inevitable. The country is is changing on this. People have a less and less tolerance for entertaining these kinds of bills in these kinds of policies, because more and more, we we just know trans people. And like I said, the medical community is just really rock solid and established on this. There's not you know, we can say all day long this is up for debate and this is controversial as the media becomes comfortable with that and understands that it's just a matter of time before this kind of becomes passé.

Activism: Tell the Senate to Pass the #EqualityAct to Protect LGBTQ+ Rights, and More - Best of the Left - Air Date 4-17-21

AMANDA HOFFMAN - ACTIVISM CZAR, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:31:04] You've reached the activism portion of today's show. Now that you're informed and angry, here's what you can do about it. Today's activism: tell the Senate to pass the Equality Act to protect LGBTQ+ rights and more.

As more Republican state legislatures abuse the law to attack the rights and health of trans people - adults and children alike - it is clear we cannot wait another moment to pass the Equality Act.

The Equality Act would expand and modernize current federal civil rights law to protect LGBTQ + people from discrimination in the workplace, classroom, public accommodations, retail stores, transportation, housing - and maybe most dire - health care. This bill would eliminate the country's patchwork of state-by-state protections and undermine the new, cruel state laws popping up around the country.

And while that should be enough to get behind this bill, it's worth noting that it would also close large gaps in existing civil rights laws and expand protections for women, people of color and people of all faiths.

Last year, three house Republicans joined Democrats to pass the Equality Act and the same three helped pass it again in February. But in the Senate, this was always going to be a steep uphill battle. West Virginia conservative Democrat Joe Manchin is further entrenching his bad reputation on LGBTQ+ issues by flinching at the Equality Act. And Maine Republican Susan Collins recently withdrew her support for the bill after losing the endorsement of the

Human Rights Campaign and after embracing a notorious local anti-LGBTQ+ group during her reelection campaign.

Even with Manchin and Collins on board, once again, protecting the rights of millions of Americans comes down to ending the Senate filibuster. It is the essential broken record of this moment, so be sure to check out the end-the-filibuster pressure campaigns we highlighted in episode #1411.

As always, we must do many things at once. So you can get involved in building support for the Equality Act by visiting PassTheEqualityAct.com. Click the take action button to learn more about the upcoming Lobby Day on April 21st and the Equality Time virtual phone bank.

This national campaign was launched by a coalition of organizations like the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund, the National Center for Transgender Equality, the National Black Justice Coalition, the National Women's Law Center, and more.

The segment notes include all the links to this information, as well as additional resources and as always this and every activism segment we produce is archived and organized under the activism tab at bestoftheleft.com.

So, if expanding and entrenching equality as the law of the land is important to you, be sure to hit the share buttons to spread the word about telling the Senate to pass the Equality Act to protect LGBTQ+ rights and more via social media so that others in your network can

spread the word, too. **The "radical feminists" working against trans rights - Post Reports - Air Date 2-26-20**

NICOLE ELLIS - HOST, POST REPORTS: [00:33:43] What is the Women's Liberation Front?

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:33:46] The Women's Liberation Front describes itself as a radical feminist organization committed to the total liberation of women and reproductive sovereignty and abortion rights, but they're increasingly focused on pushing back against transgender rights, and they started getting a lot of attention.

NICOLE ELLIS - HOST, POST REPORTS: [00:34:03] Why have we seen them and groups like them popping up recently?

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:34:09] It all began, actually, under the Obama administration as some of these bathroom bills came about, if you remember that. The Obama administration also provided guidance in a Dear Colleague letter, reminding schools that they should be allowing students to use the bathroom of their gender identity. They were very public in their opposition to the policy.

KARA DANSKY: [00:34:29] What that guidance effectively would have done is obliterated the regulations that allow for sex-segregated spaces.

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:34:36] And this was kind of the first time that WoLF took a stance and publicly submitted a lawsuit against the Obama administration, against the Department of Justice, pushing back against this.

KARA DANSKY: [00:34:47] We essentially made two arguments. One is that the Obama administration's failure to get any public input into this change constituted a violation of the Administrative Procedures Act. And further, we argued that interpreting the word "sex" to mean "gender identity," for Title IX purposes, was really, really bad for women and girls in institutions that received federal funding.

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:35:08] It also filed an Amicus brief to the Supreme Court opposing a case in Virginia about a student's right to use bathrooms that matched his gender identity. And they started appearing on Fox News, on shows like "The Tucker Carlson Show."

TUCKER CARLSON: [00:35:20] Now the left's gender insanity is destroying that. So last week, Rachel McKinnon, a biological male, won the women's track cycling world championship and set a world record in doing so. Now, several current and former women cyclists are coming out to defend their sport from a takeover by men. Kara Dansky is a board member at Women's Liberation Front, and we're happy to have her back on this show. So, Kara, what is the case they are making, and that you are making, against what just happened?

KARA DANSKY: [00:35:49] There are many Democrats and people who identify as being on the left who are very angry about the takeover of women's sports.

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:35:57] They started appearing at Heritage Foundation events. They received a \$15,000 grant from the Alliance Defending Freedom, which is a very conservative group, to help fund this fight against the Obama administration. And so they've increasingly become aligned with some of these conservative groups that would otherwise not support any of their beliefs when it comes to abortion rights, reproductive sovereignty, and it's given them a very vocal and influential platform.

NICOLE ELLIS - HOST, POST REPORTS: [00:36:24] So, how does that work, if WoLF ultimately supports a lot of traditionally progressive feminist values, with the exception of transgender rights? How do they reconcile working with conservative groups that don't agree with them on any other topic?

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:36:44] I talked to Kara Dansky, an attorney who serves on the board of WoLF, and she told me...

KARA DANSKY: [00:36:48] Cross-partisan work, at least in the United States, is not in any way unusual or surprising when different organizations who disagree about many things can come together on a particular issue. And so, we have never compromised our stance on abortion or reproductive rights, generally, and we never would.

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:37:11] And in their mind, they don't have a choice. They keep saying that they've been shunned by all progressive groups, that they they would like to do other work, as well, but they've been really rejected by this, especially what they see as cancel culture on the progressive left. But then you talk to transgender advocates, and they say that this is really the only issue they've focused on, that they don't believe that WoLF even really supports abortion rights or supports these other issues because they haven't taken any direct action on those issues. It's really been all about transgender issues. And so it kind of depends on who you talk to. But when you talk to the leaders of WoLF, they see this as a key issue and one that they've been able to have influence on because of the support of these other allies that are predominantly conservative groups.

NICOLE ELLIS - HOST, POST REPORTS: [00:37:59] So they see fighting against transgender rights as more important and a more immediate issue to tackle than, say, other parts of fighting for women's rights.

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:38:14] They do say they see it as an emergency, as something that could undermine all of the other work that they want to do for women's rights. For example, they filed an Amicus brief in an ongoing Supreme Court case that's one of the biggest of the year that would pertain to workplace protections, sex-based discrimination protections, and whether they apply to transgender people on the basis of gender identity.

KARA DANSKY: [00:38:36] We're interested in fighting for the rights, privacy, and safety of women and girls. And as everybody knows, women are female and men are male. It's really not complicated.

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:38:47] And in their mind, that would be a major threat to sex-based protections for women. Because if you can't define who a woman is, then how will you protect them in the workplace and discrimination cases?

KARA DANSKY: [00:38:59] This is not a case about gender non-conformity. We totally support protections for people who refuse to conform to sex-based stereotypes, which is what gender is. And if this were a case in which Aimee Stephens were challenging his employer's sex-specific dress code, we may have taken a very different position. But that's not what Aimee Stephens did in this case. What Aimee Stephens did is demand to be recognized as female. And we think that's wrong.

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:39:29] I think somebody who put it really well for me was a researcher named Heron Greenesmith, who has been tracking this group and their influence. And Heron described it as a scarcity mind-set, that they feel that there's a scarcity of rights, of protections for women.

HERON GREENESMITH: [00:39:46] If you think that there are finite resources, then you have to draw lines between who deserves access to those resources and, therefore, who deserves access to health and safety, well-being, a life free from violence, and who doesn't.

SAMANTHA SCHMIDT: [00:40:00] And so you have to focus on protecting cisgender women, even if it means excluding transgender women.

HERON GREENESMITH: [00:40:07] And one of the major ways that the evangelical right, the Christian right, and also anti-trans feminists draw those lines is through gender essentialism. There are only men and women, and, therefore, people outside of those lines either don't deserve access to resources or should adhere to gender essentialism in order to access them.

A National Wave of Anti-Trans Bills Part 2 - What Next | Daily News and Analysis - Air Date 3-3-21

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:40:37] in Montana. I was watching this testimony from a woman named Barbara Erhart, who had come in from Idaho, and she seemed. Really passionate about the idea of keeping trans kids out of sports.

BARBARA ERHART: [00:40:52] I grew up in the 70s and as I was growing up, opportunities for girls and women were very much limited. People have asked me, what is it that you want to do when you grow up? And what I told everybody I wanted to do is I said I wanted to play sports and I literally was told that's not what girls do.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:41:11] And it was it was interesting to watch or just to sort of see the language she used. You know, she didn't use words like trans girl or trans woman. She was talking about biological males, which it was just she was just hammering that home in pursuing this dream.

BARBARA ERHART: [00:41:29] I know first hand the hand of the things of which I speak. There is an absolute difference between men and women. And, you know, one of the things I've noticed as we've been talking about this subject has become very myopic has been this idea that, you know, gosh, by allowing a biological male to participate on a girls team, let's take a high school girls basketball team where we have, say, 12 spots that we're only displacing one young lady. But you have to understand that I think is far more than that because of the advantages that women gain by participating in sports.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:42:00] And she was sort of dressing up these conservative ideas as somehow feminist where, you know, she was talking about how as a woman, you know, she benefits from the advancement that she's had and this could somehow set people like her back.

KATE SOSIN: [00:42:20] That's been a talking point for a really long time. In fact, I went to Anchorage, Alaska, in goodness, it would have been 2018 now. And they were passing an anti trans they were trying to get an anti trans ballot measure passed by popular vote and when they were approaching people to sign. Their petition for it, they actually weren't even asking people about trans people at all, they were asking people, do you want to keep biological males out of girls dressing rooms and bathrooms? Huh? And a lot of people we found in looking at this had signed both the ballot measure to support trans people and the ballot measure to keep biological males out of girls dressing rooms because they didn't know that the two issues were. It's like a trick competing. Right. The reality is like biological males is not a scientific term. Like it doesn't it doesn't mean anything. It's not accurate. Part of that is because sex is actually a spectrum. Right. We have intersex people and. People can physically transition, right, medically transition, so that's it's an inaccurate term, but it's also deeply disrespectful. Like to miss someone.

MARY HARRIS - HOST, WHATS NEXT: [00:43:49] Yeah. And then I wonder, like, how would you enforce some kind of trans ban with kids in sports? Like, are you going to check biology at the door? Like who even wants that?

KATE SOSIN: [00:44:01] Like who does that help in setting up these sort of sex testing scenarios is that you actually end up borrowing a lot of cis gender women from competition also, if that is your goal. It's really medically invasive to sex test children, right? To subject kids to that kind of testing and a lot of people argue it's it's actually very traumatizing to put a kid through that in order to play sports or I think a lot of kids would rather not. So are you going to start banning kids who are not transgender or kids who are intersex but may not know it from playing sports? Like where do you draw the line? Gender and sex is not as binary as we would like to think. I think a lot of us grew up with those notions. But if you're going to get into the medical divide of that, it's not that simple. Right. And so that's a really fraught concept, if that is truly what you're trying to achieve.

Hudson Taylor: How Rethinking Sex-Segregation in Sports is the Key to Equality - TEDx Talks - Air Date 10-27-16

HUDSON TAYLOR: [00:45:09] As the founder and Executive Director of Athlete Ally, I have spent the last five years of my life working to end homophobia and transphobia in sports. In the last year, we've seen more athletes come out, more allies speak out and more teams and leagues take a stand than at any other time in history. But despite this tremendous progress, the reality is that the institution of sport still isolates and excludes the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Every day, I try to combat that reality. And the more I do, the more I've begun to realize that many of these anti-LGBT attitudes are the by-product of sexism.

I started wrestling when I was six years old. It has been and continues to be one of the most important things in my life. It taught me the importance of hard work, how to overcome adversity, the importance of teamwork. But for all of the good things that sport taught me, there were an equal number of things that I needed to unlearn. Sport is a competitive reward structure. From the moment you start sports, you are taught to measure yourself against your opponents and your peers, trophy, or no trophy, varsity or junior varsity. And so as an athlete, you're left asking yourself what do I need to do to be successful both athletically and socially. And because sport is one of the great socialization mechanisms, every aspect of its structure impacts an athlete's value system and self-esteem.

So then, let's not ignore the fact that sport is one of the few institutions that is segregated by sex. From the moment I started playing sports, it was boys over here, girls over there. Sport teaches boys how to become men and girls how to become women. And because of that gender divide, I was taught that what was good was masculine and what was bad was feminine. I was taught that the girls can't play with the boys and that the boys shouldn't want to play with the girls. This sex segregation teaches a false narrative of gender and sex binaries and of male superiority. And so you're left asking yourself what do I need to do to get ahead? You learn to play up your advantages, to play up your masculinity. You learn to diminish a boy by calling him a girl or gay, and then, in some twisted irony, you criticize female athletes for being too masculine. You use lesbian labels and stereotypes to diminish their efforts. This is all part of a larger system that privileges heterosexual, cisgendered male experiences, where homophobic and sexist insults are interchangeable.

As I climbed the sports ladder, I saw more and more of my peers buying into these rigid gender norms. They started to wear this culture like a comfortable coat, and because today's athletes will be tomorrow's coaches and athletic directors and business leaders, this system of homophobia and transphobia and sexism is cyclical and intergenerational and permeates throughout every sector of society. According to FIFA, there are about 265 million soccer players around the world. The global fan base of soccer is estimated at some 3.5 billion people. That is nearly half of the world's population. Sports speaks every language. It cuts cross cultures and communities in a way that little else does. And with a scope that large cannot be overstated, but neither can the impact of the inequality within it. After the landmark passage of Title IX, there was a 600% increase of women competing in college sports here in the United States, but there's also been a 200% decrease of women coaching women's sports. And to this day, there's still less than 2% of female coaches coaching men's teams. When you have a sports structure that privileges male athleticism over female athleticism, and when many hiring decisions are based on past athletic accomplishments, it's no wonder that female coaches have twice the competition for half the number of jobs. Because they are not being considered for coaching men's teams in the same way that male coaches are being considered for coaching women's teams.

This bias has carried over into how the media covers men's and women's sports. In 2014, SportsCenter allotted only 2% of its coverage to women athletics. Time and time again, we see sports commentators call women 'girls' when they would never, ever call men 'boys.' This language is yet another example of how female athleticism is trivialized.

What doing this work has taught me is that the sex segregation in sports teaches sexism. And sexism is a fundamental building block of homophobia and transphobia. If we want to end these issues, we need to start investing in more mixed-gendered sporting opportunities. There is no reason why we can't have college and Olympic athletes competing together in mixed gendered relays, why we can't award team metals based off the total accomplishments of the men and women competing. Why we can't have mixed gendered sports throughout youth sports. Or why we can't create new teams and new leagues of elite, male and female athletes competing together. Yes. We have to be mindful of competitive advantages in contact and team sports. And no, we do not want mixed gendered sports to limit the opportunities for women and girls in sports. But every time a young boy gets struck out by a girl, 'you throw like a girl' ceases to be an insult. He will learn that femininity is a form of strength.

Gloria Steinem once said we'd begun to raise our daughters more like sons, but few have had the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters. That courage is long overdue, but it is well within our control. If we want to live in a world where women and girls and the LGBT community have equal access, opportunity and experience, then I believe it starts by rethinking the sex segregation in sports.

As Anti-Trans Bills Advance, Trans Journalists Weigh In On 'Privilege' Of Reporting Part 2 - Consider This from NPR - Air Date 4-9-21

ARI SHAPIRO - HOST, CONSIDER THIS FROM NPR: [00:51:49] you're all talking about the added value that you as trans people bring to this story. And I wonder if, on the flip side of that, you've ever felt pigeonholed or tokenized in a newsroom where most people are not trans?

IMARA JONES: [00:51:59] Yeah. This is Imara. I think, yes. And I also would have to say that it's also interesting that people think that we can only talk about trans issues. You know, before I wrote about trans issues, I wrote a lot about economic and social justice, and very rarely do I get asked those questions anymore. But I think that the pigeonholing is in the newsroom, but it's also in journalism overall, where we get to think that because you do one thing, that's the only thing that you can do.

ARI SHAPIRO - HOST, CONSIDER THIS FROM NPR: [00:52:28] I'm wondering if I'm doing that right now [laughter]. Like, we've invited you to talk about trans issues.

KATE SOSIN: [00:52:32] This is Kate. You know, when I first started out in media, I was visibly queer. I was visibly trans. It was really hard for me to find work. And the one place that would hire me was Windy City Times, Chicago's LGBTQ newspaper. And I really wanted to work in mainstream media. I didn't want to do LGBTQ issues. But the longer that I worked as

an out trans person reporting on trans news, the more that I learned that it was really powerful to be a trans person telling trans stories, that that meant a lot to people.

ARI SHAPIRO - HOST, CONSIDER THIS FROM NPR: [00:53:04] Can you give us an example?

KATE SOSIN: [00:53:06] Yeah. You know, like when I'm covering these bills. So for example, last January, I went to South Dakota to cover a trans health care ban that was pending in the state legislature, and I interviewed trans kids. And when you show up as a national reporter and you're interviewing those kids, it's such a different experience if you say, hey; I am trans. Like, I have medically transitioned, and I know what it means to need this care, for your life to depend on it. And, one, I'm not going to misgender you in this article or deadname you or ask you invasive medical questions. But also, I understand that your life is on the line with this bill.

And that's a different conversation that we're going to have than a cisgender reporter who's going to fly in and endlessly quote people who are questioning whether or not it's child abuse to allow a trans kid to pause puberty until they're old enough to decide. And that's such a different question, right? And so to be able to help shape that conversation and also to help model appropriate reporting for cisgender reporters - to me, that's really powerful.

ARI SHAPIRO - HOST, CONSIDER THIS FROM NPR: [00:54:25] You know, this is coming after a summer of racial justice protests where so much of the most powerful reporting we saw came from BIPOC journalists who brought their own experiences to their reporting. And so, to conclude, could I ask you to just talk about intersectionality and allyship and the way that you see personal history and lived experience in forming journalism in this moment beyond just the debates over trans rights?

IMARA JONES: [00:54:52] Yeah. This is Imara. I think that that's a really important point. I think the thing that makes me really effective as a trans journalist is that I know my beat really well. I'm actually a part of the community. I think that for other communities, quite frankly - like, no one ever says that you're white, so you can't write about white people. We need to extend that same consciousness and that same grace to all communities because at the end of the day, as I said before, I'm still a journalist.

ARI SHAPIRO - HOST, CONSIDER THIS FROM NPR: [00:55:25] But I can hear listeners at home screaming, what about objectivity? What about the view from nowhere?

ORION RUMMLER: [00:55:30] [Laughter].

IMARA JONES: [00:55:30] Well, what - right. What the concept of objectivity does now is that it's designed to make people feel comfortable, that whatever we are presenting, they can ultimately not feel challenged. And that's not objective. Sometimes - I mean, we've spoken about this as journalists many times amongst ourselves, but sometimes there are two sides. Sometimes there are eight. Sometimes there's only one. And our job is to be able to tell readers what we have found and present it in a way that's fair. That's the job - not to be objective because no one is completely objective. It's false.

The Problem with the Focus on the Family Part 2 - Straight White American Jesus - Air Date 4-9-21

BRADLEY ONISHI - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:56:06] Where it comes back to me is we have here this individualism and this choice, but we also have the question that we've been asking for the last several weeks. Why trans bills now? And especially white Christians. Why are they so invested in targeting trans people in the trans community? So what I read from Sophie Bjork-James's book earlier really points to the nuclear family as the bedrock of evangelical politics, and even theology to be honest.

And that comes back to another point is that what's at the heart of the nuclear family, Dan, is patriarchy. And Bjork-James says in another part of the book, that masculinity and male headship and resulting female submission structure the theological and social order of conservative white evangelical practice. If you're wondering why the family, and again, listen to my interview coming up with Dr. Bjork-James in a couple of days, but if you're wondering why the family, it's because the family structures society according to male headship, male authority, female submission, and then everything goes from there. Okay?

Trans people by just existing upset that structure. They upset the patriarchal structure. They upset the family structure. And if the family has become the bedrock of evangelical faith and practice, if this focus on the family -- okay, pun intended or double entendre or whatever it is (it's Friday, I'm so tired, I don't even know what... is that a metaphor, is that a simile? Who knows?) -- but the focus on the family is absolutely how to understand evangelical politics in many cases, and this is one of them.

So I think one of the answers to why trans bills now is trans people, by their very existing, upset male headship, female submission and so on and so forth. And so they are disruptive of that body, that social body that you talked about last week.

I want to link this to guns and to race, but anyway, any wrap up thoughts on these issues?

DANIEL MILLER - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:58:01] I was just going to emphasize the one point where you talk about this notion of masculinity. There is nothing more threatening to masculinity or nothing that is viewed as more of a failure of masculinity than a trans woman, right? Within that imaginary, it's just something that can't exist and shouldn't be able to exist because, and this goes to what we said last time, it calls into question the standard of masculinity around which evangelical culture is built.

Only other point I'll point out with that is all of that stuff about the nuclear family is right, and yet it's worth noting the subtle ways in which evangelicals have had to adjust to realities of what they don't want to highlight. So for example, a piece of that for decades was that part of male headship was the male should, that the man should go out and earn a living and the wife should stay at home. That's faded from evangelical discourse a little bit. You know why? Because we live in a country where like hardly anybody can afford to be a single income family. So it's been a very convenient kind of shift to keep emphasizing these principles and yet occasionally redefine it when it serves their purposes.

BRADLEY ONISHI - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:59:00] It's the same for divorce. Like I'm divorced. I was married and now I'm divorced. And I guarantee you, if I

showed up at 90% of the evangelical churches around my neighborhood, nobody would be like, yeah, divorced. Was that for the reasons Jesus says? No. All right. Are you thinking about trying to get back together with your ex wife? You're not? Okay, I'm not sure you're welcome here. They would let me sing in the choir. They would let me, do all kinds of things there. Divorce, other adjustments have been made. But the upsetting of the patriarchal structure of the family, the female submission, and then that leading to the targeting of trans people and other LGBTQ+ folks is still alive and well.

Archie Crowley: Language around gender and identity evolves (and always has) - TED Talks Daily - Air Date

3-31-21

ARCHIE CROWLEY: [00:59:34] so do you remember how I said that, for some of my friends and family, learning how to use the singular "they" was really hard. And they said it was too confusing or too ungrammatical for them to pick up.

Well, this brings us to the first belief about language that people have: "Grammar rules don't change."

As a linguist, I see this belief a lot out in the world. A lot of language users believe that grammar just is what it is. When it comes to language, what's grammatical is what matters. You can't change it.

I want to tell you the story about English in the 1600s. Back then, as you might imagine, people spoke differently than we do today. In particular, they used "thou" when addressing a single other person, and "you" when addressing more than one other person. But for some complex historical reasons that we don't have time to get into today, so you'll just have to trust me as a linguist here, people started using "you" to address someone regardless of how many people they were talking to.

And people had a lot to say about this. This guy Thomas Elwood had to say: "The corrupt and unsound form of speaking in the plural number to a single person, 'you' to one instead of 'thou,' contrary to the pure, plain and single language of truth: 'thou' to one and 'you' to more than one." And he goes on. Needless to say, this change in pronouns was a big deal in the 1600s.

But actually, if you follow the debates about the singular "they" at all, these arguments might sound familiar to you. They're not that far off from the bickering we hear about the so-called grammaticality of pronouns used to talk about trans and non-binary people. One of the most common complaints about the singular "they" is that if "they" is used to refer to people in the plural, it can't also be used to talk about people in the singular, which is exactly what they said about "thou" and "you."

But as we have seen, pronouns have changed. Our grammar rules do change, and for a lot of different reasons. And we're living through one of these shifts right now. All living languages will continue to change. And the Thomas Elwoods of the world will eventually have to get with the program, because hundreds of years later, it's considered right to use "you" when addressing another person. Not just allowable, but right.

The second belief about language that people have is that dictionaries provide official unchanging definitions for words. When you were in school, did you ever start an essay with a sentence like, "The dictionary defines history as...." Well, if you did, which dictionary were you talking about? Was it the Oxford English dictionary? Was it Merriam-Webster? Was it Urban Dictionary? Did you even have a particular dictionary in mind? Which one of these is *the* dictionary? Dictionaries are often thought of as the authority on language, but dictionaries and fact are changing all the time.

And here's where our minds are really blown: Dictionaries don't provide a single definition for words, dictionaries are living documents that track how some people are using language. Language doesn't originate in dictionaries; language originates with people, and dictionaries are the documents that chronicle that language use. Here's one example. We currently use the word "awful" to talk about something that is bad or gross. But before the 19th century, "awful" meant just the opposite. People used "awful" to talk about something that was deserving of respect, or full of awe. And in the mid-1900s, "awesome" was the word that took up these positive meanings, and "awful" switched to the negative one we have today. And dictionaries over time reflected that.

This is just one example of how definitions and meanings have changed over time, and to keep up with it, how dictionaries are updated all the time. So I hope you're starting to feel a little more comfortable with the idea of changing language.

But of course, I'm not just talking about language in general. I'm talking about language as it is impactful for trans people. And pronouns are only one part of language. And they're only one part of language that's important for trans people. Also important are the identity terms that trans people use to talk about ourselves, such as "trans man," "trans woman," "non-binary" or "genderqueer." And some of these words have been documented in dictionaries for decades now, and others are still being added year after year. And that's because dictionaries are working to keep up with us, the people who are using language creatively.

So at this point you might be thinking, "But Archie, it seems like every trans person has a different word they want me to use for them. There are so many opportunities for me to mess up or to look ignorant or to hurt someone's feelings. What is something I can memorize and reliably employ when talking to the trans people in my life?"

Well, that brings us to the third belief about language that people have. You can't just make up words. Folks, people do this all the time. Here's the one of my favorite examples. The official term for your mother's mother or your father's mother is grandmother. I recently polled my friends and asked them what they call their grandmothers. We don't get frustrated if your friend's grandma goes by Memaw and yours goes by Gigi. We just make rather short work of it and memorize it and move on getting to know her. In fact, we might even celebrate her by gifting her with a sweatshirt or an embroidered pillow that celebrates the name she has chosen for herself.

And just like your Nana and your grandma, trans people have every right to choose their own identifying language. The process of determining self-identifying language is crucial for trans people. In my research, many trans people have shared that finding new vocabulary was an important part of understanding their own identities.

As one person I interviewed put it, "Language is one of the most important personal things, because using different words to describe myself and then finding something that feels good, feels right, is a very introspective and important process. With that process, you can piece together, with the language that you find out works best for you, who am I." Sometimes the words that feel good are already out there. For me, the words "trans" and "non-binary" just feel right. But sometimes the common lexicon doesn't get hold the words that a person needs to feel properly understood. And it's necessary and exciting to get to create and redefine words that better reflect our experience of gender.

So this is a very long answer, but yes, I'm absolutely going to give you a magic word, something really easy you can memorize. And I want you to think of this word as the biggest piece of advice I could give you, if you don't know what words to use for the trans people in your life: Ask.

I might be a linguist and a trans person and a linguist who works with trans people. But I'm no substitute for the actual trans people in your life when it comes to what words to use for them. And you're more likely to hurt someone's feelings by not asking or assuming than you are by asking. And the words that a person uses might change.

So just commit to asking and learning. Language is a powerful tool for explaining and claiming our own identities and for building relationships that affirm and support us. But language is just that: a tool. Language works for us, not the other way around.

All of us, transgender and cisgender, can use language to understand ourselves and to respect those around us. We're not bound by what words have meant before, what order they may have come in or what rules we have been taught. We can consider the beliefs that we might have had about how language works and recognize that language will continue to change. And we can creatively use language to build the identities and relationships that bring us joy.

And that's not just allowable. It's right. Believe me.

Final comments on the messy nature of reality

JAY - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT PODCAST: [01:09:13] We've just heard clips today, starting with *Straight White American Jesus* explaining gender dysphoria. *The Majority Report* dispelled myths about treating children. *Democracy Now!* introduced to the wave of new anti-trans laws. *Consider This* briefly discussed the dangers of cutting off access to care with these laws. *The Majority Report* addressed the issues of transition regret and detransitioning. *What Next* discussed to be dangerous game Republicans are playing because even most conservatives have already come around to supporting trans rights. *Post Reports* explained a bit about trans exclusionary radical feminist. *What's Next* discussed the anti-trans talking points disguised as a feminism regarding trans people in sports. And a TEDx talk from Hudson Taylor addressed the issue of sex segregated athletics head on.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips from *Consider This* speaking with trans journalists about the importance of their voices in covering stories related to trans people. *Straight White American Jesus* made the connection between the Christian ideal of patriarchy and why the very existence of trans people is a threat to their

idea of the world. And a Ted talk by Archie Crowley discussed the evolution of language, particularly as relates to using the word they to refer to a single person. And if you're mad about that, you're going to be furious that we have been misusing you for hundreds of years now.

For non-members those bonus clips are linked in the show notes and our part of the transcript for today's episode, so you can still find them if you want to make the effort, but to hear that all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support or request a financial hardship membership, because we don't make a lack of funds, a barrier to hearing more information. Every request is granted, no questions asked.

And now I would normally be saying that we're going to hear from you, but we're not, I don't have any VoicedMails queued up today. If you would like to leave a voicemail and get involved in the conversation, the number to dial is (202) 999-3991, or just write me a message to jay@bestoftheleft.com and I can turn that into a message to be played on the show.

But, I just want to finish by adding onto a couple of concepts. So you heard me mention that the member's last clip that they heard was addressing the evolution of language and how the word "you" used to mean something different than it does now, and it would be very strange to use it in the old way, but if people from 500 years ago heard how we use it now than they would be baffled. So there's that idea, put a pin in that one.

There's also the idea that we all just heard about sex segregated athletics in a gender spectrum world and all of these sorts of things are reminding me of a, I think a call that I got almost 10 years ago now, maybe amongst the first few episodes we did covering trans rights or the dynamics of trans people in our society and so forth, and I think I recall getting a voicemail from a listener who was very not hateful or angry but was struggling.

He was struggling to deal with these new concepts. I think he may have been struggling with the concept of the existence of cis people, which is pretty big group of people. It's just everyone who feels that their gender identity matches exactly what society sees. The gender they were defined at birth feels exactly right to them. Congratulations, you're a cis. And I think maybe he had a problem with that, but I think definitely had a problem with anyone in the middle of the spectrum, that there might be intersex people or people on a gender spectrum who don't quite feel that they belong on either far end of the gender binary.

And he called in and just expressed that he was having trouble with this and described himself as being very attuned to spreadsheets. Like his job was as an analyst working with spreadsheets and that was very well suited to his way of thinking, his mind was very well attuned to dealing with things in boxes. Every bit of data belongs in a box and every box has a meaning and the data relates to one another, but they all exist in their separate boxes. And so any of this gray area talk on the gender or sex spectrums he just was struggling to believe it existed or are struggling to handle its existence, something along those lines.

And I'll just reiterate basically what I said back then, but I have a lot more information and knowledge on the subject now than I did 10 years ago, is that reality, it turns out, does not lend itself nicely to hard lines and rigidly defined boxes. Reality just doesn't actually have those. We invented them. Humans, in an effort to make sense of the world around us,

created these lines and boxes and started putting stuff into it. And almost anything you look at in the world that you think can be rigidly defined, you're very likely to find that it can't.

I mean, there's not even a hard line between our atmosphere and space. You think you're in a different place now than space because we're inside the atmosphere as opposed to outside the atmosphere, as if there's a line that defines in versus out. But there is not. There's not a line. There's a vast range of kind of atmosphere. You go from atmosphere to kind of atmosphere, and that lasts for a really, really, really long time before there's no more atmosphere. But there's no point at which you can cross over from atmosphere to not atmosphere.

And the same sort of range is true of sex and certainly true of gender. And it's not just because our brains are super complex and we overthink things until we get confused about the true and simple nature of reality. No, the simple truth about reality is it's super, super complicated, and we're struggling to understand it. And it's really hard because things are complicated. I mean, many species in what we ridiculously refer to as the natural world, in yet another stupid attempt to draw a hard line - this time between ourselves and everything else in the world, also exists on sexual spectrums, as well as species that transition from one to the other. That's part of the natural world.

And there are even spectrums between species, which should blow everyone's mind because we've all been taught that species are in rigidly defined boxes and the definition of a species is that it stays on its own and doesn't mix with any other - oh, it turns out we drew those boxes wrong and that's not universally true. We think that because we have designated two species as separate that we've managed to draw a hard line between them, but nature doesn't give a shit about our perceptions of reality. So if two species that we define as separate work well in nature as being on a spectrum with each other, then they're just going to go ahead and do that regardless of what we think about it.

So if you're into rigidly defined boxes because you think it helps you understand the nature of the world, just know that you are literally hampering your ability to actually understand the nature of reality, not making it easier. So our current rigid binary of sex segregated athletics, and restrooms and anything else you want to put in that category is at odds with the reality of existence and the reality of sex and gender spectrums. So spoiler alert: that conflict is not going to get solved by convincing reality to change to fit our predefined boxes. The only way forward is for us to redraw our boxes to match reality, which is what we always should of done from the very beginning, but Jesus and the patriarchy had other ideas.

So if you're still not in favor of that, just prepare to be forever frustrated by reality's obstinate refusal to conform to your preconceived notions. Trans and intersex people have been around for a lot longer than organized sports or gender segregated bathrooms, and they're not going anywhere anytime soon.

As always comments coming in at (202) 999-3991 or by emailing me to jay@bestoftheleft.com. That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show. Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio Ben, Dan, and Ken for their volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic design, bonus show co-hosting and everything else. And

thanks of course to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support as that is absolutely how the program survives.

And now everyone can earn rewards and support the show just by telling everyone you know about it using our Refer-o-Matic system at bestoftheleft.com/refer. For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode. All that information can always be found in the show notes on the blog and likely right on the device you're using to listen.

So coming to you from far outside, the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the Best of the Left Podcast coming to you twice weekly thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from bestoftheleft.com.